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In Their Own Words.
Factors Impacting on the Higher Education (HE) Experiences of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Students in Ireland.

Meadhbh Ní Dhuinn, B.A., PG. Dip., M.A.

Supervisor:
Dr. Elaine Keane
School of Education, NUI Galway

This dissertation is submitted to the School of Education, National University of Ireland, Galway in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

September 2017
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Declaration

I certify that this thesis is all my own work and I have not obtained a degree in this university, or elsewhere, on the basis of my work.
Acknowledgements

Go raibh maith agaibh to all the staff in the School of Education, NUI, Galway. Particular thanks to my supervisor Dr. Elaine Keane, and to members of my Graduate Research Committee, Dr. Mary Fleming, Dr. Kelly Coate and Dr. Kevin Davison for your generous, thoughtful guidance. I’m also grateful for the support of the NUI, Galway write up bursary fund. A special thanks to each participant who shared their story and made this study possible. Míle Búfochas.
Dedicated to the migrants, refugees, immigrants, asylum seekers, mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, sons and daughters who have lost their lives in the Mediterranean Sea since 2015

Ar dheis dé go raibh a n-anamacha
Abstract

This study examines the experiences of black and minority ethnic (BME) groups in Irish higher education (HE). While the HE and wider experiences of this group are the focus of research and policy internationally, this study contributes to a lack of research in the area in Ireland, particularly in its focus on BME students other than international students, and in the context of the exclusion of this group in the Higher Education Authority (HEA) National Access Plan targets for Widening Participation (WP) to Irish HE.

As an in-depth qualitative study situated between the constructivist and transformative paradigms and conducted through the lenses of Critical Race Theory (CRT), postcolonialism and culturally responsive research methodologies, this study sought to generate testimonio, the voiced stories of marginalised and minoritised groups. 25 semi-unstructured interviews were conducted with participants from a range of Irish Higher Education Institutes (HEIs), both Universities and Institutes of Technology (ITs), throughout Ireland, with experience at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

The findings centred on three areas; participants’ schooling experiences, their aspirations and barriers in progression to HE; and their social and academic experiences in HE. Based on the findings, there is evidence to suggest that the participants were exposed to and battled through a discriminatory (neo)colonial Irish schooling and wider education system. Challenges experienced at both school and HE level related to self-identity, peer relationships and social experiences, academic expectations, relationships and experiences with teachers, and a range of system-related barriers. Recommendations are made for policy, practice and future research, including the provision of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for teachers and HE staff to promote successful intercultural and decolonised teaching and learning environments, integration of bi/multilingual identity, curricular reform, diversifying the teaching population, targeting BME groups in national policy, and privileging the voice of BME groups in research.
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Bachelor of Arts</td>
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<tr>
<td>BME</td>
<td>Black and Minority Ethnic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAO</td>
<td>Central Applications Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CERD</td>
<td>Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CoE</td>
<td>Council of Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPD</td>
<td>Continuous Professional Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRT</td>
<td>Critical Race Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DARE</td>
<td>Disability Access Route to Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCU</td>
<td>Dublin City University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEIS</td>
<td>Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAL</td>
<td>English as an Additional Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENAR</td>
<td>European Network Against Racism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCSE</td>
<td>General Certificate of Secondary Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HBCU</td>
<td>Historically Black College or University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEA</td>
<td>Higher Education Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>HE</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>HEAR</td>
<td>Higher Education Access Route</td>
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<tr>
<td>HEI</td>
<td>Higher Education Institutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>HWCU</td>
<td>Historically White College or University</td>
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<tr>
<td>INTO</td>
<td>Irish National Teachers’ Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>LC</td>
<td>Leaving Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Master of Arts</td>
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<tr>
<td>NASC</td>
<td>The Irish Immigrant Support Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCCA</td>
<td>National Council for Curriculum and Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCCRI</td>
<td>National Consultative Committee on Racism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCLB</td>
<td>No Child Left Behind Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUIG</td>
<td>National University of Ireland, Galway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSOU</td>
<td>Oxford University Student Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PATH</td>
<td>Programme for Access to Higher Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REC</td>
<td>Research Ethics Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUSI</td>
<td>Student Universal Support Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UL</td>
<td>University of Limerick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCAS</td>
<td>Universities and Colleges Admissions Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>WP</td>
<td>Widening Participation</td>
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Chapter One: Background, Context and Policy

I think that the role of the intellectual cannot be played without a sense of being someone whose place it is publically to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them), to be someone who cannot be easily co-opted by governments or corporations, and whose raison d’être is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug. (Edward Said, 1994, p. 9)

1.1 Introduction

This study aligns to work in the field of Widening Participation (WP) in Higher Education (HE) in relation to race, ethnicity and interculturalism. As Ireland struggles to adapt to its heterogeneous culture, there is a need for research that addresses the voiced experiences of black and minority ethnic (BME) groups in Ireland. The issue of ‘voice’ is problematic in relation to this study due to my positionality as a white researcher (see 3.2.1). Through a constructivist and transformative paradigm drawing on the scholarship of critical race theory (CRT), postcolonialism and culturally responsive research methodologies (see 3.4), the objective of the study was to generate counterhegemonic testimonio (Delgado, 1989; Delgado and Stefancic, 1993) and narrative voiced by the participants. This study presents the experiences of the participants progressing to and engaging with Irish HE in their own words. Additionally, this study can be read as insight into a white researcher’s journey of cross-cultural and interracial research in an Irish context, an issue which is critically (re)examined throughout this thesis. There are five sections in this chapter. The first looks at migration patterns in Ireland since the ‘Celtic Tiger’¹. In terms of Ireland’s heterogeneous cultural and ethnic background, the second section examines the provision of intercultural schooling at primary and post-primary level. The third section looks at WP in Irish HE in relation to BME cohorts, while the final section outlines the development of the research question(s) and the aims and objectives of this study.

1.2 Migration Patterns in Ireland from the ‘Celtic Tiger’ to the Present Day

Ireland has never been a homogenous white, Roman Catholic nation (Devine, 2005, 2009; Kitching, 2010, 2011; Mac ÊinÍr and White, 2008). A number of ethnic and cultural identities such as Roma and Travellers/Mincéir² have long populated the island. Indeed, “indigenous

¹ ‘Celtic Tiger’ is a term referring to a high peak of economic prosperity during the mid-1990’s to the mid 2000’s in Ireland which was fuelled by hyper-capitalism and (unregulated) monetary lending, leading to unsustainable economic growth and a consequent economic crash
² Mincéir is the indigenous language word for Traveller. Traveller Rights activists advocate for the term Mincéir to be used in the struggle to decolonise Traveller/ Mincéir civic and cultural inequities
and older minorities have also suffered [and continue to suffer] discrimination and marginalisation” (Mac Éinrí et al., 2008, p. 164). Ireland is not ethnically or culturally homogenous. Despite this, there is a projection of Ireland as a monocultural state. The most significant socio-cultural shift in recent years that refutes this notion occurred during the ‘Celtic Tiger’ as the neoliberal demand for cheap labour secured a rise in the “labour migrant” (Mac Éinrí et al., 2008, p. 156). In relation to this, those who migrate to Ireland have been identified as highly educated with 48% having a HE qualification, the highest rate recorded within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (OECD, 2015). Additionally, those who have inward migrated to Ireland were found to have a higher level of HE accreditation in comparison to native born Irish (OECD, 2015). This is partly due to the Irish government’s preference for migrants who can translate their HE qualifications into the labour market (Breen, 2000). As these newly arrived nationalities attempted to integrate into Irish society there is evidence of “de-skilling and downward mobility” (Gilmartin and Mugge, 2013, p. 297). This was compounded by the recession of the post ‘Celtic Tiger’ years and remains an issue due to continued austerity.

Another significant demographic change occurred in Ireland due to the presence of refugees in what has been globally politicised as ‘the refugee crisis’ (Crawley and Skleparis, 2017). Since 2015, approximately 80,000 people have crossed into Europe seeking asylum from extreme poverty and war (Irish Refugee Council, 2015, p. 3). This can be read as a “movement from former colonies to ‘mother countries’, itself a reversal of a historical pattern of dominant European out-migration (Mac Éinrí et al., 2008, p. 157). However, in relation to this, the Republic of Ireland, a once colonised state, is an interesting case insofar as 7,000 more left the shores of Ireland than migrated here in the years leading up to 2010 (CSO, 2010) due to austerity which led to increased socio-economic deprivation. In this manner, Ireland presents a unique reading of migration patterns in contrast to its European counterparts. Overall, in relation to inward migration in Ireland in recent years:

The question of integration takes on a new sense of urgency […] as economic recession coupled with political instability may make it more difficult for newcomers to become part of a society, particularly if that society is becoming more exclusionary, protectionist or xenophobic. (Gilmartin et al., 2013, p. 286)

In 2006, the first survey took place to examine racism against ‘immigrants’ in Ireland and found evidence of institutional discrimination and limited socio-cultural integration (McGinnity, O’ Connell, Quinn and Williams, 2006). The Irish branch of the European
Network Against Racism (ENAR) (2013, p. 1) suggests that there is a “policy vacuum” in terms of addressing racism in Ireland. ENAR criticises what it regards as a lack of data on racism and discrimination in Ireland, citing the need for robust policy backed up with adequate data in order to negate the wider current European crisis where “the spectres of racism and xenophobia haunt as far-right parties use racism to skew rational political debate, and minority groups are further neglected, marginalised, scapegoated” (ENAR, 2013, p. 3). Additionally, to safeguard refugees and asylum seekers arriving to Ireland, in 2015 the Irish Refugee Council (2015, p. 3) called for a political commitment to “strong intercultural and anti-racist ethos in policy”.

In relation to this, the current Irish political establishment has demonstrated limited interest in promoting successful integration outcomes for minoritised populations in Ireland. This is most evident in the instituting of Direct Provision in 2000 (Breen, 2008). Direct Provision, racially segregates asylum seekers and refugees in accommodation that the state funds in lucrative contracts liaised to private contractors (Thornton, 2014). In violation of international and domestic law, Direct Provision status limits access to food, denies access to employment and demotes rights relating to adequate housing, healthcare and education (Breen, 2008; Fanning and Veale, 2004; Thornton, 2014). As Breen (2008, p. 625) notes, “asylum seekers in Ireland run the risk of malnourishment, physical and mental health problems and social exclusion, which raises concern about racial prejudice and xenophobia”. The institutionalisation of the BME ‘other’ in Direct Provision centres echoes the state control and enforced containment of many indigenous Irish in industrial schools, Magdalene laundries and ‘mental’ institutions throughout the years (Thornton, 2014) in a process of social “hygienic governmentality” (Tyler, 2013, p. 38). Direct Provision is a replication of these forms of social hygienicism and containment. The role of Direct Provision is to ‘hygienically’ and racially segregate the ‘non-Irish’. The disturbing presence of Direct Provision is a direct insight to the Irish state’s ‘céad míle fáilte’ to non-white, non-Catholic and non-English speaking identity on its shores.

Overall, Direct Provision can be regarded as a form of institutionalised racism, as the United Nation’s (UN) International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) defines racial discrimination as:

---

3 The Gaelic term for ‘welcome’
Any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference, based on race, colour, descent, national or ethnic origin, which has the purpose of modifying or impairing the recognition, the enjoyment or exercise on an equal footing of human rights and fundamental freedom in the political, economic, social, cultural, or any other field of public life. (CERD, 1969, p. 5)

The presence of Direct Provision in Ireland is relatively new, yet there are no clear objectives as to how the Irish state intends to constructively deal with inward migration. This may relate to Gilmartin et al.’s (2008, p. 147) assertion that migration to Ireland is treated as “temporary” with those caught in the system regarded as “disposable”. Attempts to improve the immigration process are continually dismissed and undermined by the governing Irish state (Fanning et al., 2004; Thornton, 2014). Rather, “claims are repeatedly made that Ireland’s experience of immigration is new. These are often used as an (increasingly dated) explanation for the Irish state’s failure to plan and provide services for Ireland’s (migrant and non-migrant) communities” (Mac Éinrí et al., 2008, p. 162).

However, increased inward migration patterns since the Celtic Tiger years have impelled the Irish state to acknowledge the diversity of its population. This was evident in 2002, when the Irish census asked a question on nationality for the first time in reference to the presence of ‘non-Irish’ nationals (CSO, 2012). However, “between 2011 and 2016 the number of non-Irish nationals fell for the first time since the question was introduced on the census in 2002” (CSO, 2016, p. 50). This may be due to a rise in dual Irish nationality, a factor that will continue to challenge perceptions of fixed white homogenous Irish identity. Indeed, as the most up to date figures from April 2016 demonstrate, there are “535,475 non-Irish nationals of over 200 different nationalities living in Ireland” (CSO, 2017, p. 53). Additionally, “between 2011 and 2016 the number of people categorised as white Irish increased by 1% while those in the black Irish or black African category fell by 847 persons, or 1.4%. This contrasts with an increase of 45% in the black Irish or black African category between 2006 and 2011” (CSO, 2017, p. 60). When asked to define their national identity, 88.4% of respondents described themselves as Irish while 11.6% described themselves as ‘non-Irish’ (CSO, 2017, p. 50). However, it is necessary to note that in relation to the 88.4% that identify as Irish, it does not necessitate that they are homogenous in terms of being white and/or Roman Catholic. Table 1.1 below from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) (2017, p. 21) provides information on the number of Irish and ethnic minority groups currently resident in Ireland:
In terms of Ireland’s diversified population, successful integration outcomes are based on the need for a “two-way process” between the host country and the newcomer (Kinlen, 2008, p. 18). It has been accepted by European Union (EU) governing bodies “that neither assimilation nor multiculturalism models tried in the past were effective long-term solutions” (Kinlen, 2008, p. 18). Rather, successful integration has been defined as the “ability to participate to the extent that a person needs and wishes in all of the major components of society, without having to relinquish his or her own cultural identity” (The Irish Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2005, p. 3).

1.3 The Provision of Intercultural Primary and Post-Primary Schooling in Ireland
In 2006 (CSO, 2008) there were residents in Ireland from 188 countries with a majority inward migrating from non-English speaking countries. By 2009, 8-10% of students in Irish primary and post-primary schools had an ‘immigrant’ background (Taguma, Kim, Wurzburg and Kelly, 2009, p. 9). In 2008, it was stated that “Irish schools teach over 48,000 migrant pupils of 160 different nationalities” (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2008, p. 2). However, distinctions between ‘migrants’ and ‘immigrants’ are becoming increasingly difficult to enforce and/or define as first/second and third generation ‘migrants’ attain Irish citizenship and begin to define themselves as Irish and integrate Irishness into their bi/multicultural

### Table 1.1: Residents in Ireland by Ethnic or Cultural Background 2011-2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic or Cultural Background</th>
<th>2016</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>3,854,226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish Traveller</td>
<td>30,987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any Other White Background</td>
<td>446,727</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>57,850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any other Black Background</td>
<td>6,789</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>19,447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any Other Asian Background</td>
<td>79,273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>70,603</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Stated</td>
<td>124,019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of Ireland’s diversified population, successful integration outcomes are based on the need for a “two-way process” between the host country and the newcomer (Kinlen, 2008, p. 18). It has been accepted by European Union (EU) governing bodies “that neither assimilation nor multiculturalism models tried in the past were effective long-term solutions” (Kinlen, 2008, p. 18). Rather, successful integration has been defined as the “ability to participate to the extent that a person needs and wishes in all of the major components of society, without having to relinquish his or her own cultural identity” (The Irish Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2005, p. 3).
identity (Ní Laoire, Bushin, Carpena-Méndez and White, 2009). Indeed, issues relating to identity crises have been identified in this study as the participants described how they were perceived and constructed as ‘non-Irish’ during their primary and post-primary schooling experience despite being an Irish citizen and/or self-identifying as Irish (see 5.2). This is significant as primary and post-primary schooling plays a key role in the integration process for newly arrived children and children of dual nationality. As outlined by the Equal Status Acts (2004):

> Schools have a role in helping students, including those from minorities and disadvantaged groups, to learn about themselves and their differences from others in a way that is positive and affirming of diverse identities. Schools can also play an important role in helping students to understand the causes of inequality and empowering them to oppose these inequalities. (The Equality Authority, 2004, p. 17)

In an Irish context, it has been noted that “school can be a key integrating mechanism for immigrant children in wider Irish society” (Ní Laoire et al., 2009, p. 75). However, there is cause for concern as it has been found that Irish students withdraw from primary and post-primary schools when the enrolment of ‘non-Irish’ students exceeds that of white, Irish students (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2008). The consequence(s) of this emergent segregation will not be visible to researchers for a number of years. In a recent report, the Council of Europe (CoE) (2017) has warned against segregated schooling for Roma children, children with disabilities, children in institutions such as the juvenile justice system and children from a migrant or refugee background. There is evidence of segregated schooling emerging in Ireland and concerns as to how children in Direct Provision integrate into the mainstream schooling system (Ní Laoire et al., 2009). From a European context, the CoE states the need for inclusive education in order to address segregation:

> Inclusive education encompasses the fight against segregation patterns that affect certain children in particular, but it also goes far beyond that. It is an approach that considers separation as a negative phenomenon for the right of all children to education. It rejects the notion of “separate but equal” and aims to make societies open to sharing and learning from their diversity. Its importance becomes even more apparent in times of economic crisis or political instability, when attitudes of racism, xenophobia and intolerance tend to be exacerbated and endanger democratic values and social cohesion. (CoE, 2017, p. 6)

In relation to this, there are concerns that issues pertaining to intercultural education have not yet been successfully addressed in Ireland. Roman Catholic patronage over state funded primary and post-primary schools remain problematic. In response to the lack of provision for
secular and/or interfaith intercultural primary and post primary schooling, Educate Together\(^4\) schools were established in 2014. They are an independent nongovernmental organisation (NGO). Currently, there are 81 primary schools and nine post-primary schools in Ireland providing schooling under the Educate Together ethos. In June 2017, the Minister for Education issued a proposal to lift the baptism barrier\(^5\) to state funded schools (Irish Examiner, 2017). While this is a welcome move in the state reclamation of its schooling system from religious control, there has been limited insight or provision put in place outlining how the Irish state intends to directly separate church and state in the provision of education for its citizens and residents. Lodge and Lynch (2004, p. 4) note how Ireland maintains an image of political and cultural homogeneity through the “power” and “control” of “hugely influential actors” including “the teacher unions, the Churches, the Vocational Educational Committees and the Department of Education and Science itself” who inhibit a “profoundly consensual culture that dominates the debates about education in Ireland”. In terms of promoting an inclusive and integrated education system, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) (2005) provides a definition for intercultural schooling:

…which respects, celebrates and recognises the normality of diversity in all areas of human life. It sensitises the learner to the idea that humans have naturally developed a range of different ways of life, customs and worldviews, and that this breadth of human life enriches all of us. It is education which promotes equality and human rights, challenges unfair discrimination and promotes the value upon which equality is built. (NCCA, 2005, p. 3)

The imposition of Roman Catholic patronage over state-funded schools in the provision of intercultural education is outlined by Devine (2005, p. 34) as “the majority of schools are Catholic schools, and one of the essences of the Catholic faith is that this ethos will be reflected throughout the integrated curriculum”.\(^6\) The National Consultative Committee on Racism (NCCRI) (2007, p. 7) which was disbanded in 2008 due to austerity enforced budget cuts, found that some schools with a Roman Catholic or Protestant ethos put students of differing faiths “at the back of the class” during religious education as they do not have the resources to integrate these students within the full school curriculum. Indeed, Lodge et al.

\(^4\) See https://www.educatetogether.ie/
\(^5\) The ‘baptism barrier’ refers to the preference for Roman Catholics in the admission to state funded Irish primary and post-primary schools
\(^6\) On the 22nd September 2017, Education and Training Boards (ETBs) announced that religious instruction for Holy Communion and First Confirmation in Irish state-funded primary schools will take place outside of school hours and will no longer be integrated into the curriculum
(2004, p. 3) suggest that inclusivity is broadly missing in terms of “curriculum, modes of assessment and pedagogical and organisational practice” in Irish primary and post-primary education. The Department of Health and Children (2000, p. 70) set an objective that “children will be educated and supported to value social and cultural diversity so that all children including Travellers/Mincéir and other marginalised groups achieve their full potential”. A barrier to achieving such potential relates to the lack of black and minority ethnic (BME) role models in the education system. In a national study, Keane and Heinz (2015, 2016) have identified how the majority of applicants to primary and post-primary teacher training courses in Ireland identify as ‘white Irish’. The homogeneity of teachers in the primary and post-primary schooling system (McDaid and Walsh, 2016) is yet another restriction on the success of intercultural schooling in Ireland, impacting on “identity work, pedagogical development and student support” (Keane et al., 2016, p. 520). Due to instances of white students withdrawing from schools and segregating from their BME peers, limited state provisions set in place for intercultural schooling and a lack of BME teacher role models, there is concern as to how these factors may influence the HE attainment of minoritised groups.

1.4 Widening Participation in Irish HE and BME Students

International findings from the UK and US highlight how BME students are overrepresented in HE in comparison to their white peers (US Department of Education, 2016; ECU, 2016; Perna, 2016). However, in the UK, BME cohorts are overrepresented in ‘new’, post-1992 universities that are regarded as less prestigious as elite UK HEIs (Boliver, 2013, 2014, 2015; Pilkington, 2015; Shiner and Modood, 2002). In the US, Affirmative action has been implemented to tackle the issue of BME (under)representation in US HE (Espenshade, Chung and Walling, 2004; Espenshade and Chung, 2005). Despite affirmative action, black and Latino’s enrolment in elite, Ivy League colleges has declined when compared to the rates of admission for white and Asian American students (Posselt, Arbor, Jaquette, Bielby and Bastedo, 2012). Additionally, in terms of academic attainment, in the US African Americans and Hispanics graduate at a far higher proportion with an associate degree, which is a step away from a bachelor’s degree, in comparison to their white peers (US Department of Education, 2012). In the UK, BME students are less than likely to graduate with a first class degree when compared to the attainment rates of their white peers (Bhopal, 2017; Connor,

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7 Affirmative action is a policy mandate in the US to ensure inclusion and representation of disadvantaged and minoritised groups in areas such as education
8 The Ivy League is a group of the most elite and selective universities in the US
Tyers, Modood and Hillage, 1996, 2004; Elias and Jones, 2006; Leslie, 2005, Naylor and Smith, 2004; Richardson, 2008) and withdraw at a higher rate from HE than their white peers (Woodfield, 2017). There is limited insight to the progression, retention and attainment rates of BME students in Irish HE. Table 1.2 gives an overview of the percentage of ethnic minority students in Irish HE institutions from 2015 to 2016. However, these figures are derived from an Equal Access Survey that is a “voluntary” exercise at the point of student registration (HEA, 2015, p. 19). This has led to varying response rates from institutions, some very low, suggesting that these data are not reliable.

Table 1.2: Ethnic Group of Respondents 2015/16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group of Respondents</th>
<th>Universities</th>
<th>Institutes of Technology</th>
<th>All Institutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>88.5%</td>
<td>85.8%</td>
<td>87.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish Traveller</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any Other White Background</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any other Black Background</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any Other Asian Background</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of WP in Irish HE, the HEA (2015) states that “the objective of achieving equity in HE is rooted in principles of equality and social inclusion and has been a longstanding national policy priority. Access to HE should be available to individuals independent of socio-economic disadvantage, geographical location, disability or other circumstance” (HEA, 2015, p. 14). Additionally, in line with the EU Bologna Agreement9, WP in HE can be defined as “one means of ensuring that those most at risk for reasons including geographical location, socio-economic situation, ethnicity and disability are afforded greater opportunity

9 The Bologna Agreement is a collective European policy directive on HE including an agreement on equity of access
within the ‘knowledge society’” (Osborne, 2003, p. 7). Additionally, the Irish Universities Act states the need for WP:

Universities [must] prepare and implement statements of their policies in respect of access to the university and to university education by economically or socially disadvantaged people, by people who have a disability and by people from sections of society significantly under-represented in the student body (The Irish Universities Act, 1997)

Ireland introduced free undergraduate education in 1999. Despite the removal of tuition fees lower socio-economic groups have remained underrepresented in Irish HE (Mc Coy and Smyth, 2011; HEA, 2005, 2008, 2015). A shift in the socio-political climate has seen Irish students pay a rising ‘contribution fee’ which currently stands at 3,000 euro with potential to increase. Indeed, it is not credible to assert that Ireland currently provides ‘free’ HE education due to the rising cost of the student ‘contribution fee’ and continued cuts to financial support provided by Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI). The impact of austerity following the boom to bust years of the ‘Celtic Tiger’ continues to impact significantly on the provision of HE as a social good. Financial barriers have been increased by the 2008 financial crash and the ensuing years of austerity whereby “it is unlikely that public funding for HE will return to levels previously enjoyed” (Hazelkorn, 2014, p. 1343). In today’s context, Irish HE is aligning to a global neoliberal trend whereby HE attainment is increasingly marketed as a consumerist choice rather than an inherent right. This notion of choice is compounded due to HE links to the neoliberal market place whereby a HE qualification is required in order to gain access to employment opportunities.

In order to increase marginalised and minoritised populations access to the labour market and secure social inclusion via HE, the National Office for Equity of Access was instituted. This brought about the establishment of the Higher Education Access Route10 (HEAR) scheme that offers access to HE and support for students from a disadvantaged socio-economic background. Alongside HEAR, Disability Access Route to Education11 (DARE) was developed to support WP for students with a disability. Since 2005 the HEA has presented national action plans on increasing WP in Irish HE. Initial targets included students from low socio-economic backgrounds and students with a disability (HEA, 2005). Travellers/Mincéir were not included and in terms of ethnic minorities qualitative and quantitative targets were set to be achieved by 2007 (HEA, 2005). These targets have not yet been sufficiently met.

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10 See http://accesscollege.ie/hear/
11 See http://accesscollege.ie/dare/
The 2008 to 2013 WP targets included students with a disability, those with low socio-economic status and mature students (HEA, 2008). The HEA (2015) targets for increased participation from 2015 to 2019 include entrants from low socio-economic backgrounds, first time mature students, students with disabilities, part-time learners, entrants from Further Education (FE), and, for the first time, Irish Travellers/Mincéir (HEA, 2015, pp. 34-37). The inclusion of Travellers/Mincéir is particularly welcome given that “only 1% of Travellers/Mincéir have degree-level education compared to 30% among non- Travellers/Mincéir” (Watson, Kenny and McGinnity, 2017, p. 30).

However, black and minority ethnic (BME) groups resident in Ireland, with the exception of Travellers/Mincéir, have not been included. This contrasts to the HEA’s recognition and representation of BME international students. The HEA (2003, p. 167) has outlined the need for Irish HE to adapt to globalisation in terms of attracting international students who benefit the domestic economy. The most recent statistics show that international students in Irish HE are 37% Asian, 28% North American, 21% EU and 14% “rest of world” (HEA, 2016, p. 1). HEA recognition of BME international students is problematic as it raises concerns as to why BME cohort’s resident in Ireland are not targeted to progress to Irish HE. Overall, WP policy at HE level is of significant and crucial importance if equity of access is to be achieved in an Irish HE sector that is becoming increasingly commoditised as a commercial good and lucrative ‘business’. In terms of WP to HE for BME groups resident in Ireland, there is a distinct and questionable lack of policy and provision currently in place.

In terms of financial support for those in Direct Provision to progress to HE, it was found that “only two asylum seekers qualified [in 2016] for third level grant support” (Irish Examiner, 2017) from 39 applications. In response to the lack of support for BME groups in Irish HE, some HEIs have attempted to promote integration. In 2016, Dublin City University (DCU)\(^{12}\) and in 2017 University of Limerick (UL)\(^{13}\) were awarded the title of ‘university of sanctuary’ by an organisation that promotes integration for asylum seekers and refugees in Ireland and the UK. This award was based on DCU and UL’s outreach work with these communities and its commitment to offer scholarships to asylum seekers and refugees at undergraduate and postgraduate level. In a similar move, the National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG), launched a ‘university for all’ initiative in 2016 to mark the 1916 centenary and provide

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financial support in the form of scholarships for “high achieving students in Ireland’s newest communities” particular those in Direct Provision. While these initiatives are to be applauded, successful integration outcomes will be limited if progression to HE for marginalised and excluded populations is dependent upon a limited number of scholarships. Indeed, the continued absence of BME groups in national HEA (2005, 2008, 2015) targets is significant and worrying. There is a need for provisions to be put in place to ensure that BME groups are represented in Irish HE particularly at a time in Irish society when the definition of ‘Irish’ and ‘non-Irish’ is becoming increasingly difficult to racially impose. There is a need to ensure that BME students are integrated into Irish society at every level alongside their white, Irish peers. Furthermore, a lack of clear statistical data provided by the HEA in terms of BME progression, retention and attainment in Irish HE will ensure that research work in the area is hindered due to the erasure of BME presence. There is a need to question and challenge why the HEA (2005, 2008, 2015) targets for increased participation overlook and exclude the issue of racial representation in Irish HE. It is noteworthy that it took a decade for Travellers/Mincéir to be included. The lack of provision for BME attainment to HE points to structural discrimination and raises concerns relating to enforced invisibility within the education system. This needs to be urgently addressed. As noted by Reay, Davies, David and Ball (2001, p. 872), “behind the very simple idea of a mass system of HE we have to recognise a very complex institutional hierarchy and the continued reproduction of racialised and classed inequalities”.

Ireland’s idealism in the provision of free HE has long been gutted in the current socio-economic and political climate. Eurostat have found that Ireland has one of the lowest expenditure rates on education in the EU, “at the lower end was Romania (3.1%), followed by Ireland (3.7%)” (Eurostat, 2017). In August 2017 the Minister for Education and Skills announced a 16.5 million euro increase for WP cohorts to increase access to Irish HE through the Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH, Strand 1), focusing in particular on access for target groups to initial teacher education with the exception of BME groups as they are currently excluded as a national target group. In August 2017 PATH 2 and PATH 3 were announced. PATH 2 is a 1 million euro 1916 Bursary for WP cohorts which

16 Travellers/Mincéir are the only BME group to be included as a 2015-1019 HEA WP target
include, students from a disadvantaged socio-economic background, first time mature students, students with a disability, FE awardees, lone parents who are recipients of social welfare and ethnic minorities including refugees (HEA, 2017, p. 4). PATH 3 is provision of 7.5 million for the inclusion of HEA (2015) WP targets. However, PATH 3 does not include BME populations with the exception of Travellers/Mincéir.

This ‘increase’ in HE spending compares to an OECD (2017) report that highlighted how Ireland spends 1.1 % of gross domestic product (GDP) on third level education below the 1.6 % OECD average. Investment in post-primary schooling was also found to be below the OECD average (OECD, 2017). While the recent funding for WP through PATH is welcome, particularly at a time of on-going austerity and decreased social spending, it is not sufficient. Increased financial provision for WP in Irish HE is needed as austerity has been employed alongside a neoliberal agenda which has shifted the notion of HE as a public good to a “burgeoning for-profit sector” (Hazelkorn, 2014, p. 1345). Most importantly, there is a viable need for Ireland to reclaim the concept of HE as a social good. Provision of free HE was achieved in the Irish state prior to current neoliberal and centrist/right wing economic ideology which has undermined one of the most significant achievements of the Irish Republic to date. This must be reclaimed. In terms of this study, racial equity must be a key pillar of this reclamation.

1.5 Aims of the Study, and Research Questions
This study was developed in response to a lack of qualitative data on BME students in Irish HE. While there is a growing field of literature relating to BME students, including Travellers/Mincéir, in Irish primary and post-primary schools, there is a noted gap in the literature on the voiced experiences of BME students in Irish HE with the exception of international students. The experiences of BME international students integrating to Irish HE have been examined due to a political endorsement to encourage successful participation rates of these student cohorts as they contribute to the domestic economy. Beyond this exploitative, neoliberal research focus, insight to BME representation in Irish HE is largely drawn from a quantitative lens which is problematised due to unreliable data with significant gaps (see 1.4). Therefore, this study was devised due to concerns relating to racial equity and BME representation in Irish HE. This study drew on BME students nationally from range of Irish HEIs. Due to the continued exclusion of BME groups in the HEA (2005, 2008, 2015) WP targets, this study asserts the presence and inclusion of BME identity in Irish HE through
the participants’ own words. This required an-depth qualitative and participative approach informed by CRT and related theories and methodologies (see Chapter Three) whereby the participants directed the development of the research question(s) and voiced the issues that impacted on their HE experiences. While the issue of the research question(s) and their development is examined in detail in Chapter Four, section 4.2, the overall question of this study is, what are the HE experiences of BME students in Ireland?

Due to my white positionality and the participatory and emancipatory paradigmatic framework of the study, there was a need for the participants to devise the research question(s) and direct the scope of the study in collaboration with me as a researcher. Through an unstructured qualitative interview style, each participant presented a testimonio (Delgado, 1989; Delgado et al., 1993) of their views and experiences. From these voiced narratives, the participants highlighted three key areas, (i) primary and post-primary schooling experiences, (ii) aspirations and barriers in progression to HE and (iii) social and academic experiences in HE. The findings of this study are presented under these three broad headings. Due to the silencing and erasure of BME presence in Irish HE, further research in this area is of significant importance. As the findings identify evidence of racist discrimination and marginalisation, recommendations for policy, practice and further research are presented, derived from a decolonising, anti-racist pedagogist stance. Additionally, it is hoped that the research journey outlined in this thesis can perhaps provide some guidance to white researchers working in cross-cultural and cross-racial research in an Irish context to ensure that we do not appropriate, whitewash or mistranslate the voice(s) of the BME ‘other’.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter provides an overview of demographic changes and migration patterns in Ireland since the ‘Celtic Tiger’ in terms of how the Irish government has responded insufficiently to interculturalism and integration. This is evident in the setting up of Direct Provision and the lack of intercultural primary and post-primary schooling. In the context of this study, this chapter also highlights how BME cohorts have been excluded as a WP target for HE. In response to these concerns, the aims of this study and the research questions are outlined which seek to examine the HE experiences of BME students’ in Ireland in their own words.
Chapter Two: The Research on Black and Minority Ethnic Students’ Experiences of Higher Education

2.1 Introduction

The following chapter presents the literature relating to factors impacting on the Higher Education (HE) experience(s) of black and minority ethnic (BME) students. While there is a growing number of studies on the primary and post-primary schooling experience of BME students in Ireland; currently there is a lack of literature on the experiences of BME students in Irish HE that do not focus solely on BME international student experience.

There are four sections in this chapter. The first section looks at the schooling experience of BME students. The second section examines factors that impact on the progression to HE for BME students. The third section examines the academic experiences of BME students in HE while the fourth and final section presents what is known about the social experiences of BME students in HE.

2.2 The Schooling Experiences of BME students

2.2.1 Segregated Schools

In Ireland, Byrne, McGinnity, Smyth and Darmody (2010) found that students from a migrant background are overrepresented in urban schools and schools with a higher level of students from a disadvantaged socio-economic background referred to as ‘DEIS’17 schools.18 Parents of black students have voiced concern regarding the historical legacy of racial discrimination in the US and how it continues to effect black children in the schooling system (Lareau, McNamara and Horvat, 1999). Due to the historical legacy of segregated schooling in the US, it was found that black children do not have the socio-cultural capital to succeed in the US education system (Lareau et al., 1999). Black students are disproportionately enrolled in under resourced K-12 US public schools (Noguera, 2003; Toldson, 2008). Condon (2009) has evidence to suggest that the US schooling system exacerbates the disparity between black and white academic attainment and perpetuates social class inequalities due to structural racial segregation in the provision of schooling. Despite the implementation of the No Child

17 Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)
18 DEIS was founded in 2005 by the Department of Education and Skills to address educational disadvantage by providing additional support to schools referred to as ‘DEIS Schools’
Left Behind Act (NCLB) to close the white/black attainment gap in the US, Rowley and Wright (2011, p. 93) argues that it can be read as “no white child left behind”. Indeed, school segregation is also evident in affluent socio-economic districts. Drake (2017) found evidence of school segregation in a racially diverse affluent area where black, Latino and working class students were disproportionally enrolled in a less prestigious high school in contrast to a neighbouring elite high school with a high enrolment of white and Asian cohorts.

In terms of segregated schooling and BME academic (under)attainment, it is suggested that low income African American youth do not have the cultural capital to succeed in the school environment (Carter, 2003). ‘Black cultural capital’ has limited value in the education space due to white cultural dominance (Carter, 2003). In relation to this, in a desegregated urban high school environment, Hemmings (1996, p. 20) examined how being African American and a model high school student impacted on black student identity as it challenged stereotypes of “who they ought to be”. Goldsmith (2004) found that black, white, and Latino students were found to be optimistic and display a positive attitude to school despite being enrolled in segregated-minority schools. This positive attitude was enhanced when there was a visible presence of minority teachers (Goldsmith, 2004). However, segregated schooling is problematic as Fletcher and Tienda (2010) found that the quality of the high school attended by minority ethnic students contributed significantly to HE achievement gaps.

Indeed, the racialisation of schools is problematic. Black students classify schools in racial terms with white schools equated with academic success while black schools are associated with academic deficiency (Ispa-Landa and Cornwell, 2015). Furthermore, the racialisation of schools reinforces antagonisms for black students attending ‘white’ and ‘black’ schools as the school environment is where racial stereotypes are reinforced (Ispa-Landa et al., 2015). Additionally, students have reported higher ethnic pride when they were in a classroom environment with 50% same ethnicity peers and classmates (Leszczensky, Flache, Stark and Munniksma, 2017). Indeed, regardless of the level of diversity in the school, BME students who had peers of the same race and/or ethnicity were found to display positive socio-emotional development (Benner and Crosnoe, 2011). This is problematic as alongside segregated schooling there are instances whereby “half of all non-white secondary students in England attended schools where more than 75 % of the total enrolment comprised whites” (Johnston, Wilson and Burgess, 2004, p. 237).
Further evidence to suggest that segregated schooling is occurring in the UK is due to ethnic minorities being overrepresented and clustered in urban schools (Hamnett, 2012). In an examination of parental school choice for their children, white parents were found to be unhappy with the high ethnic mix of London secondary schools (Hamnett and Butler, 2013). It is suggested that this may be promoting and “possibly intensifying” ethnic segregation in schools (Hamnett et al., 2013, p. 553). However, white parents were also happy to enrol their child in a school irrespective of ethnic mix if the school had a strong academic attainment record (Hamnett et al., 2013). In relation to this, in a study of two UK ethnically segregated schools there was a correlation between school ethnic composition and academic performance in just one of the schools suggesting that other factors may also contribute to performance rates (Johnston, Wilson and Burgess, 2007). In the UK African Caribbean students are disproportionately underachieving at school and have the highest rates of school exclusion in comparison to other minority groups (Crozier, 2005). This underachievement has caused African Caribbean students to be demotivated to learn as they feel they have been rejected by the education system that they perceive as structurally enforcing their exclusion (Crozier, 2005).

In terms of segregated schools, white discourse silences issues relating to race and schooling. Kirkham (2016) suggests that there is whitewashing at UK policy level in relation to racial tension in the schooling system. Ethnically diverse schools are marketed to BME populations and white, middle-class students interested in a more ‘diverse’ schooling system (Kirkham, 2016). This perpetuates the “denial of racism and constructing the school as a tolerant environment where everybody gets along” (Kirkham, 2016, p. 383). In Ireland there has been further suggestion that increased focus on intercultural education has become a “policy panacea” (Bryan, 2009, p. 297) to racism in Ireland rather than addressing broader structural issues such as school segregation. There is a noted disconnect between the neoliberal governing Irish state which promotes egalitarianism yet offers limited structural support for ethnic minority students “least endowed with the cultural and linguistic capital valued by the school and wider society” (Bryan, 2010, p. 253).

### 2.2.2 Socio-economic Status

It was found that white parents who are committed to multi-ethnic schooling retain white privilege and cultural dominance as they extract value from the multi-ethnic ‘other’ in terms of using them for their moral and political sentiments (Reay, Hollingworth, Williams,
Crozier, Jamieson, James and Beedell, 2007). Furthermore, working class ethnic minorities who did not share or commit to middle class values in a multi-ethnic schooling environment were ‘devalued’ and further othered via white, middle class dominance (Reay et al., 2007). Despite the demand to assimilate to white middle class identity, in a study of middle class BME individuals including students, there is evidence to suggest that BME middle class identity is a “profoundly conflictual and precarious space” (Archer, 2012, p. 129). BME middle class identity is deemed inauthentic as whiteness is regarded as the legitimate marker of middle class identity (Archer, 2012). This fosters a sense of precariousness for BME identities in securing and maintaining their middle class identity particularly in a school setting (Archer, 2012).

In analysis of first generation children from a BME migrant background in Ireland, Devine (2009, p. 531) discusses how these children use school as way to gain “capital accumulation” and secure their integration to Irish society. However, some students were limited on the ‘capital’ they could gain due to socio-economic barriers, while middle class, ethnic minority children used academic attainment at post-primary level as a way to “consolidate” their class position (Devine, 2009, p. 532). Teachers play a role in this consolidation as Devine (2005, p. 61), found that when an ethnic minority child was perceived as ‘good’ by the teacher, there was a perception that they came from a middle class background. Indeed, it has also been found that white Irish teachers perceive ethnic minority students as “other” (Devine, 2005, p. 49). In relation to this, BME students perceive favouritism from teachers who are perceived as giving preferential treatment to white, Irish students (Gilligan, Curry, McGrath, Murphy and Ní Raghallaigh, 2010).

Archer (2008) found that BME students are prevented from inhabiting a positive academic identity as the dominant discourse surrounding the ‘ideal pupil’ is that it is white, male and middle class. Rather ethnic minority students are ‘othered’ in the school environment. The failure for ethnic minority students to be identified as ‘the ideal pupil’ has implications for high achieving ethnic minority students as their academic success is undermined and peripheralised due to class based prejudices (Archer, 2008). This has an impact on academic attainment. Social class was also found to be a key factor in the educational underachievement of minority ethnic students in England and Wales (Robson, 2007). Additionally, Robson (2007) found that there were significant disparities in educational attainment between ethnic groups even when they were in the same social class. However,
Wilson, Burgess and Briggs (2011) also found that a number of ethnic minority students out-performed their white peers in UK state examinations by securing a higher point average. White boys from low socio-economic backgrounds had the lowest academic attainment (Wilson et al., 2011).

2.2.3 Disproportionate Discipline and School Expulsion

Disproportionate discipline and school expulsion is a significant issue in relation to the academic (under) attainment of BME students in the US education system. In the US it was found that 1.2 million black students were suspended from K-12 public schools in a one-year period (Smith and Harper, 2015). However, these expulsions disproportionately occurred across the US as Southern states had the highest rate of black student expulsion and were responsible for 50% of black student school expulsion in the US (Smith et al., 2015). It was found that “black, Hispanic, and American Indian youth are slightly more likely than white and Asian American youth to be sent to the office and substantially (two to five times) more likely to be suspended or expelled” (Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace and Bachman, 2008, p. 47). Racial discipline occurred irrespective of socio-economic status (Skiba, Michael, Nardo and Peterson, 2002; Wallace et al., 2008). Differential treatment occurs for African American boys in the classroom as they are referred by their teachers for further disciplining “for infractions that are more subjective in interpretation” (Skiba, 2002, p. 317). Indeed, African American boys undergo enforced discipline as they are regarded as needing to be controlled (Monroe, 2005). Townsend (2002) identifies the impact of discipline on learning as African American males face disproportionate discipline impacting on the opportunity to learn.

Additionally, in a study of one multi-ethnic school district it was found that the percentage of black instructional staff did not reduce the rate of black student suspension and expulsion (Arcia, 2007) suggesting that the issue is structurally ingrained. Black male students have recounted how zero-tolerance policies and enforcement of the most punitive disciplinary measures in terms of suspension and expulsion led to their school failure, describing a school environment that was “inhospitable” to their identity as young black males (Canton, 2012). Alongside working class/working poor black boys, black girls are also found to undergo strict discipline and punishment in the school environment via a US school culture that enforces “anti-black logic of discipline and punishment” (Wun, 2014, p. 737). Furthermore, Latino-American girls were found to be disproportionately disciplined and suspended in the high school environment in contrast to their white American peers (Bondy, Peguero and Johnson,
Violence and enforced victimisation against BME students in the school environment is detrimental to overall wellbeing and establishing future success post-school (Peguero, 2011). Black/African Americans and Latino American students have a high risk of dropping out due to the disproportionate disciplinary treatment they undergo in the school environment (Peguero, 2011). It is suggested that the violence BME students undergo in the US schooling environment is a part of white “social control” of BME identity (Peguero, Popp, Latimore, Shekarkhar and Koo, 2011, p. 259) Dumas (2014, pp. 1-26) describes the US schooling system as a “site of black suffering” due to continued racial segregation and the white “infliction of power on racialised bodies”. The provision of schooling for black students in the US is described by Dumas (2014, p. 8) as “the loss of hope for oneself” due to the socio-cultural violence black identity encounters in the white American primary and post-primary schooling system.

The issue of black punishment in the schooling system has also been identified in the UK. In a study of black British boys with African Caribbean heritage, it was found that they receive a disproportionate amount of punishment in the school environment (Sewell, 1997). There is an assimilative demand for black male identity to conform to white aesthetics (Sewell, 1997). This demand is threatened by the stereotype of black masculinity as rebellious and nonconformist (Sewell, 1997). In relation to this, Maud (2001) found evidence for the racialised schooling experience of black youth in the UK in terms of discipline, racial stereotypes and teacher relationships. This affects students’ integration into the broader society as black identity is criminalised in the schooling system and therefore creates the societal stereotype of the ‘black criminal’ (Maud, 2001).

2.2.4 Racist Bullying and Discrimination

Black/African Americans and Latino Americans undergo increased discrimination and violence in the schooling environment even if they are high academic achievers, academically motivated and have white American friendships (Peguero and Jiang, 2016). It is suggested that this backlash occurs due to ethnic stereotypes being challenged (Peguero, 2016). In an US urban high school, Asian Americans recounted physical and verbal harassment from peers while black and Latino students reported discrimination from teachers and the school police (Rosenbloom and Way, 2004). In terms of cross-racial peer-to-peer integration an Irish schooling environment, Devine and Kelly (2006) note a gendered dynamic, finding that ethnic minority boys secured inclusion to the majority Irish ethnic
group by taking part in sport. In contrast, ethnic minority girls struggled to be included by their white, Irish female peers when it came to “boy-talk, fashion and appearance” (Devine et al., 2006, p. 137). In relation to peer-to-peer integration across ethnicities and cultures, overt racism has been identified. Devine, Kenny and Macneela (2008) found that BME children face verbal racism from their white Irish peers in the primary school environment. This is fuelled by the construction of BME students as ‘other’ by their white Irish peers if their skin colour, language, religion and cultural background does not ascribe to the “norm” of white, Roman Catholic identity (Devine et al., 2008, p. 369). It was found that white, Irish students have a “wide repertoire of racially abusive terms” used to discriminate against their BME peers (Devine et al., 2008, p. 375). In terms of this, BME students have reported on their teachers “failure” and lack of awareness when dealing with the issue of racist bullying (Gilligan, 2010, p. 30). Muslims and Travellers/Mincéir face the highest level of “social distancing” from their white Irish peers when compared to black Africans and Eastern Europeans (Tormey and Gleeson, 2012, p. 169). This may explain why “91% of Travellers/Mincéir leave school at age 16 or younger compared to 25% of non-Travellers/Mincéir” (Watson, Kenny and McGinnity, 2017, p. 29).

2.2.5 Culturally Unresponsive Teaching

BME children have been found to have a positive attitude to education. In a study of two black elementary schools, black children were found to aspire to academic achievement and were engaged with their schooling (Tyson, 2002). Black students have a more optimistic view of education than their white peers insofar as they regard education as important to their future (Downey and Ainsworth-Darnell, 2002). Despite this, it was found that impoverished African American students undergo a significant grade point decline when they transition from elementary to middle school (Gutman, and Midgley, 2000). Bruce and Chance (2008) provide evidence to suggest that white teacher education does not sufficiently prepare teachers to educate black students impacting on student achievement. Hyland (2005) found that white teachers believe themselves to be culturally competent and not enforce discriminatory teaching practices in the classroom. This contrasted with evidence that the teachers did in fact sustain racist practice and ideology in their teaching practice (Hyland, 2005). In a study of first and second generation black immigrants in the US schooling system, it was found that they undergo difficulty engaging with the school environment as they are positioned as ‘non-American’ leading to ethnic discrimination and marginalisation (Coutinho and Koinis-Mitchell, 2014).
An exclusionary curriculum has been noted as an integrative barrier in Ireland. Bryan (2009) suggests that successful intercultural schooling has been limited by nationalistic discourse on what legitimises Irish and ‘non-Irish’ racial identity. In an examination of identity issues relating to the inclusion of migrant children in Ireland, it was found that many migrant children describe themselves in a ‘hybrid’ or ‘hyphenated’ manner, e.g., African-Irish (Ní Laoire et al., 2009). However, despite having an attachment to their local Irish home and community, many migrant children are provoked to question their identity and choose one nationality and/or identity over another, usually the ‘non-Irish’ identity and/or nationality (Ní Laoire et al., 2009) as part of their schooling experience. It was found that a lower level of “social distance” was reported in Irish schools which provided “even a minimal level” of curricula that explored topics relating to cultural and ethnic diversity (Tormey et al., 2012, p. 171). However, the success of intercultural schooling has been stymied by Roman Catholic patronage of primary and post-primary schooling in Ireland. Integration of religious difference has been limited, impacting on issues relating to the school uniform in terms of “religious–cultural identity” and the academic attainment of religious minorities due to the religious ethos of the curriculum (Parker-Jenkins and Masterson, 2013, p. 486). Faas, Darmody and Sokolowska (2016) cite a need for “religious pluralism” in Irish schools. Additionally, it is suggested that religious education can be framed to incorporate a “moral education” (Faas et al., p. 95) on issues relating to cultural and ethnic diversity. Indeed, the lack of provision for diversity in the schooling curricula is of concern as Bryan (2012, p. 599) noted how post-primary curricula, through its representation of ethnic and cultural difference, “reinforces, rather than challenges” racism by individualising, minimising and naturalising racial experience. This may promote instances of assimilation whereby ethnic minorities have been found to be “intent on proving their Irishness” (Devine, 2009, p. 532) due to being perceived as ‘other’ in the primary and post-primary school environment by both their peers, teachers and indeed, the curricula they are exposed to.

2.2.6 Academic Attainment Gaps

A colour-blind approach to teaching and learning and refusal to acknowledge race has impacted on black student attainment (Gillborn, 1997). Black students suffer in the UK teaching and learning environment due to teachers who are increasingly under pressure to attain crude performance indicators (Gillborn, 1997). In terms of mathematics and reading, there is a significant attainment gap between black and white students in US public schools
(Vanneman, Hamilton, Anderson and Taslima, 2009). However, these attainment rates vary across states (Vanneman et al., 2009). Rowley and Wright (2011) have found that racial discrimination in the school environment and familial environments have contributed to the contrast in math and literacy attainment across white and black students. In the US, African American students are underrepresented in ‘gifted’ programs. It was found that this occurs due to deficit teaching models and teacher perceptions of BME students (Ford, Harris III, Tyson and Trotman, 2001). African Caribbean students in UK schools were found to be undesirable “or even intolerable” learners by their teachers (Youdell, 2003, p. 3). This perception impacts negatively on the identity construction of African Caribbean students’ and consequently, their academic performance (Youdell, 2003). In Ireland, Kitching (2011, p. 293) found that migrant students in post-primary school settings were regarded as an “undesirable” learner and classmate by their white Irish peers. In a study of Mexican Americans in a low-performing school, students recounted a positive ethnic identity when the school undertook activities that dispelled racial stereotypes and perceived bilingual identity as an asset (Gonzalez, 2009). Latina/o high school students were found to benefit from ethnic enclaves whereby academic support and positive ethnic self-image was fostered (Salerno and Reynolds, 2017).

A fear of being regarded as ‘acting white’ leads to academic underachievement for black students causing them to disengage from the teaching and learning environment (Ford, Grantham and Whiting, 2008; Fordham and Ogbu, 1986). Gifted black students have attributed ‘acting white’ to successful school achievement (Ford et al., 2008). Conversely, ‘acting black’ was perceived to indicate low intelligence, poor behaviour and negative engagement with school by gifted black students (Ford et al., 2008) suggesting that racial stereotypes were internalised. ‘Acting white’ is regarded negatively by BME students’ peers (Ford et al., 2008). This is problematic as peer pressure has been identified as a factor of black student underachievement whereby students do not work to their full potential (Ford, 1993). In contrast to this, in study of two US schools it was found that African American students created a peer-to-peer environment to challenge stereotypes by celebrating academic achievement and college progression (Griffin and Allen, 2006). This compares to a study where African American students at elite independent schools fostered peer groups where academic success was encouraged (Datnow and Cooper, 1998). This was found to foster and promote the development of positive academic identities that resisted racial stereotypes (Datnow et al., 1998). Indeed, African American students perform better if there is peer and
parental support for their academic work (Witherspoon, Speight and Thomas, 1997). Furthermore, gifted black students are motivated to academically succeed due to familial support and expectations (Ford and Harris, 2008). Race has been found to be a factor in academic attainment, as grade point averages were found to correlate with attitudes to racial identity and “academic self-concept” (Witherspoon, et al., 1997, p. 344).

In terms of HE progression to HE, the attainment gap between black and white students at primary and post-primary level in the US is partly based on socio-economic status (Richard, 2004). However, in some instances the gap remains even when blacks and whites have a shared socio-economic background (Richard, 2004). Overall, black students have a lower rate of high school completion and graduation (Lynn et al., 2010; Schott Foundation, 2010). Black males were found to focus on athletic aspirations in favour of academic attainment due to the potential of securing a scholarship to US HE as an athlete (Benson, 2000; Harper, 2009; Sellers and Kuperminc, 1997). This may occur as HE is not presented as an option to black students (Griffin and Allen, 2006). The hostile environment (see 2.2.3) that African American students encounter leads them to discontinue their education (Griffin et al., 2006). It was found that black students have to develop resilience in order to overcome the obstacles they face in academically attaining at high school level and progressing to HE (Griffin et al. 2006). In terms of addressing this issue, from a UK perspective, Gillborn (2008) suggests that the attainment rates between black and white students in the education system cannot be addressed due to “the workings of “whiteness” as a fundamental driver of social policy”.

2.3 Factors Impacting on Progression to HE for BME Students

2.3.1 Progression to HE for BME Students in Ireland

Darmody Byrne and McGinnity (2014, pp. 146-147) found that migrant students in Ireland face barriers accessing HE due to their experience in post-primary school where they are overrepresented in “less prestigious schools”, streamed in classes below their age group and receive limited career guidance in terms of how to progress to HE. This is compounded by unfamiliarity with the Irish education system and pathways to HE (Darmody et al., 2014). Lack of proficiency with the English language was also found to be a barrier for BME progression to Irish HE due to a lack of information provided in mother-tongue languages (Darmody et al., 2014; Linehan and Hogan, 2008). Another barrier is the lack of recognition of non-Western qualifications restricting enrolment to postgraduate courses for those who
have inward migrated to Ireland (Linehan et al., 2008). In terms of prior qualifications, it was found that “no attempt was made in most cases to assess their worth” particularly in the case of African students (Coghlan, Fagan, Munck, O’Brien and Warener, 2005, p. 8). Keogh and White (2003) suggest that BME cohorts are overrepresented in Institutes of Technology (IT) due to its admission structure which is more open to non-standard entry qualifications. Furthermore, in a study examining migrants’ progression to Irish HE, Linehan et al. (2008) found that residency status impeded progression to HE as visa status made ‘migrants’ liable to pay international student fees despite being resident in Ireland as they find themselves “stateless within the state” (Tyler, 2013, p. 61). Indeed, BME students often find themselves structurally marginalised as they attempt to progress to Irish HE:

Educational systems such as Ireland […] with the highest levels of overall eligibility and participation in HE, share certain characteristics such as free tuition and alternative pathways to HE, but social differences still remain in terms of secondary school attainment and access to HE and in the types of institutions selected by under-represented groups. (Bowes, Thomas, Peck and Nathwani, 2013, p. 31)

In the context of this study, there is a need for further research in this area in order to develop robust policy to address this concern.

2.3.2 Progression to HE for BME Students in the UK

In the United Kingdom (UK), BME cohorts are categorised by the Office for National Statistics (2015, p. 8) as:

- Irish
- Gypsy or Irish Traveller / Mincéir
- Any other White background
- White and Black Caribbean
- White and Black African
- White and Asian
- Asian / Asian British
- Indian
- Pakistani
- Bangladeshi
- Chinese
- Any other Asian background
- Black / African / Caribbean / Black British
- African
- Caribbean
- Any other Black / African / Caribbean background
- Arab
In terms of progression to UK HE, at post-primary level, black Caribbean and black African students’ score an average of 3.0 points less in General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) when compared to their white British peers (ENT, 2012). Despite this, black students are overrepresented in UK HE when compared to their white, British peers who are underrepresented (ECU, 2016). Asian women alongside black ethnic females were found to be the largest underrepresented ethnic group in terms of HE enrolment (Magadi, Beckhelling, Phung, Chzhen, France and Harvey, 2007). Additionally, UK BME cohorts remain underrepresented in elite and selective Russell Group19 HE institutions (Boliver, 2013, 2014, 2015; Pilkington, 2015). Despite, BME students’ overrepresentation in UK HE, 60% of BME cohorts are found in the ‘new’ university which is disregarded as less prestigious and delivering lower-quality graduates (Boliver, 2014). Shiner and Modood (2002, p. 209) found that “new universities respond more positively than old universities to (non-white) ethnic minority applicants and, within this sector, Chinese, Bangladeshi and Indian candidates appear to be favoured over whites”. However, BME cohorts face “an ethnic penalty” (Shiner et al., 2002, p. 227) when applying to ‘old universities’ and elite HEIs. In terms of admission to elite HE, a report from Oxford University Student Union (OSOU) (2014) found that during the application process 29.7% of students believed that their race was factored as an issue during the admissions process.

In response to growing concern of admission bias, the UK Universities and Colleges Admissions Services (UCAS) (2015) introduced a name blind application process in 2016. From its 2016 report, UCAS concluded that there was no evidence of structural discrimination and/or bias against BME students in the progression to Russell Group universities as post-primary attainment and socio-economic background were found to be contributors to the lack of BME representation in elite UK HE (UCAS, 2015). Additionally, Noden, Shiner and Modood (2014, p. 19) have noted “self-exclusion” whereby UK BME students apply at a narrower and lower range of HEIs. There is further evidence to suggest that the “ethnic mix” of a HEI attracts BME cohorts impacting on HE choice insofar as BME students tend to choose HEIs where their ethnicity and culture is most visible (Ball, Reay and David, 2002, p. 333).

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19 The Russell Group refers to the most prestigious and elite universities in the UK
However, the most influential factor impacting on progress to UK HE and in particular elite UK HE for BME students, is class and socio-economic background (Ball, Reay and David, 2002; Bowl, 2001). Progression to UK HE is impeded for working class, ethnic minorities who tend to be overrepresented in multi-ethnic post-primary schools in deprived and disadvantaged areas (Dewitt, Archer, Osborne, Dillion, Willis and Wong, 2011). Despite attempts at improving the participation rates of UK BME groups in HE, structural barriers remain an issue. In the UK, black ethnic groups attend tertiary and adult colleges in greater proportion to other ethnic groups (Magadi et al., 2007). In a study of UK BME students transitioning from a Further Education (FE) Access course to an undergraduate social work programme, Dillon (2011) found that low socio-economic status and limited self-confidence in academic ability prohibited progress to HE. Additionally, it was found that BME students were less likely to secure a place on the undergraduate programme following a group interview when compared to the success rates of their white British peers suggesting potential bias (Dillon, 2011).

Despite barriers in the progression to HE, aspiration to progress to HE is evident (Dillon, 2011, Reay, 1998). Reay (1998) notes how UK BME aspiration to progress to HE is influenced by familial choice, whereby HE attainment is regarded as a way to improve or secure class positioning. However, increased class positioning does not seem to negate experiences of racism and discrimination in relation to schooling. In a study of middle class UK BME parents who positively interacted with teachers in the schools where their children attended, it was found that racism and discrimination continued to be experienced by the BME students negatively impacting on successful progression to HE (Gillborn, Rollock, Vincent and Ball, 2012).

2.3.3 Progression to HE for BME Students in the US

In the United States (US), BME cohorts are African American, First Nation, Hispanic-American and Asian-American (OMB, 1997). In terms of post-primary attainment, approximately half of Hispanic immigrants in the twenty to thirty age bracket have no high school diploma, compared with 9% of black immigrants and 5% Asian and white immigrants (Baum and Flores, 2011). Mexican, Salvadoran, and Guatemalan foreign-born nationals continue to have the lowest levels of post-primary educational attainment in the US (Baum, et al., 2011). Despite BME groups’ statistically attaining lower academic rates at post-primary level, in the 2013 US college admissions, there has been an increase of Hispanics to 16%,
Asian/ Pacific Islander to 6%, First Nation/ Alaska Native to 0.8% and black students to 15%. This contrasts with a decline in the percentage of white students from 84% to 59% (US Department of Education, 2016). Affirmative action^{20} has been implemented to deal with the issue of BME (under)representation in US HE. Affirmative action has improved progression to HE for US BME students and in the last ten years Hispanic and African American undergraduates have increased and are overrepresented in US HE while the enrolment rates of white Americans has declined (Perna, 2016). However, despite affirmative action, black and Latinos’ enrolment in elite, Ivy League^{21} colleges has declined when compared to the rates of admission for white and Asian American students (Posselt, Arbor, Jaquette, Bielby and Bastedo, 2012). Elite US colleges have long held preferential standards for student intake in terms of athletes and children of alumni as “admission to elite colleges and universities in the US is not now and never has been based solely on academic merit” (Espenshade, Chung and Walling, 2004, p. 1422).

Yet, the preference for BME cohorts via affirmative action is the most controversial (Espenshade, et al., 2004; Espenshade and Chung, 2005) which may be due to the decline of white American’s securing admission. However, Alon and Tienda (2007, p. 447) found that an inability to improve the impact that lower socio-economic status has on high school SAT test scores makes it “difficult for institutions to achieve diversity without giving minorities a “boost” through race-sensitive preferences”. As González, Stoner and Jovel (2003, p. 146) suggest, the lack of progression to HE for Latino students is a result of low social capital and “institutional neglect”. Alongside, black/African American girls, Latino American girls were found to have “lower levels of academic self-efficacy” impacting on HE progression (Bondy et al., 2017, p. 505). HE progression is further compounded by structural segregation evident within the US primary and post-primary system (Condron, 2009; Drake, 2917; Fletcher et al., 2010; Noguera, 2003; Toldson, 2008). Additional structural and socio-economicclassed limitation is evident in the case of black Americans as the median income of white US households is more than ten times that of black households (Barnes, Chemerinsky and Jones, 2010). Espenshade et al., (2005) contend that African Americans and Hispanics would be substantially underrepresented in elite US HE if affirmative action was to be eliminated:

^{20} Affirmative action is a policy mandate in the US to ensure inclusion and representation of disadvantaged and minoritised groups in areas such as education

^{21} The Ivy League is a group of the most elite and selective universities in the US
A ban of affirmative action will lead to a substantial decline of minority students in the top-tier colleges. [...] Independently of what one thinks about the desirability of racial diversity and affirmative action, our analysis indicates that a ban of affirmative action and the resulting adoption of race-blind admission policies will likely have a substantial impact on the racial composition of colleges, the educational achievement of minority students, and the distribution of gains resulting from higher education in the population. (Epple, Romano and Sieg, 2008, pp. 475-498)

Affirmative action, particularly in the case of elite institutions is important insofar as “students select environments where they will find people with similar racial beliefs” (Milem, Umbach and Liang, 2004, p. 615).

2.4 The Academic Experiences of BME Students in HE

2.4.1 Course Choice

In US HE, there is evidence that BME students continue to be underrepresented in the sciences (Ovink and Veazey, 2011). In UK HE, white students have a higher enrolment presence in the social sciences and the humanities in comparison to their BME peers (Magadi et al., 2007). This is comparable to a prior UK study which found that there were double the average of proportions of BME students enrolled in medicine, dentistry, computer science and law when compared to less than 10% enrolled in humanities, art and design, veterinary science and agriculture, suggesting a move towards more vocationally-based subjects for BME students (Connor, Tyers, Modood and Hillage, 2004). A recent UK report found that minority ethnic cohorts are “slightly over-represented” in dentistry and medicine with the exception of black Caribbean students who remain significantly under-represented at 0.03% (Gamsu and Donnelly, 2017). The greatest discrepancy was found in veterinary science where 95% of students were white with less than 60 students from a non-white background (Gamsu et al., 2017).

2.4.2 Aspirations

99% of UK BME students stated that employment opportunities influenced their course choice (Magadi, et al., 2007). In contrast, personal interest rather than employment opportunities tends to guide white students’ decision making regarding their choice of HE course (Connor et al., 2004). Keane (2016) found that Irish students, including a very small number of BME students, who entered HE via a HEAR programme, were motivated to progress to postgraduate level in order to secure employment opportunities. Additionally, UK BME students are influenced by their parents and familial choices in terms of choosing what
course to study (Dhanda, 2009). In a study examining UK BME students’ progression to science based courses, it was found that UK BME students, particularly those of Asian ethnicity, have high aspirations to progress to HE science courses due to familial expectations. However, these high aspirations contrasted with low progression to HE and low academic attainment when access to HE had been secured (Dewitt, Archer, Osborne, Dillon, Willis and Wong, 2011). Law, Finney and Swann (2014) found that a quarter of the black, white and Asian men did not regard educational attainment as important or valuable. However, in regards to this, the study warns against generalisations and stereotypes against these groups and the need to look at the structural constraints preventing HE aspiration, particularly in the case of black men in the UK (Law et al., 2014). To combat the negative perception of BME students in UK HE as underachievers with low aspirations, Mirza (2006, p. 137) undertook a gendered study where it was found that black and Asian women have a “collective desire for education” and a “positive and enduring relationship with education”. Griffin, (2006, p. 395) found that black college students are academically motivated in order to “reach their career goals, make their families proud, and be a positive representative of the Black community” (Griffin, 2006, p. 395).

2.4.3 Factors Impacting on Academic Attainment

2.4.3.1 ‘Dropping Out’

US BME students described feeling academically underprepared upon entering HE (Harklau, 1999). In terms of this, irrespective of course choice, in the UK, BME students are less than likely to graduate with a first class degree when compared to the attainment rates of their white peers (Bhopal, 2017; Connor et al., 1996, 2004; Elias and Jones, 2006; Leslie, 2005, Naylor and Smith, 2004; Richardson, 2008) and withdraw at a higher rate from HE than their white peers (Woodfield, 2017). In the UK, black students are 50% more likely to drop out of university when compared to their ethnic minority and white peers (Social Market Foundation, 2017). Evidence of BME students withdrawing from HE at a higher rate than their white peers compares to prior research by Dhanda (2009), HEFCE (2016) and Steele (1999) which suggests an on-going trajectory in relation to this issue. In the US, Hausmann, Schofield and Woods (2007, p. 819) found a “marginally significant decrease” in terms of academic integration with males reporting a higher level of lack of integration than females (Hausmann et al., 2007). In addition, white students reported a greater level of peer support than African Americans (Hausmann et al., 2007). In terms of academic support, parental support was found to be “the only statistically significant predictor” for students to
academically “persist” as they encountered instances and experiences of dis-belonging in the academic environment (Hausmann et al., 2007, p. 819). Wood (2014) found that variables that impacted on black male persistence in US community colleges was dependent on securing high grades, having the opportunity to repeat courses for higher grades and the provision of informal meetings with faculty and staff. However, in a study that looked at black and Muslim students in a UK HE, it was found that these students acquired a “new academic literacy” with many who entered HE with low academic grades qualifying from HE with high grades and first-class degrees (Harris, Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 2017, p. 365) suggesting a positive academic experience at HE level.

In terms of academic attainment, there is additional evidence to suggest that the socio-economic status of UK BME students influenced academic retention and progression rates (Cureton, 2007; Rodgers, 2013). Issues relating to financial difficulties, lack of institutional support, isolation and lack of cultural diversity have also been found to contribute to BME students dropping out of HE prior to graduation (Connor et. al, 2004; Dhanda, 2009; HEFCE, 2016; Smith, 2017; Steele, 1999). Smith (2017) found that low confidence has impacted UK BME students’ attainment rates. Additionally, Conner et al. (2004, p. 39) attribute the rate of black BME cohorts dropping out of UK HE occurring as white lecturers regard young black men as “less able” and “more threatening than Asians” impacting on the relationship teachers foster with their black and Asian students. Indeed, black students who dropped out of their course have reported the greatest relationship difficulties with their teachers and peers in comparison to other BME populations (Connor et al., 2004, p. 39). In the US, Hausmann et al. (2007, p. 829) found that feelings of belonging lead to greater instances of “persistence” to remain in HE.

2.4.3.2 Academic Stereotypes

BME students undergo “stereotypes about their ability to succeed” (Syed, Azmitia and Cooper, 2011, p. 450). Some students may internalise these stereotypes. In the US, it was found that Asian American’s perceive themselves to be more academically motivated than their white peers resulting in them being termed the “model minority” (Wong, Lai and Nagasawa, 1998, p. 95). Additionally, white students also perceived their Asian American peers to be more academically focused and “superior” (Wong et al., 1998, p. 95). This compared to African Americans, Hispanics and First Nation students who perceived themselves as being “inferior” to whites in terms of being academically motivated (Wong et
The perception of Asian Americans as the model minority is problematic as it enforces positive discrimination (Lee, 2006). Indeed, Lee (2006, p. 24) found that Asian American students “face considerable barriers in their pursuit of education”. Promotion of Asian Americans as the model minority has the potential to delegitimise these students’ struggles and prevent engagement to deal effectively with the issues that affect their academic attainment in HE. In relation to this, Fischer and Massey (2007) found that US BME groups who progress to selective HE despite having a low SAT score excel academically while in HE. However, this contrasts with BME students being regarded as “academically challenged and intellectually weak” in the US HE learning environment (Fischer et al., 2007, p. 531). US BME students reported that their BME status led to peer and lecturer assumptions that they had an inability to attain at the same level as their white peers (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002).

Indeed, US BME students have described an overwhelming pressure to strive for and maintain high levels of academic achievement to prove their worth (Solorzano et al., 2002). In the US, Solorzano, Ceja and Yosso (2000) reported that BME students feel ‘drained’ due to racial stereotypes which force them to continuously assert themselves above racial assumptions regarding their academic ability. BME students have described how their race and/or ethnicity led to assumptions that they were unable to academically attain at the same level as their white peers (Solorzano et al., 2000). This led to an overwhelming pressure to strive for and maintain high levels of academic achievement to prove their worth as they negotiated disparaging perceptions of their particular ethnic or racial grouping (Solorzano et al., 2000). BME students in elite UK HE academic settings have also described how they are labelled as ‘trouble’ and perceived as ‘low achievers’ due to their ethnicity (Dumangane, 2016). UK BME students reported “expectations and anticipations of failure” from their peers and lecturers which created a need to prove themselves within the classroom leading to “more effort and more stress” (Davies et al., 2004, pp. 433) when dealing with their coursework. In contrast to their UK BME peers, white students position themselves as “bright”, “intelligent” and “good students” (Crozier, Burke and Archer, 2016, p. 49). Alternatively, it has been found that UK BME international students are regarded as “academically superior” (Trice, 2003, p. 379) in comparison to their local peers in what can be referred to as positive discrimination.
2.4.3.3 Culturally Unresponsive Teaching

Lack of BME staff is problematic as there are limited role models in the HE learning environment for BME students impacting on BME retention rates (Dumangane 2016; Johnson, 2015). In terms of UK BME students’ academic under-attainment while enrolled in HE, Richardson (2015, p. 278) asserts that “we do not know what aspects of teaching and assessment practices are responsible for variations in the attainment gap”. There has been suggestion that UK HE implements a racially imbued “deficit modelling of teaching” (Tatlow, 2015, p. 10). Indeed, UK BME students have reported higher levels of dissatisfaction with the teaching quality they received at university in comparison to their white, British peers (Neves and Hillman, 2016). Osler (1999, p. 39) suggests that in academic settings UK BME students undergo “discriminatory teaching and assessment exercises”. UK BME students have reported that their lecturers do not ‘push’ them to succeed academically (Mclean, Abbas and Ashwin, 2015). There is evidence to suggest that US BME students “self-sorted” (Freeman, Crowe and Wenderoth, 2017, p. 115) in a collaborative learning environment due to a preference to remain in divided ethno-cultural groups. There is a call for ethnic and cultural diversity to be viewed as an “asset” (Fletcher, Bernard, Fairtlough and Ahmet, 2015, p. 136) in the HE teaching and learning environment.

2.4.3.4 Restrictive English Speaking Monolingualism

Cotton, Joyer and George (2016) found that confidence regarding English speaking proficiency impacted on BME students’ confidence in the learning environment. Indeed, the issue of “silence” (Housee, 2010, p. 421; Zhou, Knoke and Sakamoto, 2005, p. 287) has been identified in the UK HE learning environment in relation to Asian cohorts whose indigenous knowledge is not incorporated into the Western/English curricula. In terms of this, issues relating to isolation have been reported by UK BME students in relation to the white HE curriculum and syllabus that does not cater to the diversity of the student population (Connor et al., 2004). Indeed, the monolingual English speaking teaching and learning environment of HE has been identified as an issue. Language barriers were found to be a stressor in UK HE which impacted on learning (Mori, 2000; Poyrazli et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2011). Issues relating to English language proficiency for international students has led to low academic achievement (Dhanda, 2009). Language barriers were further impeded by the adjustment needed to adapt to the “cultural setting” and “educational practices” of UK HE (Dhanda, 2009, p. 10).
Sterzuk (2015, p. 53) argues against the “white varieties of English” used in Western HE. ‘White English’ is used as “the benchmark” whereby academic ability and “legitimate participation in learning” is marked and scored (Sterzuk, 2015, p. 53). Issues relating to English language proficiency was also found to be a key issue for BME students in Irish HE (Linehan et al., 2008). Harris and Chonaill (2016) found that difficulties with the English language impacted on academic performance. An Irish study on international students’ academic literacies found that this cohort of student is expected to assimilate to and “fit into” the existing teaching and learning practices of Irish institutions particularly in the case of language (Sheridan, 2011, p. 129). International BME students in an Irish HE learning environment have described the difficulty of finding an “academic voice that can express complex meanings in the second language” (Sheridan, 2011, p. 129). In the US, BME cohorts who are proficient in English yet have a bi/multilingual voice describe being singled out as needing additional academic assistance due to their multi/bilingualism (Harklau, 1999). Difficulties adapting to the monolingual teaching and learning style has fostered divide in Irish HE learning spaces (Sheridan, 2011). In Ireland, lecturers have noted instances of “ghettoization” in their lecture halls where “the international students sit in the front and all the Irish students sit in the back” (Sheridan, 2011, p. 129).

### 2.4.3.5 Degree Attainment

Despite the success of affirmative action in increasing BME presence in US HE, African Americans and Hispanics, graduate at a far higher proportion with an associate degree which is a step away from a bachelor’s degree in comparison to their white peers (US Department of Education, 2012). In a study that looked at baccalaureate degree attainment, it was found that African American students have a similar attainment rate whether they attend a historically black college or university (HBCU) or a historically white college or university (HWCU). Females graduate at a higher proportion than males in a baccalaureate programme (Kim and Conrad, 2006). Despite the contribution that HBCUs make in African American HE attainment they are underfunded in comparison to HWCUs (Kim et al., 2006). Irrespective of variables such as socio-economic background, it was found that BME students attain a lower degree than their white, British peers (Connor et al., 2004). UK BME students are less likely to get a first or upper second class degree in comparison to their white peers (Connor et al., 2004). Black students attain a third degree or lower in comparison to their white peers and other BME groupings (Connor et al., 2004). In terms of gender, in the UK females generally outperform males (Connor et al., 2004). The latest UK HE figures show that 60% of black
and BME students achieved a 2:1 in 2013-2014 in comparison to 76% of white students (Neves, Hillman, 2016). Broecke and Nicholls (2006) suggest that status as an ‘ethnic minority’ was statistically significant in terms of explaining attainment rates. As with the UK, in the US there is a notable attainment gap between BME students and their white peers (Horn, Peter and Tooney, 2002; Richardson, 2012).

Despite lower attainment rates than their white, British peers, UK BME students are more likely to further their academic study to postgraduate level in an attempt to broaden their chances of employment in the labour market where their success is “less than expected” (Connor et al., 2004, p. 30). It was also found that UK BME students are more likely than white graduates to progress to taught masters level (HEFCE, 2016). In this manner BME students engage with HE as a way to increase “social mobility” (Noden, Shiner and Modood, 2014, p. 15). This aligns with a number of studies which found that BME groups engage with HE to increase socio-cultural capital (Archer, 2000; Beck, 2006; Conner et al., 2004; Fitzgerald et al., 2000; Rhamie et al., 2002; Strand, 2007; Torgerson, et al., 2008). This contrasts to Irish students who were found to feel “less pressure to succeed academically” in comparison to their BME peers (Dunne, 2009, p. 222). Rather, Irish students were found to be more “laid back” and “less focused” on their studies preferring the social side of the HE experience in comparison to their BME peers (Dunne, 2009, p. 222).

2.5 The Social Experience of BME Students in HE

2.5.1 Culture Shock

The early social experiences that students have in HE is an indicator of how they develop a sense of belonging or dis-belonging (Hausmann, et al. 2007). However, BME students have described experiences of ‘culture shock’ in HE due to the white culture of the academy due to a white curriculum and lack of BME staff (Connor et al., 2004). As Shillilam (2015, p. 33) remarks, “universities remain overwhelmingly administratively, normatively, habitually and intellectually ‘white’. Their doors have been opened, but the architecture remains the same”. This relates to studies which have found that BME students encounter a HE space that is culturally dominated by white, middle class values (Berry and Loke, 2011; Osler, 1999; Torgerson, Gorard, Low, Ainsworth, See and Wright, 2008). In relation to this, BME students in the UK have reported the issue of colour blindness whereby the HE staff and their white peers claim to not see race, thus leading to feelings of further peripheralisation (NUS, 2010).
One US study found that BME students feel both “invisible” and “hyper-visible” due to their race and/or ethnicity, with students reporting that they experienced being noticed “wholly as a result of being black” (Davies, Dias-Bowie, Greenberg, Klukken, Pollio, Thomas and Thompson, 2004, p. 430). Furthermore, evidence suggests that class status does not lead to reduced levels of structural discrimination as middle-class African Americans described an “inability to find a place on campus” (Grasmuck and Kim, 2010, p. 243).

Culture shock in the HE space has an impact on racial self-identification. Asians and Latinos who had an immigrant background and attended selective US HE were found to be perceived based on their country of origin rather than their American ethnicity (O’Sears, Fu, Henry and Bui, 2003, p. 419). However, it was also found that these students’ ethnic identities were “quite stable” during college, yet their identity was not “strengthened” or enhanced while at HE (O’Sears et al., 419). Trieu (2017) found that Asian American students’ gain a sense of belonging in US American narrative/history while in US HE due to exposure to Asian American activities on campus which led respondents to hyphenate their identity to add ‘American’. This contrasts with the experiences of African American college students who experience racial attitudes at cultural and individual level within the HE environment which impacts negatively on their ethnic identity (Johnson and Arbona, 2006). However, Shreve, Jensen and Uddin (2003) found that African Americans have higher ethnic identity and self-esteem when compared to Hispanics.

In a study examining the link between racial discrimination and depressive symptoms amongst Latino adolescents, it was found that high self-esteem in relation to ethnic identity and cultural orientation while enrolled in HE led to lower instances of depressive symptoms (Umaña-Taylor and Updegraff, 2007). Asian American’s, Mexican American and black students reported higher self-esteem when issues relating to race and ethnicity were discussed and resolved via the HE curriculum (Phinney and Alipuria, 1990). In relation to this, in the UK, BME students have described feeling tokenized and categorized in a fixed grouping of ‘race’ by both the HE institution and their white peers (Connor et al., 2004).

2.5.2 Racism and Isolation

UK BME students reported a lack of structural support in terms of addressing issues of isolation and racism (NUS, 2010). Connor et al. (2004) found that UK black Caribbean and black ‘other’ alongside Indian students had the highest instances of reporting racial
discrimination. In a small-scale study of BME students in a majoritarian white UK HEI, BME students reported a positive experience with some clashes of values while being “ambiguous about racism, giving anecdotal evidence of its existence whilst downplaying its significance” (Jessop and Williams, 2009, p. 95). In an Irish study, Boucher (1998) examined experiences of racism experienced by international BME students and noted how minority groups were ‘scapegoated’ by the majority Irish who may have felt that the dominant white culture of HE was under threat. In relation to this, overt experiences of racism have been described by BME students in both UK and US HE. In the UK, issues of racism were reported at Oxford University which had a 79% white student population at the time of the report (OSOU, 2014). Over half of BME students at Oxford admitted that they had heard or been the subject of an unacceptable racial joke or comment. In addition, there was a noted discrepancy in terms of how white and BME students perceived racism, with many white students not perceiving it to be a threat or issue on campus. This compared to 59.3% of BME students who stated that they had been made to feel uncomfortable and unwelcome in Oxford due to their race and/or ethnic background (OSOU, 2014). Similar findings are highlighted in US studies in terms of white students being less nuanced in perceptions of prejudice and discrimination. US BME students perceive racial hostility from their white peers and have reported experiences of alienation and isolation from their white peers (Cabera and Nora, 1994; Cureton, 2007; Smedley, Myers and Harrell, 1993). This contrasts with the white students who did not perceive racial exclusion or discrimination to be an issue on campus (Cabera et al., 2007).

It was found that while US black students and their white peers recognized the importance of interracial peer relationships they also recognized that this was not reflective of daily campus life (Fisher et al., 1995). 59% of white students and 70% of black students stated that making friends was affected by race (Fisher et al., 1995, p. 121). 71% of black students reported racial slurs, 9% reported exclusion from social activities, 5% experienced racially motivated fights, 55% witnessed racial incidents and 12% experienced physical violence (Fisher et al., 1995, p. 128). In terms of cross-racial integration in US HE settings, Hughey (2008, p. 443) explored how African American collegiate fraternities and sororities are regarded as “educated gangs” due to racist discourses and a white vilification and demonization of blackness which occurs within the culturally dominant white US HE space. In terms of cross-racial integration, Cabrera (2014) found that white students are less nuanced in perceptions of prejudice and discrimination. There is evidence that white students’ act differently when they are with their white peers where they are more open to telling racist jokes (Cabrera, 2014).
White students also regarded racism as an individual trait rather than a result of structural privilege, power dynamics and cultural dominance (Cabrera, 2014). Indeed, Grasmuck et al. (2010, p. 243) noted a lack of “race-literate whites” on a US HE campus. Harper and Hurtado (2007) found that white students tended to be more satisfied with the HE social environment while also assuming that their black, Latino and First Nation peers were equally satisfied with their student social experience. Similarly, Fiske et al. (1999) described the lack of integration in HE spaces as a result of white students’ ambivalence towards their BME peers. In relation to this, Nakay (1999, p. 177) found that white students perceived anti-racism and endorsement of multiculturalism in education settings as “techniques for the surveillance of white racial identity” in what they referred to as “white backlash”.

2.5.3 Racial Divides

In HE social spaces there is evidence of what Cabrera (2014, p. 32) refers to as “racially homogenous sub-environments”. White students have described ‘cliques’ on campus in what they refer to as “black people sticking together” (Crozier et al., 2016, p. 44). In terms of this, Gurowitz (1991, p. 260) argues that BME students self-segregate due to discomfort with their perceived lack of “institutional membership” in HE. This can be seen in contrast to white students who have reported feeling “right at home” on campus (Fisher et al., 1995, p. 122). In relation to the issue of cliques in US HE, white and black students stated that they wanted to belong to groups “where they did not stand out” (Fisher et al., 1995, p. 123). Issues relating to “distrust” and fear of victimization also led to groups cliquing together (Fisher et al., 1995, p. 122). In a US study of second generation immigrant students and African American students, it was found that social mixing involved “ethnoracial boundaries on campus” (Grasmuck et al., 2010, p. 221). Those who cross-racial socialised were found to be rejected from their own ethnic group (Grasmuck et al., 2010). Additionally, for those who did partake in cross-racial socialising it was found that they move “back and forth between different cultural personas” (Grasmuck, 2010, p. 243). However, it has been found that positive cross-racial peer to peer interaction results in a “greater sense of belonging” in HE, benefiting white and BME students (Locks, Hurtado, Bowman and Oseguera, 2008, p. 277). In terms of cross-racial peer to peer integration, in the US, BME students reported a fear of ‘selling out’ and trying to adjust to HE without becoming white (Fisher et al., 1995). This fear of assimilation is evident in the US as Bernal (2002, p. 114) found that bilingual identity was used by Chicana/Chicano students to resist assimilation as they protected their identity by “maintaining their home language”. McKinley and Brayboy (2004, p. 125) found that First Nation students in elite US
HEIs make themselves ‘invisible’ on campus in order to protect their “cultural integrity”. However, these First Nation students also make themselves ‘visible’ when they want to “emphasise” their voice as being part of the campus community (McKinley et al., 2004, p. 125). The need to protect cultural identity may be due to assimilative demands. Harklau (1999, p. 257) found that immigrant language minorities in US HE underwent “polarized cultural otherness subject to cultural orientation into American society” as they found their minority identity “subject to intensive resocialisation efforts”. In relation to this, international BME students in an Irish HEI were found to undergo experiences of sociocultural adjustment as they tried to adapt to the culture of the Irish HE space in terms of the English language and drinking culture of their Irish peers (O’Reilly, Ryan and Hickey, 2010). In terms of the lack of integration secured by international students with their white, Irish peers, Dunne (2009) reports that Irish students distance themselves from BME international students as they feel ‘judged’ due to their alcohol use and the role it plays in their social experience of HE. Dunne (2009) suggests that it is this perception of judgement that leads Irish students to exclude BME international students from their social activities. English language proficiency has also been found to impact on interaction between BME international students and their local peers in UK HE (Mori, 2000; Poyrazli and Lopez, 2007; Smith and Khawaja, 2011). Smith et al. (2011) found that this led to loneliness and instances of depression for BME international students in UK HEIs.

In relation to the lack of integration, Crozier, Burke and Archer (2016) suggest that as HE becomes an increasingly competitive space due to the need to gain employment via a HE qualification, white students are becoming increasingly unsettled by the presence of their BME peers. Due to the increased representation of BME students in HE, white students may fear that the “symbolic and exchange value of their HE capital” (Crozier et al., 2016, p. 50) will be reduced if shared by their BME peers. It is this unsettlement and competiveness that may encourage white students to perpetuate questions relating to ‘belonging’ as they situate their BME peers as being in the “wrong place” (Crozier et al., 2016, p. 47). Additionally, Keane (2011a) found that a similar experience occurred for working class students in Irish HE. The issue of ‘belonging’ may lead to BME students being represented as “interlopers” and “potentially threatening” (Crozier et al., 2016, p. 47) to the HE culture in what Pilkington (2013, p. 225) refers to as the “overwhelming whiteness of the university and the position of white privilege within it”. Drawing on from this, there is a need to examine if and how Irish HE promotes an exclusionary culture of white privilege.
2.6 Conclusion

BME progression to HE may be impacted by primary and post-primary schooling experience where there is evidence of segregated schooling, socio-economic barriers, disproportionate rates of school expulsion, evidence of racist bullying and discrimination, culturally unresponsive teaching and significant academic attainment gaps between BME and white students. Factors impacting on the HE experiences for BME cohorts in Ireland may begin in primary and post-primary school as BME students are positioned as ‘non-Irish’ by their peers and teachers, are overrepresented in disadvantaged DEIS schools, streamed in classes below their age group and receive limited support at post-primary level to progress to HE. Further barriers in the progression to Irish HE arise for residents awaiting Irish citizenship who report difficulties in terms of language barriers, non-recognition of prior qualifications and lack of cohesive information on pathways to Irish HE. Further insight on the progression rates to HE for BME cohorts in Ireland is impeded due to a lack of HEA data.

In the UK, BME populations are overrepresented in HE in comparison to their white, British peers. However, BME cohorts continue to be underrepresented in elite HEIs. This has been seen as a result of BME cohorts enrolling in ‘new universities’ where their culture and ethnicity is more visible. Some studies have suggested that elite UK HEIs are biased in the application process towards BME cohorts. However, post-primary attainment and disadvantaged socio-economic status were also found to be barriers in the success rates of securing a place at an elite UK HEI. In the US, affirmative action has improved BME representation in HE. BME cohorts in the US and UK are motivated to progress to HE due to cultural and familial expectations and aspirations to increase employment opportunities via a HE qualification. However, in both the US and UK it was found that black men have the highest drop-out rate. Black students have also been found to graduate with a lower scored degree in comparison to their white peers in both the US and UK. A white curriculum, underrepresentation of BME staff, discriminatory teaching practices and language barriers have been cited as part of the BME academic experience. In terms of the social experience of BME students in HE, issues relating to racial discrimination, limited cross-racial socialising and instances of ethnic and cultural identity being enhanced or diminished have been identified. Currently, there is limited literature on the academic and social experience of BME students in Irish HE beyond the scope of BME international students. The following chapter outlines the methodology underpinning this study in order to explore these issues in an Irish context from the perspective of a white researcher.
Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction
In this chapter, I provide an account of the methodological framework underpinning the study. There are three sections in this chapter. The first section highlights my positionality drawing on my biographical ethnography and my identity as a white researcher. The second section presents the paradigmatic framework of the study which found itself “in between” (Bhabha, 2011, p. 53) the constructivist and transformative paradigm. The final three sections examine the underpinning epistemologies and ontologies of the study which include critical race theory (CRT), postcolonialism and culturally responsive research methodologies in terms of how they can be used to generate counterhegemonic narrative in the form of testimonio.

3.2 Positionality

3.2.1 Critical Autobiographical Ethnography
My mother is a teacher and my father was a working-class man. Together, they worked hard to make sure I had the best of everything particularly when it came to school. I attended Roman Catholic primary and post-primary schools in rural Ireland where the student populations were predominantly ‘white Irish’. I have happy memories of primary school where I went to meet my friends, colour in and see how many gold stickers I could collect from the teacher. Post-primary school was a different story. I was bullied by some of the older students. As someone who had grown up surrounded by friends, I suddenly found myself isolated and alone as I was the kid no-one wanted to hang out with. Alongside this, I was struggling to adapt to the strict rules of the post-primary school environment that demanded conformity. This was difficult, as the bullies had let me know that I did not ‘fit in’. So I started to rebel to prove that I did not want to belong. I did not wear the proper uniform, I smoked, got stoned, mitched classes and did the bare minimum of study. I failed my mock Leaving Certificate (LC) examinations. This mock, pre-test showed that I had no chance of making it to university. Seeing all those D’s and F’s made me angry. I was angry at myself because I saw how hard my mother and father worked to make sure I had the best opportunities and I had just thrown it all back in their faces. I started to work as hard as I could to make sure that I would pass the LC and get into university. I had so much to catch up on, that at times it seemed unlikely that I would make it. I had to get extra tuition outside of school for French and math three days a week at extra expense to my mother, who also had
to drive me back and forth to these classes after a long day at work. I studied every evening and every weekend, and even then, I just about managed to get enough points to get into university.

I graduated with a BA in History and English. As a monolingual English speaker, studying English literature was a natural choice for me as the English vocabulary is how I grew up expressing myself and understanding the world around me. I chose history to complement my study of English literature as historical narrative can also be regarded as a form of storytelling. Following the BA, I was accepted into a MA in Drama and Theatre Studies. I was interested in the physicality of voicing narrative. I wanted a deeper understanding as to how literary text and prose could be taken from the paper and enacted in a physical space. Through the MA, I was exposed to the works of Dario Fo and Augusto Boal, playwrights who created theatre as a means of political expression for/and with marginalised voices (Behan, 2002; Österlind, 2008). Boal (2008) drew inspiration from Freire in his key text, ‘Theatre of the Oppressed’ and it was from Boal and Theatre Studies that I was first introduced to the radical pedagogist, Freire.

Between the BA and MA something else had happened. Having travelled around Europe during prior summers I decided I wanted to see a bit more of the world, so I went to India. I volunteered in a girls’ secondary school in Kolkata run by an Irish nun as part of a Roman Catholic missionary. I eased into the English speaking school environment which reflected my own early education. The nun running the school looked no different to my primary school principal with the long grey habit and rosary beads hanging from her pocket. It is only now, having undertaken this study, I can see how I could easily be perceived as the white, Catholic educator going out to the ‘third world’ to teach the ‘other’. As much as I now challenge the civilising, missionary ethos of white educators in non-Western countries as well as in my own country, the nun who ran this school in Kolkata seemed different in her approach. What I witnessed was a form of radical pedagogy in action. The school attracted students from wealthy backgrounds due to the standard of teaching and the high rates of progression to HE. The fees that wealthy students paid were used to pay for the education of ‘slum children’ or rainbow children as they were called. The rainbow children were boarders in the school and wore the same uniform and sat alongside their wealthy peers in the classroom. Every Friday a group of students would take the school bus to the rural outskirts of the city. It was here that I sat in a large concrete room with no copybooks, crayons or
pictures on the walls. I sat and watched a fourteen-year-old girl from the school teach a class of girls and boys from a workbook she held in her hands and pointed to. This peer to peer teaching was due to the ethos of the school which taught its students that their opportunity to gain an education gave them the responsibility to pass it on to another. Rich or poor, ‘slum child’ or daughter of the local businessman, it didn’t matter, everyone had a right to an education.

Something shifted in me during that trip to Kolkata. I had gone there light-heartedly to spend a summer, see a bit of the world and have the craic, all the things that my white Western privilege afforded me. What I found was a world I had never seen before. I saw a fight for education I had never experienced in my own life. I saw first-hand the divide between the ‘first world’ and the ‘third world’ and the violence and subjugation of global inequities and enforced poverty. I then returned to Ireland and began the MA where I started to read the work of Fo and Boal. India had stirred something in me and I saw the link between education and social justice. I finished the MA and enrolled in a diploma in third level teaching and learning. I was attracted to the HE space as it was the place where I had learnt to enjoy study beyond the rote learning and regimented thinking I experienced during my post-primary years. The diploma shaped me as a pedagogist. It was personal and intense as our teaching philosophy and teaching styles were continually critiqued through peer reviews, microteaching and critical reflexive analysis. Much of my teaching experience had been derived from my time in India shaping how I viewed the role of education as a site for activism and resistance.

During the diploma I began writing a PhD proposal. Bringing together my background in theatre studies and my 3rd level teaching qualification, I pieced together a study on ‘active learning in higher education’. The objective of the study linked back to my interest in taking words from the text and enacting them in a physical manner in an attempt to make the theory practical. I saw the study as an opportunity to disrupt the classical, didactic mode of HE teaching where the lecturer constructs and expresses knowledge to passive students. I wanted to disrupt the traditional lecture hall and use my background in theatre studies to play with the space and the performances of the lecturer and the student. My proposal was accepted and I began the literature review. In the literature surrounding active learning, words and theories relating to the democratisation of space came to the forefront. Words like ‘inclusion’ were being used with frequency and I started to question who was being excluded.
This was happening as Irish people became aware of Direct Provision. Alongside this, residents in Ireland awaiting Irish citizenship who had progressed through the primary and post-primary school system were now discovering that they could not enter HE as they were liable to pay international student fees. Therefore, I began to question the need for a study advocating for the democratisation of learning space when the students who needed to be included were not even in the system. At the Graduate Research Committee meeting at the end of my first year, I showed how my literature review on active learning had led me to a more pressing research question. With a new proposal in place, I began year two of my PhD on an entirely new topic examining ‘the HE experiences of migrant students in Ireland’. Yet, what I was also going to discover in this research process was questions relating to my own white gaze.

3.2.2 The White Researcher

I entered the research field as I am, white, settled, Irish and privileged in my position as a researcher from a “Western, Anglo-Irish” (Al-Hardan, 2014) academic institution. I am the researcher the black and minority ethnic (BME) identity is suspicious of. I am the one who can determine how voice and subjectivity is situated. I am formed and positioned by colonial constructs of racial identity which affords me privilege in a caste like system of cultural and ethnic preference (Berryman, Soohoo and Nevin, 2013). I am both privileged and bound by this white, Western identity that I carry with me into the research field. Due to the legacy of academia in the construction, enforcement and maintenance of racial hierarchies (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2007; Linklater and Mennell, 2010; Rattansi, 2007) I am aware how “a researcher in the dominant social system studying marginalised ‘others’ may be perceived as colonialistic, manipulative or exploitative” (Henderson, 1998, p. 161). My presence in the research field is problematised due to the power and privilege of the white identity that I bring with me as “‘whiteness' as a racialised position raises a number of issues about the taken-for-granted position and power of the mainstream researcher. Whiteness, understood as lack of, or 'freedom' from colour, has, at least within the modern era and within Western societies, tended to be constructed as a largely uncontested norm […] from which all other identities come to be marked by their difference” (Kalmer and Santoro, 1999, p. 60). I cannot give voice to the participants. I cannot share or fully understand their experience. There is

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22 Direct Provision segregates asylum seekers and refugees in Ireland in state funded accommodation centres with limited rights to food, adequate housing, employment, healthcare and education
potential resistance and distrust to my presence due to “the tension between insider and outsider statuses” (Davies, 1998, p. 267) perpetuated by racial and ethno-cultural divides. It is a journey exasperated by my white identity:

For white scholars wanting to study race relations...conclusions in the literature are daunting. How can white scholars elicit an understanding of race relations as experienced by racial minorities? How can white scholars study those who have been historically subordinated without further producing sociological accounts distorted by the political economy of race, class and gender? (Anderson, 1993, p. 41)

Gunaratnam (2003, p. 2) suggests that there is viability in cross-racial research to work “both with and against racialised categories [...] to make links between lived experience, political relations and the production of knowledge” (Gunaratnam, 2003, p. 23). In this manner, my skin colour was a research instrument (Creswell, 2014) that was placed in the research field as “race does not simply exist as an object of study or a variable in analysis, it enters into the research process itself-into the selection of a problem, into the methodology, the conduct of the research, the assumptions behind it, who is included in the study, whose perspective is highlighted- and importantly influences the relationship with those we are studying (Edwards, 1990, p. 482). There was a need for critical reflexivity in relation to my whiteness (Berryman et al., 2013; Bishop, 2008) in order to move both “with and against” (Gunaratnam, 2003, p. 23) the racial divides between me and the participants. Despite this, the divide could never be fully crossed as “there are dimensions to black experience invisible to the white interviewer/investigator who possesses neither the language nor the cultural equipment either to elicit or understand the experience. In other words, the lack of an insider perspective precludes the white person from access to the black social world, whereas necessity has taught black people to be competent in both (Adamson and Donovan, 2002, p. 549).

Prior to seeking reciprocity from participants, there was a need to understand my own self before I could begin to understand the ‘other’ (Valenzuela, 2013). This was a space of critical, in-depth self-reflection and self-examination. It was a reflective space intensified by the fraught narrative of race and race relations. Reflecting on the following questions allowed me to position myself in the research field and see where I stood in relation to the participants:
What is my racial and cultural heritage? How do I know?

In what ways do my racial and cultural backgrounds influence how I experience the world, what I emphasise in my research, and how I interpret others and their experiences? How do I know?

How do I negotiate and balance my racial and cultural selves in society and in my research? How do I know?

What do I believe about race and culture in society and education, and how do I attend to my own convictions and beliefs about race and culture in my research? Why? How do I know?

What is the historical landscape of my racial and cultural identity and heritage? How do I know?

What are and have been the contextual nuances and realities that help shape my racial and cultural ways of knowing, both past and present? How do I know?

What racialised and cultural experiences have shaped my research decisions, practices, approaches, epistemologies, and agendas?

(Milner, 2007, p. 395)

Through the difficult process of engaging with and reflecting on these questions, I began to understand how knowing the self is a critical first step before I could even begin to know the ‘other’ (Berryman et al., 2013; Valenzuela, 2013). These questions led to reflection on what my racial identity is and how it was constructed. It is written in the form of a poem23 in line with culturally responsive research methodologies (Berryman et al., 2013) which advocates for storytelling in the coconstruction of cross-racial research (see 3.6). The poem aided in the reflective process of identifying how my ‘Irishness’ was constructed and how I came to be ‘white and speak English only’24. Within this reflective space there was also a need for distance from the self to abate indulgent analysis as “the fundamental challenge of reflexivity [...] is that knowledge of self does not become self-absorption but remains an instrument for knowing others” (Davies, 1998, p. 267). In terms of my positionality, how do I present voice with my participants as best we can through the tense divides of race relations? My gaze is that of white, Western identity and this was a “resource” (Nelson and Gould, 2005, p. 329) I attempted to bring to the research field as:

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23 See Appendix H
24 Quote from poem, see Appendix H
‘Resources’, including a researcher’s cultural values and beliefs, while possibly different from those of his/her targeted research group, constitute a set of different and potentially rich perspectives from which to draw. However, the ways in which researchers’ positioning’s shape their research work needs to be interrogated and to be made explicit. ‘The way in which we produce stories is undeniably influenced by our own gaze, our standpoint, the history we bring to a research moment’ (Nelson et al., 2005, p. 329)

Who am I? Seeking an answer to such a question is perhaps the most complex and uncertain journey we as individuals undertake. Truthfully, I do not know who I am. I am white. I am Irish. I am a woman. Despite all these labels, what do these words truly mean? In the context of this study, the awareness that I am white has come to mean more than I ever thought it would. As I undertake this research journey, I am barraged by foreign terms and concepts; eurocentrism, coloniality, privilege and ‘other’. As I trace, map and link the discourse of racial opposition that dominates history, screenshots of black Americans in Ferguson with the hash-tag #dontshoot stream down my Twitter page and I have become increasingly aware of the unresolved tension and discord of raced social constructs. I am aware of privilege and that in all probability I will never have to ask my government #dontshoot because of the colour of my skin. In terms of my positionality, my whiteness is what divides me from the participants. Yet, tracing my way along the map, there is a bridge, a link between two distant territories. It is the broken pathway of coloniality. In an attempt to reach out to the ‘other’ and their culture(s), I have inadvertently undertaken a journey to rediscover my own culture and my own sense of self and belonging. Along this path I have found an affinity with the ‘other’ and recognised a shared experience linked by an imposed and constructed sense of inferiority that our cultures and identities share in the aftermath of colonialism.

Van Krieken (2011) describes how colonial ‘adventurers’ such as Walter Raleigh and Humphrey Gilbert ‘cut their teeth’ in Ireland, experimenting and implementing a process of ‘civility’ and pacification on the Gaelic Irish population before making their way to the ‘New World’. The Gaelic Irish were one of the first populations to undergo the violence of European colonial practice. The Irish case was to become the reference point for the modes of practice that would be utilised in the pacification and conquest of indigenous populations in the ‘New World’ in the 15th century (Van Krieken, 2011). Colonialism was justified through the discourse of ‘civility’ and civilisation (Linklater, Mennell and Elias, 2010). The construction of the ‘other’ as barbaric, savage and sub-human in need of ‘civilisation’ legitimised the violence and immorality of the colonial cause. This false narrative concealed
the true intent of colonial objectives, which sought a monopolisation, and centralisation of military and political power. Colonialisation, rather than demonstrating any proof of inferiority or sub-humanism within the conquered populations, displayed only the desire for control and power by subduing nations into governable domains (Chadwick and Dillon, 2003; Van Krieken, 2011).

Though the Irish have in some ways regained a sense of identity in recent years through the formation of the Irish Republic, I hesitate to distance myself from those who have suffered a similar fate to the Gaelic Irish. Haddon and Browne (1889) charted the ‘primitive’ life of the Gaelic Irish in a series of publications that add to the theory of scientific racism. Through the use of anthropometry\(^{25}\), ethnologists such as Beddoe noted that the Gaelic Irish could be classified as ‘Africanoid’ (Rattansi, 2007). It is this legacy that I share with the participants. Together we share a commonality within a story of suppression and domination that denoted our identities as inferior within the ‘enlightened’ Eurocentric culture of the 15th century. In response, there is a need for a reclaimed narrative and the placement of colonialised voice. This is achievable through a process of ‘unlearning’. ‘Unlearning’ occurs in the stories we hear and speak, and the stories we choose to share.

Unlearning involves visualising the derailing or peeling back the tracks of oppressor/coloniser, erasing the vestiges of uninvited stranger, in order to reclaim space and resources and re-territorialising the intellectual and/or physical landscapes that were taken or oppressed. (Berryman et al., 2013, p. 14)

Within this study, the intention is to facilitate this decolonial process via the voiced experiences and stories shared by the participants. However, in terms of positionality, I am the white gaze. In order to work “with and against” (Gunaratnam, 2003, p.23) my white racial identity there was a need to situate the study within the most conducive paradigmatic framework to ensure that I did not appropriate, whitewash or mistranslate the voice of the participants.

3.3 ‘In Between’ Paradigms: Constructivism and the Transformative Paradigm
Differing philosophies relating to constructivism have been defined by the work of Piaget (1967), Vygtosky (1978), von Glasersfeld (1995) and Mathews (1998). In the context of this

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\(^{25}\) A practice that has been utilised in eugenics and scientific racism which involves measurement of the body for racial comparison
study which seeks to examine BME student experience, there is a radical constructivist (von Glaserfeld, 1995) understanding that perceptions of experience are subjective and that there are a multitude of ‘truth/s’. Additionally, such ‘truth/s’ cannot be regarded as objective. As von Glaserfeld (1995, p. 21) states “knowledge, no matter how it be defined, is in the heads of persons, and that the thinking subject has no alternative but to construct what he or she knows on the basis of his or her own experience”. This study sought to present the experiences of the participants as ‘voiced’ in their own words. This was problematic as historically, knowledge and ‘voice’ has been (re)produced through the lens of a white, and often positivist, neocolonial gaze in the Western academy (Ashcroft et al., 2007; Fenton, 1999; Linklater et al., 2010). Indeed, it was academia that constructed and validated race and racism insofar as it provided “a theoretical formulation and a scientific basis for racism” (Chiwangu, 1996, p. 23). From its foundations, HE has been a “key companion pillar with the church and state in the establishment of this settler colony as a nation” (Patel, 2014, p. 363). Through academia, theorists such as Darwin, Vogt, Risley, Haeckel, Morton and Beddoe amongst others, constructed race and racial hierarchies laying the foundations for scientific racism, eugenics and colonial domination of races theorized as uncivilized, barbaric and savage in comparison to the civility and enlightened progressiveness of the white, Euro-Western identity (Ashcroft et al., 2007; Fenton, 1999; Linklater et al., 2010; Rattansi, 2007; Tucker, 1994). In the context of this study, there was a need to ensure that these racial (mis)representations were not (re)produced.

Due to my white gaze there was a need to work within a paradigm that ensured critical reflexivity in terms of how racial ‘truth’ is constructed (Bartolomé, 2003; Berryman et al., 2013; Bishop, 2008). Through the use of constructivism there was space to explore how “particular actors, in particular places, at particular times, fashion meaning out of events and phenomena through prolonged, complex processes of social interaction involving history, language and action” (Schwandt, 1998, p. 222). Furthermore, in terms of the constructivist and transformative paradigm, there was potential to create a counterhegemonic narrative to ‘white’ truth. This was achieved in this study through the use of unstructured qualitative interviews (see 4.4.1) where testimonio (Delgado, 1989; Delgado and Stefancic, 1993) a form of counter- storytelling could be voiced. In relation to this, Foucault (1980, p. 131) refers to the “regime of truth”. This ‘regime’ is achieved through the denial and silencing of voice and narrative which challenges the (re)production of dominant epistemologies and ontologies (Bourdieu, 1996; 1967; Spivak, 1985). In response, constructivism resists and explores
concepts of ‘truth’ due to an anti-positivist awareness of “epistemological fallibilism” (Schwandt, 1998, p. 236). Indeed, as Fuss (1989, p. 3) notes, “constructivists are concerned above all with the production and organisation of differences”. This was key within this study in terms of understanding how Irish and ‘non-Irish’ identity is constructed and (in)validated.

The Irish neocolonial nation state, through its schooling system, has enforced cultural and epistemological hegemony through assimilative and exclusionary practices which preferences the white, middle class, heteronormative, English speaking, Roman Catholic identity (Bryan, 2010; Devine, 2009, 2011; Devine, Kenny and Macneela, 2008; Kitching, 2010). The Irish schooling system has a (white) preference for racial and cultural identity. This is reflective of a neocolonial model of schooling. As Bernal (2002, p. 105) remarks “students of colour, despite being holders and creators of knowledge often feel as if their histories, experiences, cultures, and languages are devalued, misinterpreted, or omitted within formal education settings”. In terms of this, the constructivist/transformative paradigm provided ample space to resist white hegemonic narrative to incorporate minoritised voice. However, due to my positionality this study was limited in ‘voicing’ and representing BME experience due to a concern of appropriating, whitewashing and further marginalising and silencing BME struggle (see 9.5). HEIs remain a privileged, elitist power (re)producer within the wider structures of the neocolonial nation state (Bourdieu, 1990; 1981; 1977; 1975). By attempting to work in the transformative paradigm this study sought to enact some resistance whereby counterhegemonic ‘truth’ could be coconstructed:

Transformative mixed methods research is needed because research does not necessarily serve the needs of those who have traditionally been excluded from positions of power in the research world, and therefore the potential to further human rights through a research agenda has not been fully realised. The transformative paradigm provides such a framework for examining assumptions that explicitly address power issues, social justice, and cultural complexity throughout the research process. (Mertens, 2007, pp. 212-213)

Through the constructivist and transformative paradigms there was potential to challenge ‘regimes’ of white truth by “developing a self-conscious research design, […] Sharing perquisites of privilege and expressing issues of oppressed groups (Whittenmore, Chase and Mandle, 2001, p. 533). This occurred during the research design whereby the participants rejected racial categorisations that I had imposed such as ‘migrant’ and/or ‘immigrant (see 4.2.2) and developed the research question(s) (see 4.2). Additionally, critical reflexivity was
undertaken throughout the research aided by the use of a reflective notebook (see 4.4.1). Indeed, an understanding of who I am in relation to the research field is critical within a constructivist/transformative paradigm as together they “reject the notions of a theory neutral data language” (Schwandt, 1998, p. 225). Furthermore, by positioning research in a constructivist/transformative framework I, as a white researcher had ample space to enact resistance:

…to explore critically and creatively [my] own cultural identities (a radical act) in a counterhegemonic endeavour (a very radical act) to develop culturally inclusive philosophies of professional practice. These radical ambitions constitute transformative educational research. [...] The autobiographical ‘self’ is set in dialectical tension against the ethnographic ‘other,’ with the researcher investigating critically his/her own cultural situatedness from the unique standpoint of a cultural insider and border crosser, particularly the way in which his/her professional identity has been shaped historically by hegemonic cultural, social, political and economic imperatives. (Taylor, 2008, pp.884-888)

This is evident in the critical analysis I underwent understanding my positionality as a white researcher and the reflexivity I undertook to understand my racial identity and how my own sense of ‘Irishness’ was constructed26 (see 3.2.1). Furthermore, as a white researcher, I was working “in between” (Bhabha, 2011, p. 53) cultures in terms of the ruling culture of the academic institution and the culture(s) of the marginalised. As a white researcher working “with and against” (Gunaratnam, 2003, p. 23) the privileged structures of Anglo-Irish HE, the constructivist/transformative paradigm promoted the need for resistant and counterhegemonic research practice. There were numerous attempts in this study to ensure that I did not impose my white voice during data collection, transcription and data analysis (see 4.4.1, 5.4.2 and 5.4.3). Furthermore, the constructivist/transformative paradigm fitted the framework of the study as it allies with the epistemologies and ontologies of critical race theory (CRT), postcolonialism and culturally responsive research methodologies which were critical in understanding how BME voice has historically been (mis)represented, silenced and whitewashed in education and research settings.

3.4 Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged from legal scholarship in the US as a way to define structural and institutional racial segregation. CRT exposes the legal structuring of institutions such as schools and the manner in which the legal system has the potential to segregate or desegregate. This is particularly evident in the landmark Brown versus Board of

26 See Appendix H
Education case in the US which deemed segregated schooling unconstitutional (DeCuir and Dixson, 2004; Gillborn, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2005, 1998; Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995). Based on this, CRT is a framework which can be used to examine the enforced legality of racist minoritisation and segregation existent between the nation state and its socio-cultural institutions. CRT provides a terminology that had been lacking in educational discourse as “there was a need for a vocabulary that could name the race-related structures of oppression in the law and society that had not been adequately addressed in existing scholarship” (Dixson and Rousseau, 2005, p. 9).

Within this discourse, there is an emphasis on counter storytelling (Delgado, 1989; Solórzano and Yosso, 2002) defined as testimonio (Harper, 2009; Pérez Huber, 2009). Testimonio disrupts hegemonic “majoritarian” (Solórzano et al., 2002, p. 31) white voice by presenting the ‘truth’ of the minoritised. Testimonio is derived from the LatCrit i.e Latino/Chicano element of CRT scholarship as “testimonio and LatCrit acknowledge the emancipatory elements of revealing oppression through lived experiences, which are rooted in the histories and memories of a larger community” (Pérez Huber, 2009, p. 645). This is achieved through the reflective narrative of “spoken accounts of oppression” (Reyes and Rodríguez, 2012, p. 526) in what Delgado (1989) refers to as counter-storytelling. Testimonio also has its roots in the work of Freire whereby the voice and words of the marginalised and silenced play a key role in resistance and liberation from oppressive governance. Some scholars have succeeded in linking CRT to Friere and critical pedagogy in terms of education’s role in the (re)production of resistant counterhegemonic narrative and voice (Parker and Stovall, 2004; Smith-Maddox and Solórzano, 2002). In relation to this “the collective goal of testimonio is to name oppression and to arrest its actions whether as genocide, racism, classism, xenophobia, or any other type of institutionalized marginalization” (Reyes et al., 2012, p. 528). The creation and co-construction of testimonio was of key importance within this study due to the silencing and erasure of black and minority ethnic (BME) voice in dominant Irish socio-cultural discourse particularly in the case where participants had or continue to have experience living on the margins of Irish society in Direct Provision. Through the participants voicing their stories and reflecting on their interactions with the institutions of Irish society, including HE, there was an attempt to have BME voice desegregated.

The constructivist lens relates to the development of testimonio, insofar as it is a reflective process of “theorizing our own realities” (Pérez Huber, 2009, p. 643). Additionally,
constructivism aligns to CRT and the development of testimonio insofar as “for praxis to be possible, not only must theory illuminate the lived experience of social groups, it must also be illuminated by their struggle” (Lather, 1986, p. 260). Due to my white positionality, there was a racial and ethical conflict of interest. Therefore testimonio allowed the participants to speak for themselves as “testimonio is a grassroots tactic for political advocacy and community formation that compensates for and reacts against the limited opportunities for civic participation afforded noncitizens” (Figueroa, 2015, p. 258). Due to the inclusion of participants who had experience with Direct Provision as ‘noncitizens’ and the racial discourse of the ‘Irish’ and the ‘non-Irish’, the methodological underpinnings of this study sought to challenge socio-cultural structures that reinforce political subjugation and erasure. Testimonio provided the necessary tool to co-construct narrative and voice beyond victimisation to autonomous assertion(s) of BME ‘truth’:

The objective of the testimonio is to bring to light a wrong, a point of view, or an urgent call for action. Thus, in this manner, the testimonio is different from the qualitative method of in-depth interviewing, oral history narration, prose, or spoken word. The testimonio is intentional and political. (Reyes et al., 2012, p. 525)

The experiences and the testimonio of the participants is political insofar as the ruling structures have politicised how they are framed, represented and integrated within the institutions of Irish society. Indeed, working within a CRT framework, the concept of ‘voice’ is inherently political in terms of who can speak and who has a right to be heard. Delgado et al. (1993), key scholars in the area of testimonio as liberative research, outline the theoretical, methodological and pedagogical potential of counterhegemonic voiced stories:

1. they can build community among those at the margins of society by putting a human and familiar face to educational theory and practice; (2) they can challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society’s centre by providing a context to understand and transform established belief systems; (3) they can open new windows into the reality of those at the margins of society by showing the possibilities beyond the ones they live and demonstrating that they are not alone in their position (Delgado et al., 1993, p. 475)

This is of significant importance in the Irish context due to the erasure and marginalisation of identity and voice that does not conform to white, English speaking Roman Catholicism. Through the development of testimonio via qualitative interviewing techniques, this study attempted to incorporate silenced voice to challenge dominant discourse in Irish society in terms of who has a right to speak and who has a right to be heard. Most importantly, it is not I, the white researcher, giving voice to the participants. Rather, the participants voiced their testimonio and their story in their own words. Indeed, CRT refutes oppressive white
constructs of racial narrative(s). Therefore, the incorporation of CRT to this study had implications for my positionality as there is a concern that my white gaze:

...would be a form of colonisation in which we would take over CRT to promote our own interests or recenter our positions while attempting to “represent” people of color. [...] Counterstories must be told from the perspective of the oppressed person or group. As a white person, I cannot provide this perspective. In fact, there is a risk that my counterstory would actually co-opt the words of the “other” into a stock story, thus taking away their voices. (Bergerson, 2003, pp. 52-56)

CRT is useful for white researchers in the field of racial and ethnic studies. Through qualitative research, testimonio and “counter narrative” (Harper, 2009, p. 702) can be devised as “traditionally, educational research has (a) ignored historically marginalised groups by simply not addressing their concerns, (b) relied heavily on genetic or biological determinist perspectives to explain away complex social educational problems, or (c) de-emphasised race by arguing that the problems minority students experience in schools can be understood via class or gender analyses that do not fully take race, culture, language, and immigrant status into account (Parker and Lynn, 2002, p. 13). In terms of this, CRT studies continue to analyse BME student experience, highlighting a schooling system whereby “many teacher education programs draw on majoritarian stories to explain educational inequity through a cultural deficit model and thereby pass on beliefs that students of colour are culturally deprived” (Solorzano et al., 2002, p. 31). As a constructivist transformative approach to white positivism, testimonio disrupts hegemonic voice. CRT refutes the neoliberal manner whereby “‘oppositional voices’ are effectively channelled into ‘ideological safe harbours’, where they cannot disrupt the system” (Jay, 2003, p. 6).

Rather, research as praxis (Lather, 1986) is a core tenet within the CRT paradigm. It is grounded in the call for civic, mobilised action against structural and institutionalised segregation through on-going “active struggle” (Dixson and Rousseau, 2005, p. 22). Yet counter arguments within CRT itself have suggested that while CRT has been successful in highlighting and theorising the causation of racial oppression and segregation, it has not yet been successful in actively igniting the movement beyond the intellectual space of academia to generate resistance at grass roots level to mobilise against the institution from within the institution. This has been referred to as the “unfulfilled promise of CRT in education” (Dixson et al., 2005, p. 25). Scholars in the field of education have been successful in drawing on CRT to provide counter narratives which present marginalised and silenced voice
through *testimonio*. Yet, in terms of its key ontology, to *actively* mobilise against structural inequity, the success of CRT has proved limited. For current CRT scholars researching a schooling landscape which has not yet evolved beyond its segregationist foundations, the question for those of us keen to enact the civic resistance of CRT remains- what now? Therefore, there was a need within this study to examine other potential theories and ontologies which could provide further context and analysis of issues relating to BME experience and identity.

### 3.5 Postcolonialism

Postcolonialism is a philosophical critique (Ashcroft et al., 2007; McLeod, 2000) on the way imperial, (neo)colonial power(s) construct hierarchies of cultural and racial identity. It is a critique which challenges representation of the non-white and non-Western ‘other’ as savage, barbaric and uncivilised. As an evolving theory, it has been defined by the writings of Fanon (1952), Said (1978; 2000), Bhabha (1984, 1990, 1994, 1998, 2011) and Spivak (1999, 1985). Fanon’s (1952) work is rooted in black consciousness; an intellectual movement from the US theorised by African Americans such as Douglas and Du Bois. It was from this movement that many black colleges were founded in the US at a time when HE was a legally segregated white space (Ashcroft et al., 2007, p. 24). In a key text, ‘Black People, White Masks’, Fanon (1952) brings together issues of racial power dynamics, acculturation and assimilation to illustrate the way society moulds black identities to express and understand themselves through the white gaze. Through the work of postcolonial theory, educationalists can gain insight to the way identities are constructed as ‘other’ and peripheralised from the dominant mainstream culture whilst simultaneously assimilated within our schools:

> Postcolonialism’s contentions surrounding the relationship between knowledge and power are linked directly to education, both as an institution where people are inculcated into hegemonic systems of reasoning and as a site where it is possible to resist dominant discursive practices. In this way, education has a systematically ambivalent relation to postcolonialism. On the one hand, it is an object of postcolonial critique regarding its complicity with Eurocentric discourses and practices. On the other hand, it is only through education that it is possible to reveal and resist colonialism’s continuing hold on our imagination. Education is also a site where legacies of colonialism and the contemporary processes of globalisation intersect. (Rizvi, Lingard and Lavia, 2006, p. 25)

This brings us to the notion of hegemony, first coined by Gramsci (1988) and further developed by postcolonial theorists such as Bhabha (1998) and Said (1978) whereby
“hegemony is the power of the ruling class to convince other classes that their interests are the interests of all” (Ashcroft et al., 2007, p. 106). Bhabha (1998) challenges hegemony imposed on culture(s) denoting the need for “recognition of difference” beyond Western neoliberalism which “seeks an equalisation of culture” (Bhabha, 1998, p. 9). Multiculturalism has not yet succeeded as difference is still regarded as a threat (Bennett, 1998). Further issues relating to hegemony occur as members of an ethnic group may not be homogenous in their cultural identity. Identity is far too complex to be considered fixed or homogenous (Bennett, 1998; Bhabha, 1998; Espiritu, 1992; Malesevic, 2004). Western, neocolonialism aspires to hegemony while postcolonialism advocates for “counter narratives” (Harper, 2009, p. 702).

From a postcolonial perspective there is an understanding that history is narrated through power-privilege dynamics as the coloniser (re)writes and defines the way the colonised are historically viewed and placed (Said, 1978, 2000; Spivak, 1999, 1985). Said (1978) explores this in his key concept, Orientalism. He defines Orientalism as the method whereby Western perspectives shape and cultivate ontological and epistemological discourses on the Orient. In doing so, Western power is maintained as it defines how Oriental culture should be viewed and placed. Spivak (1985, p. 10) suggests that Western academia maintains “sanctioned ignorance” through the “theoretical elite” who teach from a singular white, Western world view. Within this teaching and learning structure we see the emergence of “third world” (Spivak, 1985) epistemology which is regarded as culturally and linguistically deficient in relation to Western modes of knowledge (re)production. In response, postcolonial scholarship challenges linguistic and cultural misrepresentation. This is achieved through the inclusion of marginalised voice to recognise “the silences, gaps and omissions within and between hegemonic and counterhegemonic systems of knowledge so as to begin to unearth alternative ways of knowing the world” (Tikly, 2004, p. 193). There is a need to resist narratives imposed by the coloniser such as “third world” and “other” (Spivak, 1985) so they can be challenged as ‘truth’. In response, culturally responsive research methodologies provide insight as to how decolonial ‘truth’ and testimonio can be negotiated and co-constructed in the research field by white researchers encountering the BME ‘other’.

3.6 Culturally Responsive Research Methodologies
The underpinning epistemology of culturally responsive research methodologies aligns to the transformative constructivist lens, advocating that “if an idea and resulting social condition
has been socially constructed, it can be socially deconstructed, that is, concepts that have
dehumanised such as racism, can be analysed and replaced with anti-oppressive theories of
hope” (Berryman et al., 2013, p. 14). In terms of deconstruction, culturally responsive
research methodologies challenge the ethics and legitimacy of positivist subjectivism in the
representation of minoritised voice (Berryman et al., 2013). Rather, as a constructivist lens,
culturally responsive research methodologies underpin issues relating to researcher
positionality, the co-construction of knowledge and representation of the ‘other’. Culturally
responsive research methodologies challenge white perceptions of ‘truth’. In order for a
process of epistemological anti-racism to take place, culturally responsive research alongside
postcolonialism and CRT, provokes and analyses concepts of ‘truth’ in the co-construction of
knowledge in the research field.

Within the paradigmatic framework of this study there was a need to challenge (neo)colonial,
Oriental views in terms of “what is knowledge, how is knowledge produced, who has the
power to produce knowledge and for whose benefit is knowledge created?” (Berryman et al.,
2013, p. 3). Through this counterhegemonic resistance there is an attempt to de-colonize
research practice which (re)enforces the white, imperial, positivist construction of the racial
‘other’. In terms of this study, from a culturally responsive stance, the positionality of the
researcher is a key site of analysis27 (Bartolomé, 2003; Soohoo, 2013; Valenzuela, 2013) as
critical self-reflexivity challenges “how we shape relationships between researchers and
participants, and how we shape the ethics and politics of knowledge construction in
fieldwork” (Elwood et al., 2000, p. 656). Culturally responsive scholars have highlighted the
exploitation of research by white, Western researchers who profit from the subjugation of
marginalised and minoritised groupings as “educational research, in many ways, relies on
vulnerable populations to justify various foci in funding streams” (Patel, 2014, p. 365). In
response, culturally responsive methodologies advocate for a decolonising process of
“unlearning” (Berryman et al., 2013, p.14) exploitive research conduct in the co construction
of minoritised voice:

As decolonising activist-researchers dwelling at the borderland and periphery of
western academy we find decolonising and decolonial notions of research very
meaningful because they helps us to claim, reclaim, support and legitimise ‘other’
epistemological positions in the academy. Looking at research as insiders/outsiders in

27 Culturally responsive research methodology influenced the development of my critical self-reflexivity (See
3.2)
terms of a complicated, fluid and messy process rather than a clearly defined methodology and beginning from a place of mutual activism/advocacy we believe is of utmost importance. This epistemological shift along with the recognition of participants as researchers and pedagogues with agency even as they participate in informal researcher/teaching roles asks us to re-imagine research as a non-hierarchal teaching/learning/advocacy process rather than a method of investigation and discovery which echoes violent colonising projects of history. (Gill, Purru, Lin and Hartej, 2012, p. 11)

Culturally responsive research challenges the “coloniality of knowledge” (Adams, 2014, p. 467) and the power-privilege dynamics of the researcher-participant relationship in order to negate the appropriation and/or exploitation of BME voice. Within culturally responsive research there is an understanding that the research field has been colonised by the white researcher perpetuating and maintaining a culture where BME epistemology and culture is marginalised, silenced and disparaged in schooling and research settings (Bartolomé, 2003; Berryman et al., 2013; Bishop, 2008; Soohoo, 2013). In line with the ontology of CRT, culturally responsive research practice challenges structural racial divides from within the research field and the academy. This is achieved through the advocacy for participatory research in order to develop coconstructed knowledge (Bartolomé, 2003; Berryman et al., 2013; Bishop, 2008) voiced by and for the participant population:

Culturally sensitive research approaches attempt to reveal, understand, and respond to unequal power relations that may minimise, marginalise, subjugate, or exclude the multiple realities and knowledge bases of African Americans. Research privilege is questioned, as well as claims of neutrality and objectivity in educational research. Research practices that place the perspectives of African Americans on the margins of the inquiry are challenged. The cultural standpoints of those persons who experience the social, political, economic, and educational consequences of unequal power relations are privileged over the assumed knowledge of those who are positioned outside of these experiences. (Tillman, 2002, p. 6)

Culturally responsive methodologies do not provide the white researcher with a ‘tourist-guide’ to differing cultures in order to ease access into the research field. Rather, culturally responsive research advocates for critical self-reflexivity and provides insight in terms of how cross cultural narrative/testimonio can be ethically and sensitively negotiated, formed and coconstructed. In terms of this, culturally responsive methodology was an invaluable tool on this research journey. Guidelines on culturally responsive research practice were particularly significant in relation to this study insofar as I sought to decolonise my white gaze and white voice in the research field. This study advocates for culturally responsive research methodologies as best practice in the field of racial and ethnic studies. However, I was constrained by how successfully I could implement culturally responsive research practice in
the research field due to my positionality as the participants were reluctant to co-construct ‘truth’, share their story and engage with the study due to distrust of the white researcher (Berryman et al., 2013; Smith 1994). This had a number of implications for the study which are examined and highlighted in detail in the following chapter.

3.7 Conclusion

My positionality demanded a methodological framework that could negate the privilege and dominance of my white gaze and voice. Therefore, I found myself ‘in between’ paradigms. Constructivism allowed for the rejection of positivist subjectivity in line with culturally responsive research methodologies while the transformative paradigm aligns to the advocacy of CRT and postcolonialism. Within this framework, it was hoped that counterhegemonic narrative and voice could be constructed with the participants to produce *testimonio*. Despite this, the success of my methodological framework was limited by my positionality as a white researcher. These limitations and their consequences are explored in-depth in the following chapter.
Chapter Four: Methods

4.1 Introduction
This chapter outlines the journey of researching across cultures highlighting the complexity involved in my attempts at accessing and presenting the words and stories of a multiplicity of ethnic and cultural identities, including my own. There are three sections in this chapter. The first section considers a disrupted research design and evolving research question. This was perpetuated by the difficulty in recruiting and categorising participants, an issue which is dealt with in the second section. The third section explores data collection, the transcription process and data analysis, processes which were underpinned and ultimately determined by my positionality as a white researcher in the field of black and minority ethnic (BME) study.

4.2 An Evolving Research Design and Research Question

4.2.1 Phase 1
The initial research question sought to examine ‘the university experiences of migrant (both Access and traditional-entry) and non-migrant (traditional-entry) students. Full ethical approval for the study was granted by the NUI, Galway Research Ethics Committee (REC) in May 2014 after submission of an application that outlined how the following issues would be dealt with in the study:

- Ensure that issues such as establishing trust and consent are not viewed as singular, ‘one off’ events. Trust needs to be established with the research participants and is required throughout the research process.
- Check that consent is obtained and re-established during the research process.
- Make sure participants are reminded of their rights to withdraw from the study at any time.
- Monitor that the research process is being sustained with good intention, in such a way that the participants are respected and that their dignity remains intact.
- Check that ending the research process and withdrawal from the field are handled sensitively and tactfully.
- Ensure that participants are aware of their right to check how they are represented in any field notes/transcripts.
- Monitor the research participants for evidence of harm and provide them with the necessary ‘safety net’ of support if necessary.

(Cutcliffe and Ramcharan, 2002, p. 1002)

28 Access programmes DARE and HEAR target disadvantaged groups for inclusion in Irish HE education (see 1.4)
The objective was to do a comparative study on Access and traditional-entry migrant students in relation to their white Irish peers who had progressed to Higher Education (HE) via the traditional Central Applications Office (CAO) route in one Irish university. At the time, a focus on both socio-economic status and ethnicity was intended; hence the inclusion of those entering HE via an Access and traditional-entry route. The focus of the study in this regard had to be amended due to significant difficulties recruiting migrant students who had entered HE via an Access programme. Additionally, in this initial phase, the research design was developing in relation to decolonising paradigms such as critical race theory (CRT), postcolonialism and culturally responsive research methodologies. Within this framework the issue of ‘voice’ was emerging. It became apparent that an in-depth study focusing solely on migrant students would be more appropriate “to provide frameworks for hearing silence and listening to the voices of the silenced” (Smith, 2008, p. 121) to move beyond “neo-colonial dominance of majority interests” (Bishop, 2008, p. 147) and to challenge the research conduct of the Western academy by placing the culture and voice of minority ethnic groups at “the centre of inquiry” (Tillman, 2002, p. 4).

Furthermore, based on the literature review that I was conducting during this time, it was apparent that this research related to the area of black and minority ethnic (BME) studies (as termed in the literature). Working under the term BME, the Traveller/Mincéir community can be regarded as a minoritised, ethnic grouping. Despite this, Travellers/Mincéir were not included in the target population. While the Traveller/Mincéir community experiences continued racism, marginalisation and minoritisation in Irish society, their positioning is unique insofar as they are not seen as ‘foreign’ though they are regarded as ‘other’. In order to address the issues facing Travellers/Mincéir and their significant under-representation in Irish HE (HEA, 2015; 2016), specific and dedicated research is required which looks solely at the Traveller/ Mincéir experience. I was concerned that inclusion of the Traveller/ Mincéir experience in this particular study would dilute the Traveller/ Mincéir voice and further marginalise their unique placement in Irish society. As a result, it was decided to focus solely on the experiences of ‘migrant’ students in HE. I now began negotiating access to a research field without a readily or easily definable or accessible target population or, indeed, a targeted research question. So began a re-examination and reanalysis of what questions needed to be asked and identification of who needed to answer them.
4.2.2 Phase 2

In phase two of the research design, the research question concerned ‘the university experiences of migrant students in Irish HEIs’. In order to progress the study, the research question was broadened to include ‘migrant’ students from any background and entry path. Additionally, rather than focusing the study in one HEI, there was a recognisable need to expand the scope to all Irish HEIs to generate adequate data. I advertised the study to a number of HEIs in the Republic of Ireland. There was no response. The study was also advertised to the public via national and local Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), local newspapers and radio as well as through social media. There was a continued lack of response. Despite the study redesign, participant recruitment remained a constant challenge. A number of factors were likely at play. Issues of research fatigue, distrust and resistance are well known in relation to minority groups ‘being researched’ rather than participating in research (Bartolomé, 2003; Berryman, Soohoo and Nevin, 2013; Connolly, 2003; Elwood and Martin, 2000). As Berryman et al. (2013) observe, research is a ‘dirty’ word for minority groups:

Traditional Western Research frameworks have given little regard to participants’ right to initiate, contribute, critique, or evaluate research. Traditionally, the ‘right to be studied (or not)’ and decisions about how the study would be carried out […] have been sustained by groups of outsiders who have retained the power to research and define. So much so that many researched groups who have re-storied and ‘othered’ through these processes undoubtedly agree research is one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous [colonised, BME] world’s vocabulary. (Berryman et al., 2013, p. 1)

In this respect, it is likely that my positionality as a white Irish researcher impacted on the recruitment process. There may have been suspicions in relation to my objectives researching the minority ethnic experience and concerns as to how I intended to use my white voice (an issue that is discussed more in-depth in section, 4.2.1) as my positionality continued to define and underpin this research journey. However, beyond my positionality, the silence I encountered in these initial recruitment attempts spoke to me of something needing deeper analysis. Said (2000, p. 24) speaks of “the desire not to be written”. Indeed, “we must note those who choose to remain silent, as well as those who have been silenced. […] Mapping those silences, in their relation to active alignments, can render invisible social structures visible” (Charmaz, 2008, p. 229).
In regards to the silence encountered, it is necessary to acknowledge the cultural and historical context of this study which was taking place at a time of increased racial tension locally and internationally. Such events include the fatal shooting of Michael Brown by a white police officer in Ferguson, sparking civil unrest and protest in the US, the on-going European refugee ‘crisis’, as well as mounting tension with regards to Ireland’s structurally racist Direct Provision system (Bonilla and Rosa, 2015; Briddick, 2015). The normative rhetoric surrounding these events in the Irish and international media was propagated using white, nationalist terminology. Within this context, it is possible that participants, in an attempt to disengage from mantras of ‘crisis’ and racist subjugation, did not wish to contribute their story in an attempt to self-protect. I realised that in a time of heightened racial tension, I too may have identified my participants as ‘other’ in the wording of the research question and related documentation advertising the study as the term ‘migrant’ exists in opposition to the “ethnicity of the dominant group, masked behind such social categories as ‘the public’, ‘the taxpayers’ or ‘the rest of society’” (Smith, 2008, p. 122). In studies which seek to engage beyond the narrative of (neo)colonial racial discourses it became clear that the term ‘migrant’ should not be used as a fixed label to define and encapsulate the complexity of diverse ethno-cultural identities. Therefore, the relevant wording in the recruitment documentation was revised to reflect and respect the diversity of multiple expressions of cultural and ethnic identity. The following descriptors were used:

- African
- African-Irish
- African-Caribbean
- African-Caribbean-Irish
- Chinese
- Chinese-Irish
- Indian
- Indian-Irish
- Malaysian
- Malaysian-Irish
- Pakistani
- Pakistani-Irish
- Polish
- Polish-Irish
The exclusion of the word ‘migrant’ and the use of more specific expressions of cultural and ethnic identity used in this approach allowed me to gain access to participants and a higher response rate was obtained. It was also necessary to make spaces within the wording for the participants to identify with the term that they felt was most relevant and applicable. An example of this was calling for African or African-Irish participants. In this way, the participant was free to choose the grouping of their choice without being labelled or appropriated.

The significance of language was demonstrated while reflecting on this phase of participant recruitment. Researchers, particularly white scholars, engaging across cultures must become consciously sensitive to the “dialectical nature of constructed otherness” (King, 1995, p. 373). The significance of the ‘naming’ process in participant recruitment demonstrates the limitations of simplified generalisations and the constraints of overly defined categorisations within diverse, multi stratified groupings. It relation to this study, it exposed issues and expressions of (neo)colonial privilege, otherness, racist categorisation, silence, resistance and ‘crisis’. The lack of engagement from potential participants to take part in the study due to the use of the word ‘migrant’ further highlights how the “‘authoritative’ voice of the methodological expert” (Bishop, 2008, p. 146), was challenged and subverted until I presented a more identifiable and acceptable language. The legitimacy of my role as ‘expert’ was challenged. Indeed, Creswell (2014, p. 20) contends that “qualitative research is especially useful when the researcher does not know the important variables to examine”. In this case, the participants, through their willingness to participate in the study and share their story, shaped the development of the emerging research question(s):

**Central Research Question:**
What are the HE experiences of BME students in Ireland?

**Sub-questions:**
1. How do BME students’ in Irish HE ‘voice’ their academic experiences?
2. How do BME students’ in Irish HE ‘voice’ their social experiences?
3. What factors impacted on BME students’ progression to Irish HE? (Enablers & Constraints)
4. What factors impacted on BME students’ experiences of Irish HE?
Despite my initial concern regarding my inability to access specific groups, it could be argued that the study ultimately became more inclusive to a diversity of voices. As a study which situates itself within decolonising paradigms, space for fluidity in the on-going (re)defining of the research question can be viewed as a way each participant broke down the structures in order to have their voice placed in the research narrative. Resistance to strict parameters and boundaries of accepted voice can be seen in Phase 1 and Phase 2 in terms of the proposed research questions, where strictly defined categories worded as ‘migrant’ led to potential participants not self-identifying as such and/or refusing this label. Unwillingness to participate may have been motivated by a concern that their story would not be and could not be represented and/or voiced under such a label. Indeed, the significance of language between the researcher and the participant became apparent during these phases, challenging the study to look at issues relating to language, representation, exclusion, inclusion and sites of participant resistance.

4.3 Participant Recruitment and Participant Characteristics

4.3.1 ‘Seeking Participants’, Naming Race(s)

As noted, gaining access to participants was challenging. As part of Phase 1, the following advertisement methods generated no response.

- Contacting HEIs via email and phone to advertise the study
- Placing posters in HEI communal spaces
- Contacting local and state NGOs via email and phone
- Contacting local African churches via email and phone
- Advertising in local newspapers
- Advertising on local radio
- Advertising on social media

When the study was redesigned and the use of the term ‘migrant’ was removed in Phase 2 to include more specific ethno-cultural identities, the following generated a response from potential participants:

- Advertising on social media
- Contacting individual student societies, e.g. Islamic Society via email

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29 See Appendix A for an example of the Poster used, Appendix B for the Letter of Invitation, and Appendix C for the Information Sheet provided
I offered no incentive to participants to take part in this study. I declined to incentivise participants in an attempt to deconstruct neocolonial and neoliberal approaches which suggest that I can somehow buy data. The reluctance to provide an incentive was based on an unwillingness to make the interview an uncomfortable commercial exchange. As academia is obsessively caught up in the language of currency, my refusal to buy into the conduct of incentives was in some way my own resistance. I hoped that the reciprocal showing up, being present and co-construction of narratives was where intrinsic benefit lay. Perhaps this aided my “initiation” (Berryman et al., 2013) process to the participants’ space. There is also potential argument to suggest that a lack of monetary incentive further legitimised the co-construction and articulation of voice within the study.

Aside from this, participant recruitment followed the traditional dictates. A letter of invitation30 and information sheet31 was provided for potential participants, detailing the purpose of the study. This documentation also included a brief format of how the interview would take place as well as highlighting the need to sign a consent form to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Due to the difficulty in participant recruitment, I over-emphasised the right to confidentiality thinking it would break through the silence I encountered. However, this provoked a reaction from some participants who questioned if their name was being erased or if there was a need to hide their voice. In all of these cases, the participants did request confidentiality despite underlying resistance to the notion of anonymity. I chose culturally appropriate pseudonyms throughout the study as no participant requested a specific pseudonym. Additionally, despite adherence to the correct practice of Western research protocol, the question of whom the participants were ‘consenting’ to arose in the consent form32. The following is part of my reflection notebook33 on an interview where the participant hesitated to ‘consent’:

Before the interview began he was hesitant to sign the consent form. He was suspicious. I realised he didn’t trust me despite our previous encounters. Maybe it was the system he didn’t trust. As someone living through Direct Provision I understood that he was probably feeling backed up against a wall once more, unable to, in his own words “just be”, obliged once more to another demand within a system that constantly cornered him. I told him he didn’t have to do the interview, he could walk

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30 See Appendix B
31 See Appendix C
32 See Appendix D
33 See 4.4.1 on the process of developing and writing a reflective notebook
away. For whatever reason he decided to stay. (Reflective Notebook, January 2015, Interview 5)

It was a heightened moment which demonstrated the power-privilege dynamics existent between the white researcher and BME participant, due to the wording of ‘consent’. Indeed ‘consent’ is a problematic word as “the general ethical correctness of informed consent […] may be questionable with reference to the North-South dimension in Third World projects. Written informed consent can be seen as a token of the bureaucratisation of Western societies with its institutionalisation of trust into formal bodies of organisation, written documentation and well organised filing systems” (Ryen, 2005, p. 232). In the information sheet participants were made aware of the potential for distress and discomfort by taking part in the study. Information on counselling and support services was provided. There was an ethical need for “accountability” (Smith, 2008, p. 129) on my part as a researcher in order to devise “socially responsible research” (Berryman, 2013, p. 51). However, I was discomfited at my imposition as a white person offering phone numbers and email addresses to racism ‘reporting’ mechanisms which can be regarded as faceless state entities which fashion an (unresponsive) anti-racist discourse to project a neoliberal egalitarian vision of state protection and governance. Yet, I continued to work within the traditional ethical framework (Oliver, 2003) as it offered, at least, some sense of direction in territory I was having difficulty negotiating.

Participants were made aware of their right to withdraw themselves and any data relating to them at any point throughout the study, adhering to ethical concerns regarding participant autonomy (Robson, 2011; Ryen, 2005). Prior to the scheduled interview I sent each participant an email with the information sheet and consent form at least one week in advance citing the need for them to be aware of their rights and the potential of distress prior to taking part in the study. While none of the potential participants removed themselves from the study during this time, many did reply asking for a broader outline of the types of questions that they would be asked suggesting a need to prepare responses and/or feel more comfortable in the interview setting. Brief outlines of semi-structured interview questions were provided in these instances. 25 participants agreed to take part. Was it not for the lessons that had to be learnt in Phase 1 (see 4.2.1) of the research design which greatly impacted on time constraints.

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34 See Appendix E
in terms of the timeframe of the study, it is possible that a higher number of participants could have been recruited.

In terms of cultural and ethnic background, the following groups had the highest and most frequent response to participate:

- African
- African-Irish
- Malaysian
- Pakistani
- Pakistani-Irish
- Polish
- Sri Lankan

The following groups made no response to calls for participation:

- Chinese
- Chinese-Irish
- Indian
- Indian-Irish
- Polish-Irish

Table 4.1 provides background information on the participants who took part in the study.
### Table 4.1 Participant Characteristics

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<th>Sex</th>
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<th>Direct Provision Yes=Y No=N</th>
<th>Access Course Yes=Y No=N</th>
<th>Country of Post-Primary Schooling</th>
<th>Higher Education Institution</th>
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35 At time of interview.
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As we can see above, of the 25 participants, there were:

- 15 Males and 10 Females
- 10 Irish citizens, and six awaiting Irish citizenship
- Three had experience in the Direct Provision system
- Three had entered HE via an Access programme
- 16 had experience of post-primary schooling outside of Ireland
- 21 were enrolled in a University and four in an Institute of Technology at the time of interview
- 15 were studying various programmes at undergraduate level, and 10 were studying at postgraduate level at the time of interview
- In terms of ethnic and cultural background, five were Nigerian, five were Pakistani, two were Pakistani-Irish, two were Malaysian, two were Zimbabwean, one was Angolan, one was Angolan-Irish, one was Kenyan, one was Kenyan-Irish, one was Nigerian-Irish, one was Polish, one was Somali, one was Tamil, and one was Zimbabwean-Irish

Additionally, the following Table 4.2 outlines the courses undertaken by the participants and the number(s) enrolled:

**Table 4.2 Course Title and number of Participants enrolled**

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<td>Computer Engineering</td>
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<td>Equality and Social Justice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health Promotion</td>
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<td>Hotel and Catering Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>Human Rights</td>
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<td>International Peace Studies</td>
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<td>International Relations</td>
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<td>Public and Social Policy</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Tourism Management</td>
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</table>
In the case where you see Angolan in contrast to Angolan-Irish etc., the presence of the word ‘Irish’ denotes that citizenship had been attained. However, for a number of participants who classified themselves as Angolan etc., many of them did not have Irish citizenship yet considered a part of their identity to be Irish. This gives you an indication of the difficulty classifying the participants. In response, I defined the participants as ‘non-white’ in comparison to their white, Irish peers. This may be regarded as problematic in regards to the Polish participant who is ‘white’. Yet analysis of his story suggested that he was not accepted as ‘white-Irish’. Explanations for this may be related to colonial hierarchies of whiteness and white identity (Rattansi, 2007, p. 8). Overall, strict racial categorisations in terms of ethnicity, cultural background and citizenship status hindered and challenged the research process rather than providing a sense of order or cohesion. Working through such labels became a site of contestation. The following reflection gives insight to the difficulties this issue generated in the interview space as many participants resisted labelling and racial categorisation. It also demonstrates how I attempted to navigate the language and terminology with which we were working:

He [the participant] scolded me for using terms like migrant and ethnic minority. I told him I am uncomfortable with those terms as well. I explained that the reason I was saying them was to ask what term he thinks I should use. He had no answer. On the tip of my tongue I wanted to ask “how do you [racially] define yourself”. Yet I was too unnerved to ask. How does a white person ask a question like that? […] He was himself. He wasn't a category, a subheading, a definition. (Reflective Notebook, November 2014, Interview 4)

Despite shared negotiation and contestation of labels, the participants are categorised based on their citizenship and ethnicity to present a sense of ‘order’ for the reader and to demonstrate how we have learnt to name race(s) in strict mono-homogenous categories.

4.4. Disrupting the Paradigm of White Voice

4.4.1 Data Collection

As explained in Chapter Three (see 3.3), this study is framed ‘in between’ the constructivist and transformative paradigms, and informed by principles underlying critical race theory (CRT), postcoloniality and culturally responsive research methodologies. It was through these lenses that the study was positioned and this impacted on how data were generated and analysed. A qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate to facilitate the sharing and ‘voicing’ of experience to develop testimonio. Due to the manner in which my white positionality underpinned the research process, there was a need to reject positivist
‘objective’ neutrality. Creswell (2014, p. 206) notes that “the researcher is the primary instrument in data collection” (Creswell, 2014, p. 206). My instrumentality was that of a white researcher attempting to negotiate cultural and racial divides. This position has been complicated by the role of white positivism in the research field which has propagated a “heuristic schema” (Morrow, 1994, p. 306) of white subjective ‘truth’. As culturally responsive research methodologies challenge hegemonic enforcement of ‘truth’, and CRT alongside postcoloniality challenge white representation(s) of minoritised voice, there was a need to negotiate concepts of ‘truth’ in order to mediate “between different constructions of reality to increase understanding of these various constructions and of the social world order behind them” (Aull Davies, 2008, p. 255). In an attempt to move beyond positivist neutrality, the study aligned to an interpretive, constructivist perspective as “human consciousness, which is subjective, is not accessible to science, and thus not truly knowable” (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 23). Therefore, how can the positivist, white researcher claim to speak for the subaltern? (Spivak, 1985). All that is known is that which has been constructed, a process complicated by the dominance of neocolonial white voice.

In response, within the research design there was a need for the praxis of CRT to be incorporated by devising “testimonio” which can be regarded as a “counternarrative” (Harper, 2009, p. 702) to white hegemonic ‘truth’ and voice. Indeed, “testimonio serves as a conceptual and methodological tool that transforms cultural and personal narratives into critical social analysis. One of the key tenets of testimonio is to analyse and interpret individual stories as part of a collective experience” (Fuentes and Pérez, 2016, p. 8). Denzin and Lincoln (2008, p. 79) pose some interesting and useful questions in this regard:

What kind of narratives disrupt oppressive social processes? How and when do researchers’ analyses and representations of others’ stories encourage social justice and democratic processes? And for whom are these processes disrupted and encouraged? Which audiences need to hear which researchers’ and narrators’ stories?

These questions informed the design of semi-structured interview questions36 for the individual participant interviews. It was expected that individual interviews would be the most useful tool in generating narrative and testimonio. Initially, in Phase 1, I intended to do a focus group where participants would devise the subsequent questions for individual interviews in terms of discussing what issues needed to be explored, how the questions should be framed and what the study objectives ought to be, as part of a preferred culturally

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36 See Appendix G
responsive collaborative project design. Due to the participant recruitment difficulties already outlined, I was unable to form a focus group at the outset of the study. Consequently, I, myself began the design of interview questions for a semi-structured interview due to a need for some sense of structure. Based on my review of the research and methodological literature, I wrote broad questions, an example being ‘tell me about yourself’, followed by a probe such as ‘what is your nationality?’ with an understanding that “neutral questions do not mean a neutral interview” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 27). There was a paradigmatic understanding of the underlying politicisation of such questioning and the answers they may provoke. Additionally, there was an ethical need to restructure research frameworks where the ‘other’ is a voice from a transcript to be sequenced and enumerated and “an object to be archived” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008, p. 21). Such ethics derive from culturally responsive frameworks which uphold the participants’ voice in acknowledgement that they are co-constructers of knowledge (Berryman et al., 2013). Such representation challenges researcher privilege by establishing parity in the representation of voice through the acknowledgement that the participant’s voice leads the development of story bridged by the questioning of the researcher in order to make “manifest the political underpinnings that so often remain tacit in the “everyday” activities of schooling” (Martin and Kambereis, 2013, p. 678).

Despite designing an interview schedule based on semi-structured interviewing, the interviews took on an unstructured format in practice. This was due to the need to generate testimonio and the culturally responsive lens which advocates for an intercultural narrative co-constructed through the process of (counter)storytelling (Berryman et al., 2013; Delgado, 1989; Delgado and Stefancic, 1993). Research with silenced communities demands an ethics of “mutual, symmetrical, dialogic construction of meaning within appropriate culturally constituted contexts” (Bishop, 2008, p. 164). An example of how this took place is noted in the following extract from my reflective notebook detailing how the participant invited me into their story and culture:

The interview began similarly to all the other interviews as [the participant] spoke about their education in Nigeria and Ireland. Yet [the participant] pushed the conversation open. [The participant] invited me into their home and culture. [The participant] spoke of the traditions and culture of Nigeria and then asked me about the history, traditions and culture of Ireland. The interview became more than a set list of questions and answers. It became a conversation between two people interested in the ‘other’ and the interview changed to a free flowing conversation unhindered by objectives, analysis and questioning. It became natural, a natural exchange between two people. We were engaged by our curiosity of the ‘other’. (Reflective Notebook, February 2015, Interview 10)
Through this unstructured dialogue “the identities of interviewer and respondent disappear. Each becomes a storyteller, or the two collaborate in telling a conjoint story” (Denzin, 2002, p. 839). While the semi-structured interview guide did ease the conversation forward in terms of providing ice breaker questions, an unstructured format was necessary as, “what you want is for interviewees to speak freely in their own terms about the set of concerns you bring to the interaction, plus anything else they wish to talk about. [...] The respondent is perfectly free to interrupt, ask clarification of the interviewer, criticise a line of questioning (Robson, 2011, p. 288). It was through this unstructured line of interviewing that the final focus of the research question was devised, as seen in Phase 2 (see 4.2.2), whereby the participants generated the questions that needed to be examined through the issues that they highlighted and discussed. In addition, an unstructured format allowed space for tensions as the participants and I sought to engage in intercultural dialogue, a process that may have been stymied by power-privilege dynamics if a strict layout of questioning had been imposed. Indeed, “the process of qualitative inquiry should invite the possibility for questioning personal theories and for expanding or modifying the original conceptual framework and research questions” (Agee, 2009, p. 439), a process, which was aided by an unstructured interviewing style.

Prior to each interview, participants had time to re-read the information sheet and ask questions with a reminder that they were free to withdraw themselves and their data from the study at any time. The participants’ and I then respectively signed the consent forms, each retaining a copy for our records. Interviews generally lasted an hour, and in some instances two hours due to the unstructured format. While the interview was audio recorded with the participants’ permission, I did not take notes in the interview room as I was cautious of replicating the voyeuristic mannerism of the white western anthropologist who studied the ‘other’ and noted ‘truths’ (Bartolomé, 2003; Bishop, 2008; Soohoo, 2013). Rather, in respect of critical reflexivity, I wrote in a reflective notebook after each individual interview to examine my own interaction with the participants and reflect on how I negotiated through this racially charged space. It is through this process that “we can no longer remain objective, faceless interviewers, but become human beings and must disclose ourselves, learning about ourselves as we learn about the other” (Fontana and Frey, 1994, pp. 373-4). This reflective act proved fruitful in examining and developing a sense of understanding in regards to my positionality in the research field. There was a need for:
…not just awareness, but deliberate taking note of and problematising the possible effects of these contexts. Thus the data produced by the interview should include not just a record of what is said, but full notes as to the contexts and these various contexts are likely to affect the interactions that formally constitute the interview. (Aull Davies, 2008, p. 122)

The reflective notebook provided a space where I could reflectively explore and analyse in a more free-style, less formal manner outside of the interview setting. In many ways, it was a place where I could grapple with difficult questions and synthesise the research experience in my own words. This reflective practice after each interview also helped to develop a more fully rounded picture of each participant and our interaction, resisting the facelessness of sequential data collection. Indeed, the view that “interview data may be more of a reflection of the social encounter between the interviewer and the interviewee than it is about the actual topic itself” (Rapley, 2005, p.16) became apparent in my reflections in the notebook. This was evident as the reflective notes generated rich, detailed and insightful accounts of the antagonisms, difficulties and attempted collaboration which the participants and I underwent in the intercultural dialogic setting of the formal interview. The following is a reflection on the limitations I felt my white gaze and white voice brought to fully understanding the experiences and cultures the participants voiced as seen in this particular case:

I struggled to write this reflection. I’m not entirely sure what [the participant’s] story is. Perhaps that’s reflective of [the participant’s] own journey. As someone who carries a number of cultures [the participant] also seems to struggle with their own diversity in a world that upholds singularity. [The participant’s] identity links across continents and cultures with the ability to express their story in English, Creole or Swahili. Perhaps within the multiplicities of [the participant’s] languages I could not translate their story. (Reflective Notebook, September 2015, Interview 19)

Indeed, the process of reflective writing provided ample space for analyses of the contestations yielded by my white positionality and the threat of mistranslation.

4.4.2 Transcription

Raw data including voice recordings, coded/transcripts, reflective writing and tables of participant characteristics were stored electronically on a password protected drive “to maintain the dignity of the database” (Oliver, 2003, p. 64) and participants were informed that their data would only be used for the purpose of this study. A confidentiality statement was prepared in the event that a transcription service would be employed. However,

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37 See Appendix F
following critical reflection on each interview, I transcribed the interview verbatim\(^{38}\) (Robson, 2011) before returning it to the participants to ensure that they had the opportunity to edit and rewrite the narrative if they chose to do so. Due to a white neocolonial tendency to correct ‘black English’ (Ball and Lardner, 1997), there was a need to ensure that I did not impose a white lingualism in the transcription process as “it is difficult to justify altering actual words and style of speech (e.g.) changing regional or class-based dialects into a standardised form to make it more accessible” (Aull Davies, 2008, p. 127). As interviews had been conducted to produce a form of testimonio, it was necessary to present the authenticity of each individual voice beyond white pronunciation and correction. Despite these intentions, language barriers became an issue early in the process. Many of the participants were bi/multilingual and fluent in a range of languages from Urdu, Yoruba to Malay. However, all of the participants spoke English during the interview. While many were proficient, it was clear that English was not their first language. Through this, I became aware of linguistic privilege and (dis)advantage. Many participants whose first language was not English were self-conscious in the manner in which they expressed themselves, apologising when they could not remember or form a word. There were frustrated instances when they struggled to articulate what they were trying to say as clearly as they wished to, perhaps unable to translate their experience into English. In many instances I found it difficult to understand accents.

This was particularly difficult during the initial transcription process. There were times when I lost a word or full sentences. The tension that arose from language barriers occurred during one of the early interviews when I returned a transcript to the participant. Throughout the transcript I noted [inaudible] in certain parts. This was due to difficulties understanding the participant’s accent, compounded by the low volume of the recording due to the way I had set up the recording equipment. On receipt of their transcript, the participant phoned me, sounding panicked that the term [inaudible] had been used throughout. They asked if I wanted to redo the interview. I tried to reassure the participant that it was common practice to use the term [inaudible] when the voice recorder does not pick up sound or if the sound is blurred. The conversation ended but I had a feeling that the participant had not been convinced. In that moment I realised that I had just imposed on the sensitivities surrounding the English language. I felt that the participant had been unhappy with how their voice had

\(^{38}\) All available transcripts are available to the examiners upon request
been transcribed. As this study was grounded in hearing and voicing the stories of participants, this participant may have felt that their voice was ‘[inaudible]’.

After this exchange I added a note when I returned transcripts to participants. I clearly stated that the term [inaudible] appears in the transcript to denote that the voice recorder did not pick up the sound. I also realised that I had to devise a way of transcribing the spaces where I could not translate words the participant was saying. I kept a pen and paper between myself and the participant in the interview room. If they used words or language I did not understand I would ask them if they would mind writing it down for me. This did not seem to cause any issues. In fact, many participants used this opportunity to open a discussion on their cultural language(s) and the way it impacted on their identity and sense of (dis)belonging. Conversely, it became a learning experience for me as I began to learn about language and expression beyond my own English monolingualism. I then returned to the transcription process with a hand written ‘dictionary’ provided by the participants. I referred back to this ‘dictionary’ when transcribing the interview in order to place the correct word(s) in the script. Despite this, there were continued occurrences where I could not understand the pronunciation or language of certain words. In these instances I left a space as follows, [____]. I no longer used the word ‘inaudible’.

When returning the transcripts to participants, I noted that I did not understand or could not translate the word and asked if they would write it into the transcript. The participants who did respond obliged. Many participants did not reply after I returned their transcript. I noted that this happened in relation to the earlier transcripts that I had sent. As I began to redesign the way I engaged with the participants, including the manner in which I transcribed, I noted how I generated a higher response rate in the later interviews in terms of participants responding when I returned their transcripts. In these cases, some participants edited their transcript, correcting their sentences, fixing my spelling and placing the words I had lost in the space marked [____]. Some also asked for sections or parts of their transcript to be removed. This seemed to happen in cases where one cultural value or norm clashed with another. It would seem that these participants wanted to remove any indication of cultural antagonisms. An example was a Muslim student who wished to remove descriptors where they were socialising with their Irish student peers who were drinking despite a number of participants voicing similar conflicts on this issue. However, in all cases, participants’ requests were respected and withdrawn data was not brought forward for analysis as “ethical
as well as scientific objectivity is about letting the objects object to what we do to them and say about them” (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2005, p. 161).

The transcription process was in many ways a space for further reflection and an opportunity to ‘re-hear’ the participants stories. Through the interplay of diverse lingualisms, the threat of ‘inaudibility’, the need to edit, withdraw, and indeed, have my own words corrected, I began to see how the transcription process developed an “understanding [of] the language and culture of respondents” (Chase, 2008, p. 131) beyond the “projecting” (Aull Davies, 2008, p.24) articulation of my monolingual white, English voice.

4.4.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis was underpinned by my white positionality. In relation to the underpinning epistemologies of the study, there was a challenge in terms of how the white gaze imposes on the “emancipation from hearing only the voices of Western Europe, emancipation from generations of silence, and emancipation from seeing the world in one colour” (Guba and Lincoln, 2008, p. 281). Data analysis is a potential site of contestation as the white gaze interprets the narrative(s) of the minoritised ‘other’. This process is further complicated by the constructivist mediation of ‘truth’ as I attempted to interpret the “pre-interpreted world” (Giddens, 1976, p. 146) of the participants. Additionally, the participants could not be regarded as a homogenous grouping. There was a need to examine how I could and should analyse hybrid, diversified ethno-cultural voices as I worked within “a complex politics of representation” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008, p. 45). There was a need to resist positivist neutrality and objectivity and place myself fully in the data to ensure transparency of my white voice. In the data analysis I drew on some constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; 2014) coding techniques methods as they provide “a disposition to ‘discover’ ideas in data without imposing preconceptions” (Dey, 2005, p. 80). Additionally, Charmaz (2008) argues that such methods lend themselves to research in the constructivist/transformative paradigm as:

Grounded theory can supply analytic tools to move social justice studies beyond description, while keeping them anchored in their respective empirical worlds. […] A constructivist grounded theory offers another alternative: a systematic approach to social justice inquiry that fosters integrating subjective experience with social conditions in our analyses. (Charmaz, 2008, pp. 204-206)

As with the diversity of the participants, so too, was the need for “diverse perceptions and interpretations” (Merry, Clausen, Gagnon, Carnevale, Jeannotte, Saucier and Oxman-
Martinez, 2011, p. 984) and “culturally appropriate analytical skills” (Suh, Kagan, and Strumpf, 2009, p. 196). Throughout the analysis there was a need to understand that from a constructivist standpoint, this study does not claim to fully voice the experiences of the participants, rather, it is hoped that “the final written product is a mediation that is itself a conduit for further mediations (Aull Davies, 2008, p. 255).

I underwent a process of developing the raw data into stories, seeking “a common storyline which grows out of the data itself and represents the character of the data as a whole” (Holliday, 2002, p. 104). Raw data were processed using a pen and paper during reflective writing, line by line coding (on typed transcripts), initial categorisation of codes, memoing and mapping. This was done in agreement with Robson’s (2002, p. 469) suggestion that some researchers find that “doing it on the computer screen inhibits creativity and playfulness”. Indeed, as a researcher working in a culturally responsive paradigm of storytelling, there was a personal inclination to work through the medium of the writer in terms of utilising pen and paper as a tool of analysis. Through the physicality of writing words and mapping, categorising and linking the data with a pen and paper, it allowed me to place myself and my words within the emerging story. In turn, this generated transparency in the data, as the placement of my words and thoughts alongside the data allowed me to see my own assumptions and judgements written into the data in terms of “implicit assumptions, biases, ethnocentrism and ill-defined concepts from dominant cultural values” (Neuman, 1997, p. 421).

Furthermore, my use of a pen and paper in the management and analyses of the raw data stemmed from the view of qualitative analysis as an art form. If ethnography is a portrait of a people, it can be argued that we as qualitative researchers are artists. Our methodologies are the tools we draw upon to perceive, interpret and describe the contours that shape our participants. Indeed, Sandelowski (1994) describes the work of a qualitative researcher as akin to that of a portrait artist. Through this assertion, I worked with the data through the use of a pen and paper, writing line by line codes on the transcripts, using words to draw and shape the interaction between the participants and I in my reflective notebook, using memos to colour theory into the narrative, drawing tables to categorise the codes in order to decipher a common face in the stories and using large pages of blank paper to map the codes and initial categories to see what picture emerged. This collection of written data was then typed and mapped onto word documents prior to being placed within the theoretical framework.
During this process there was a need to acknowledge that “raw data can be very interesting to look at, yet they do not help the reader to understand the social world under scrutiny, and the way the participants view it, unless such data have been systematically analysed to illuminate an existent situation” (Basit, 2003, p. 144). In terms of this study, there was a need to ascertain how the stories of the participants presented a picture “not merely part of a neutral and given reality, but as products of power relations and struggle” (May, 2002, p. 237). While the separation of data and discussion was necessary for transparency, the picture and story of the participants needed to be embedded in a framework of historical and societal raced relations.

In terms of initial coding of the interviews, I began with line by line coding, a technique which activates passive textual data through the use of gerunds (Charmaz, 2006; 2014). Additionally, this initial phase is a form of “substantive coding” (Dey, 2005, p. 81) insofar as the codes generated closely follow the data. This was of particular importance due to my positionality as this form of coding allowed me to see and clarify “assumptions” (Charmaz, 2008, p. 221) my white gaze may have imposed on the data. Furthermore, due to the underpinning epistemological lens of the study there was a need to generate a form of testimonio (Harper, 2009; Pérez Huber, 2009), a process facilitated by grounded theory coding as it “impels us to make our participants’ language problematic to render an analysis of it” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 47). Table 4.2 provides an example of the initial, line by line coding phase demonstrating how textual data from the interview transcripts were broken down into problematised gerund-based codes.
Table 4.3 An Example of Initial Line by Line Coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Interview Transcript</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Then it was like oh she’s actually a new student and she’s here to stay. Then of course there were all these misconceptions about the fact that I came from Africa, the fact that I spoke English and that it was very good. That seemed to kind of shake people up a little bit because I wasn’t any of those ways. I was sort of breaking down all those stereotypes. They were expecting me to be poor academically.</td>
<td>Describing reaction of Irish school peers to her staying in Ireland.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Being here to ‘stay’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Recalling peers’ misconceptions about her coming from Africa and speaking good English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Feeling like her good English shook people up a little bit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Peers expecting her to be just a certain way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>Feeling like she was breaking down stereotypes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>Peers expecting her to be poor academically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following, line by line coding of each individual interview, I conducted focused coding, which involved a review of all initial codes from the line-by-line coding phase, and bringing forward the most frequent and/or significant ones (Charmaz, 2006; 2014). At that point, I began to initially categorise focused codes by placing relevant codes under broad headings such as ‘language barriers’, ‘culture shock’, and so forth. I referred back to the underpinning epistemologies of the study in an effort to derive meaning and impose a sense of structure on the data using headings such as ‘segregation’, ‘seclusion’ and ‘assimilation’ with sub-headings based on the participants’ experience of accessing HE, and their HE social experience and academic progression. Table 4.4 presents an example of an early attempt to frame the data and develop categories:
**Table 4.4 Initial Categorisation of Codes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Segregation Accessing H.E Experience</th>
<th>Seclusion Social Experience</th>
<th>Assimilation Academic Progression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty Accessing HE</td>
<td>Adjusting to an unfamiliar system</td>
<td>HE qualification as social capital/ currency/ freedom/ autonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inequity of Immigration status</td>
<td>Language barrier</td>
<td>Cultural Upholding of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking of Space/placement/displacement</td>
<td>Lack of HE social experience</td>
<td>Familial expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking/ Attaining Irish Citizenship</td>
<td>Culture Shock</td>
<td>Fear of Immigration System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Struggling with identity Politics</td>
<td>Divided Lecture Halls</td>
<td>Enjoying HE Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting asked ‘Where are you from?’</td>
<td>Getting asked ‘Where are you from?’</td>
<td>Wanting to progress academically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiding Identity and Culture</td>
<td>Hiding Identity and Culture</td>
<td>Hiding Identity and Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talked down to</td>
<td>Talked down to</td>
<td>Resilience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non encouragement to progress to HE</td>
<td>Wanting to integrate/ be accepted</td>
<td>Describing Ireland as home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Socialising in “Own Group”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Challenging Forced integration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fighting for space/ acknowledgement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being identified as different</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Awareness/ Experience of racial intolerance/ discrimination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussing issue of racism amongst “own group”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanting experience voiced</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty addressing issues of racism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being the “only one”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HE as a racial space</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blaming self for difficulties in social interaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silencing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, the limitations of these initial categorisations became clear as there was an overlap amongst the sub-categories across the three headings. This initial analytic frame was not fitting of the data. Additionally, my imposition of the terms ‘segregation’, ‘seclusion’ and ‘assimilation’ was problematic as it imposed a narrative that had not been generated from within the data themselves. It was clear that the initial process of categorisation had been too broad and theoretically imposed and that a more in depth analysis of the data could be generated, derived more closely from the emerging issues voiced by the participants. My imposition on the data can be read as an attempt to navigate within the increasing complexity of race(ed) antagonisms as “theory is often used to protect us from the awesome complexity of the world” (Lather, 1986, p. 270). To counteract this initial imposition, mapping (Martin and Kamberelils, 2013) was used to ‘free’ the data. Mapping allowed for analysis of focused codes and helped determine what provisional categories were developing. Figure 4.5 presents an example of how the codes were regrouped and clustered through a process of mapping:
Figure 4.5 demonstrates the bringing together and clustering of codes which provided provisional categories. As there was continued evidence of overlapping areas, further analysis
was conducted through further mapping in order to develop categories and sub-categories. The visual application of the mapping process also allowed me to discover additional nuanced aspects of the data that I had initially overlooked. Indeed, mapping data is of particular use for decolonial CRT and culturally responsive research as:

Mapping unearths the complex structures and forces that connect teachers and students, teaching and learning, affect and cognition, and culture and politics. When these assemblages – constituted by unique configurations of lines of articulation and lines of flight – are made visible, individuals and collectives are better positioned to engage in deterritorialisations and reterritorialisations that produce new and more desirable assemblages. (Martin et al., 2013, p. 677)

This mapping process led to thematic analysis (Petty, Thomson and Stew, 2012; Robson, 2011) of the existing codes and provisional categories. I began memoing (Charmaz, 2006; Petty et al., 2012) to explore ways of capturing the analysis under broader headings to facilitate the write-up of findings. In memos, I began to see that the data and codes indicated that the participants’ experience of HE was influenced by and began in their primary and post-primary schooling years. Additionally, I began to see the contrast between participants’ aspirations to progress to HE and the barriers that impacted on progression. In terms of HE experiences, there was evidence to suggest that experience(s) could be divided between the social and the academic experience. Therefore the findings were framed under the following broad category headings, with relevant sub-categories:

1. **The primary and post-primary schooling experience of BME students in Ireland**
   - Identity battles and divides
   - Experiences of racist bullying in school and teacher responses
   - Multilingual identities and experiences
   - Preparing for the Leaving Certificate (LC) and HE progression

2. **Aspirations and Barriers in the progression to HE**

   *Aspirations:*
   - Familial and cultural expectations
   - Achieving greater socio-cultural capital
   - Improving employability prospects and contributing to social change

   *Barriers:*
   - Financial Issues
   - Racial labelling
• Non-recognition of non-Western qualifications

3. The social and academic experiences of BME students in Irish HE

Social:
• Divided lecture halls
• Divided and/or limited cross-cultural interaction
• Culture clashes
• Identity crises and battles

Academic:
• Adjusting to unfamiliar teaching and learning styles
• Restrictive English monolingualism
• Being undermined academically
• Aspiration to progress academically

4.5. Conclusion
In this chapter, I traced my methodological journey. The research design was influenced by my white positionality. This impeded the research process in many ways, impacting on participant recruitment and categorisation. The research questions were devised by the participants themselves through the issues they discussed in the 25 interviews conducted via a relatively unstructured interview approach. Through this method, the intention was to generate testimonio. Transcription was hampered by my English monolingualism. Strategies had to be devised to ensure that words were not lost and that participants did not become ‘inaudible’. In relation to data analyses, constructivist grounded theory coding techniques allowed me to see and clarify assumptions my white gaze may have imposed on the participants’ narrative. Mapping and thematic analysis was also implemented. Overall, the limitations and obstacles imposed by my white positionality are evident in the research journey. In terms of the findings brought forward, mapping the data aided in the development of categories relating to the (i) primary and post-primary schooling experience of BME students in Ireland, (ii) aspirations and barriers in the progression to HE and (iii) the social and academic experiences of BME students in Irish HE. The following three chapters present the findings of this study under these broad headings through the relevant categories and sub-categories, and also examine and discuss these findings in relation to relevant scholarly research and literature.
Chapter Five: The Primary and Post-primary Schooling Experiences of Black and Minority Ethnic Students in Ireland

5.1 Introduction

When asked to reflect on their Leaving Certificate (LC) experience and how it influenced their pathway to Higher Education (HE), the participants recalled their primary and post-primary schooling. In doing so, participants, themselves, identified the link between primary and post-primary schooling and how it impacted on their progression to HE and the identity that they brought with them. Out of the study’s 25 participants, 11 had experience of primary and post-primary schooling in Ireland. This chapter, the first of three Findings and Discussion chapters, focuses on the participants’ experiences in the Irish schooling system. Table 6.1 indicates the participants’ citizenship status and sites of primary and post-primary schooling.

Table 5.1 Participants with Experience of Schooling in Ireland: Citizenship Status and Location(s) of Schooling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Citizenship</th>
<th>Primary Schooling</th>
<th>Post-Primary Schooling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adelina</td>
<td>Irish citizen</td>
<td>Angola &amp; Ireland</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ado</td>
<td>Angolan awaiting Irish citizenship</td>
<td>Angola &amp; Ireland</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akoni</td>
<td>Nigerian awaiting Irish citizenship</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awande</td>
<td>Irish citizen</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azli</td>
<td>Irish citizen</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uzoma</td>
<td>Nigerian awaiting Irish citizenship</td>
<td>Nigeria &amp; Ireland</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pawel</td>
<td>Polish-EU citizen</td>
<td>Poland &amp; Ireland</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idai</td>
<td>Irish citizen</td>
<td>Zimbabwe &amp; Ireland</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paddy</td>
<td>Irish citizen</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iana</td>
<td>Irish citizen</td>
<td>Somalia &amp; Ireland</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niamh</td>
<td>Irish citizen</td>
<td>Kenya &amp; Ireland</td>
<td>Kenya &amp; Ireland</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As we can see in Table 5.1, 11 of the participants had experience of schooling in Ireland. These participants and their related experiences form the basis of this current chapter. There
are four sections in this chapter. The first examines the way constructs of ‘Irish’ and ‘non-Irish’ identity were maintained and enforced by the participants’ teachers and peers. The second section highlights the racism experienced and voiced by the participants and their reflections on how teachers responded to such instances. The third section examines bi/multilingual identity and how it was experienced and expressed by the participants in Irish primary and post-primary schools. The final section looks at the LC experience of the participants and how it impacted on progression to HE.

5.2 “You sound Irish and you act Irish but you don’t look Irish”39, Bicultural Identity Battles and Divides

In the primary and post-primary system, participants reported that they were accepted as long as their peers and teachers could acknowledge them as different. Furthermore, there was an onus on the participants to identify themselves as being different and ‘other’. The findings suggest that for some participants, being accepted as Irish was dependent on skin colour and language, with white skin and English speaking proficiency being the accepted norm as to what constituted a right to claim an Irish identity. Participants reported experiences of exclusion and dismissal due to their skin colour. Those who identified as Irish described how they were positioned as ‘non-Irish’ due to their skin colour despite being biracial and/or having Irish citizenship. Niamh was continuously made aware of her skin colour by her peers and teachers throughout her schooling experience remarking that, “I think at least once a day I’d have somebody remind me that I was of a different colour”. She went on to describe how she was not aware of her “colour” or the way she could be perceived as different. However, she was reminded of her difference through the continuous questioning of “where are you from?” despite being a biracial Irish citizen:

I used to say and I still say now, I look at myself in the mirror, I catch myself and go ‘oh yes you are that colour’ or ‘oh yes you look like that’ because I forget, I really do, I forget what I look like. I think I’m just floating about and I don’t really pay much attention to it and then something will happen that will remind me. So I think verbally at first or for most people it was relatively polite in that it was kind of, where are you from? (Niamh)

Idai shared Niamh’s experience of being reminded that she was somehow different. Idai described herself in contrast to her white Irish peers which suggest that she was aware of her positioning as ‘non-Irish’ despite her Irish citizenship. She described how she was used to being the only African-Irish in her HE class as she had experienced this in primary school.

39 A quote from Paddy, a biracial Irish citizen
Due to this, she became accustomed to her position as an outsider early in her educational experience:

In college for the first year I was always the only African-Irish there. I was kind of used to it because in primary school I was the only one. If you’ve grown up with it you’re used to it like I’m the only African-Irish there, all my friends are Irish friends and blah blah blah. (Idai)

Paddy described how his white, Irish school peers constantly reminded him that he was different. Despite having an Irish name and an Irish father, his skin colour was used as a basis to identify him as ‘non-Irish’. He recalled the way his white peers described him, “they go, Jesus you sound Irish and you act Irish but you don’t look Irish”. In his interview, he reflected on the difficulty of understanding his positioning as different:

I was a bit confused as to why the kids in my class at primary school kept mentioning this thing. Why they would constantly say you’re different even though I knew I sounded like them and had similar names to them. [...] Why are they saying I’m not Irish when that’s obviously all I am? (Paddy)

From the experiences outlined above, we can see how the participants were identified as different based on their skin colour and were not fully accepted as Irish despite having Irish citizenship and a bi/multi-racial claim to Irish identity. This is problematic insofar as some of the participants who identified as Irish were denied a claim to Irish identity. Indeed, research to date on the primary and post-primary schooling experience of BME students in Ireland has identified the way the culture of the Irish school environment maintains notions of the ‘other’ based on strict distinctions in terms of ethnicity and culture. It has been found that experience in Direct Provision contributed to ‘migrant’ students being positioned as ‘non-Irish’ as the “Direct Provision system segregates migrant children while simultaneously placing them in local schools’ (Ní Laoire, Bushin, Carpena-Méndez and White, 2009, p. 75). In relation to this, Bryan (2009) suggests that successful intercultural schooling has been limited by nationalistic discourse on what legitimises Irish and ‘non-Irish’ racial identity. In an examination of identity issues relating to the inclusion of migrant children in Ireland, it was found that many migrant children describe themselves in a ‘hybrid’ or ‘hyphenated’ manner, e.g., African-Irish (Ní Laoire et al., 2009). However, migrant children are provoked to question their identity and position themselves as ‘non-Irish’ (Ní Laoire et al., 2009).

Indeed, these participants, despite identifying as Irish were displaced from their Irish identity in a manner that sited identity as fixed and homogenous despite understandings that “identity
is always hybrid, multiple, porous and mutable” (Bennett, 2008, p. 7). Yet, construction of the ‘other’ serves a purpose insofar as it maintains a false sense of cohesion for the dominant culture as the ‘other’ is side-lined so that questions and “assumptions about ‘fixed identities’, unproblematic nationhood, invisible sovereignty, ethnic homogeneity and exclusive citizenship” (Espiritu 2003, p. 209). The denial of Irishness in the participants bi/multi raciality is of limited surprise as the maintenance and enforcement of the dominant versus marginal identity has always been perpetuated by neocolonial state schooling as “the public school is a site for the production ad reproduction of the ideological hegemony of the state” (Sefa Dei, 1996, p. 34). The bi/multi raciality of the participants posed a threat to white, Irish hegemony and fixed notions of identity as they identified as African and Irish or Pakistani and Irish. The presence of hybrid and fluid cross-cultural identity is a threat to the borders of the neocolonial state. For the participants to be accepted as Irish, fixed perceptions in terms of what ‘being Irish’ constitutes needs to be deconstructed. This can be achieved through the restructuring of the dominant narrative whereby Irishness is defined in terms of white skin colour and English speaking monolingualism.

Bryan (2008) suggests that neoliberal multiculturalism promotes the abnormalisation of BME identity through the dominant enforced narrative that Irish society is static, white and homogenous. Historically, Ireland conformed to a narrative that it was populated solely by white, English speaking Roman Catholics, erasing the presence of distinct cultures such as Travellers/Minceir, Roma and the diverse number of cultures and ethnicities that populate the island. Diversity is pointed to as a “phenomenon” (Bryan, 2008) perpetuated by modern migration patterns further erasing BME presence in the Irish consciousness and historical narrative. The erasure of BME presence in Ireland has facilitated a process whereby BME identity is viewed as foreign, ‘other’ and interloping (Devine, 2005; Devine, Kenny and Macneela, 2008; Devine, 2009; Lynch and Lodge, 2002). The consequence of this fixed narrative is evident in the hostility participants faced in expressing their Irish identity and/or being accepted as Irish. Despite being bi/multiracial, identifying as Irish and/or having Irish citizenship, the participants were positioned as distinctly ‘non-Irish’ perpetuating the erasure of BME bi/multiracial identity. Bryan (2009) regards this as the failure of the Irish neoliberal intercultural education model which fails to challenge or deconstruct structural and institutionalised racial dynamics. Rather, the Irish state schooling system perpetuates ‘symbolic violence’ (Bourdieu, 1997; 1996; 1991; 1990; 1977) against BME identity through the narrow lens with which it can be defined and/or expressed. Being regarded as different
based on skin colour had further implications as it fostered racial and cultural divides in the participants’ classrooms and school social spaces. The participants described the way they experienced primary and post-primary school divided from their white, Irish peers. Uzoma tried to explain the way he could interact on an individual level with his white, Irish peers, yet in groups white and black students remained separated. He noted the difficulty he had understanding this divide as he did not know how to describe himself or his white peers:

…because we don’t see the colour, we just see friendship or whatever especially at that age, we don’t know how to describe ourselves. […] In class we wouldn’t tend to sit beside each other, like lunchtime or break time there was yeah, big divide. […] You can always tell the difference but there was always a big divide. You’d have the majority separated. There’s a huge divide. You might get along in class, it might not seem like a divide but socially there is. (Uzoma)

Awande defined herself in her own terms: “to me I actually prefer Afro-Irish, African-Irish, it makes sense because it tells you the person was born in Africa and is now Irish”. Despite having a sense of Irish identity, she found that it was easier for her to maintain group divides and stay with people who “looked like” her in order to avoid name calling. It was easier to exclude herself rather than be excluded by her white, Irish peers:

It was easier for me to stick to the people that looked like me rather than the ones that didn’t look like me because children are taught things so some of them did call us names. (Awande)

The divide between those positioned as Irish and ‘non-Irish’ led some participants to battle with their sense of identity. Some participants reflected on the way they attempted to adapt aspects of their identity which did not conform to white Irishness. When asked how one negotiates across cultures and adapts their identity, Iana described how she had to adjust to Irishness by “finding my way in terms of language, in terms of culture, in terms of everything else”. Niamh also reflected on the need to adjust. Despite this adjustment her peers “always” reminded her that she was “different”:

Being the new girl in the class where you find everyone is literally either staring at you or not wanting to make any eye contact and I was like ‘ok so it’s going to be like that, it’s not going to be that easy’ [laughter], nobody wants to be my friend for the day [laughter], nothing like that so I think that kind of stuff used to always remind me that I’m different. (Niamh)

She described how she rejected and hid the Kenyan part of her identity and culture. She further explained the uncertainty she felt in relation to her identity as she was denied her claim to Irish identity while simultaneously denying her own Kenyan identity stating that,
“you can’t just be‖. In an attempt to gain a sense of belonging she rejected parts of her cultural background that would not be considered Irish. She reflected on one such instance when she swapped traditional Kenyan flatbread for brown bread in her school lunchbox:

I didn’t want to bring in any lunches, any kind of traditional food, I would say to my mum I want a ham sandwich on brown bread. Flatbread, I was like none of that, it all smells weird in class, just give me the brown bread. (Niamh)

Niamh’s experience suggests a tension in her bicultural identity as she herself went on to explain how “it was exhausting because I was constantly trying to prove myself”. When asked to reflect on this need to constantly prove herself, she described how her main concern was “no I am determined to integrate, even if it kills me, I’ll integrate you know”. In analysis of first generation children from a migrant background, Devine (2009, p. 531) discusses how these children use school as way to gain “capital accumulation” and secure their integration to Irish society. Teachers play a role in this consolidation as Devine (2005, p. 61), found that white Irish teachers perceive ethnic minority students as “other” (Devine, 2005, p. 49). Indeed, BME students perceive favouritism from teachers who are perceived as giving preferential treatment to their white, Irish students (Gilligan, Curry, McGrath, Murphy, Ní Raghallaigh, Rogers, Scholtz and Quinn, 2010). In terms of teacher preference for white Irish students, Devine (2009, p. 532) identified BME students as “flexible negotiators of culture” taking on the traits and cultural values associated with Irishness. She defines this process as a negotiation required to gain cultural tokenism. It is an assimilative process which requires sustained “ethnic self-monitoring” (Devine, 2009, p. 532) for BME identities and the suppression of their non-Irish cultural and ethnic self.

Bhabha (1984, p. 10) refers to this assimilative process as “mimicry” whereby the minoritised take on the mannerisms, language, customs and socio-cultural values of the culturally dominant. Rather than improving integration, Bhabha (1984, p. 10) contends that mimicry is viewed as a “menace” as it threatens the divide and hierarchal dominance maintained by the ruling, majoritarian group. Despite being Irish citizens, these participants struggled to be accepted as Irish. This raises questions as to what identity ‘non-Irish’, Irish citizens are allowed to claim. In terms of the experiences of the participants being denied their Irish identity and finding their ‘non-Irish’ identity marginalised, Taylor (2002, p.1) describes the labelling of biracial identity and the difficulty of defining and being defined as:

Terminology is now taking centre stage in discussions of mixed racial identity, as we continue to struggle over what we can or should call ourselves and to what extent we can step away from old labels and create new ones. For instance, debate over whether
there should be a new category on census forms for people with racially mixed heritages has cultivated the use of new terms such as “interracial”, “transracial”, “biracial” or “multiracial”. But questions remain: what importance should we place on such labels? Should we criticise those who find comfort in labels?

Being labelled as ‘non-Irish’ led to identity crises for participants. Participants struggled to describe or define themselves suggesting that the participants themselves were negotiators within the labelling process. As evidenced, the participants were positioned as ‘other’ and ‘non-Irish’ due to their skin colour even in instances where they self-identified as Irish. This relates to DuBois’ (1903, p. 5) notion of “double consciousness” whereby the bicultural identity “ever feels his two-ness…two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings” in transit across cultures and borders. The experiences of the participants in the school environment suggests that there is limited space for bi/multiracialism as it challenges constructs of white, Irish cultural norms, values and nationhood. Rather, there is a continual “strict social and cultural hierarchy between whites and non-whites, between members of the dominant and members of the subject race” (Said, 2000, p. xxv).

Additionally, critical pedagogy acknowledges the role that education and the learning environment plays in the maintenance of cultural, socio-economic and racial hierarchies as “the classroom is a politicised space; it has always been a politicised space between the systems of thought, as well as cultural and political hierarchies being affirmed and denied there” (McKenna, 2003, p. 435). As a way to dilute the threat of bi/multiracial identity it is “erased through the homogenisation of culture” (Smith, 1994) or what Said (2000, p.xxv) refers to as “cultural centralisation”. The neocolonial demand for centralisation posed a distinct crisis for the participants as they were never fully accepted as Irish. They spoke of the constant divide that was maintained between them and their white Irish peers suggesting that while the dominant culture demands cultural homogenisation it simultaneously side-lines those enacting the homogenisation process.

Within the divide between those positioned as Irish and ‘non-Irish’, some participants were keen to stress that they had a ‘normal’ schooling experience suggesting that they believed that there was an ‘abnormal’ experience that they may be associated with. There was a noted sense of unease at being identified as different in many of the participants’ responses when asked to recall their primary and post-primary experiences. Despite understanding and experiencing how their skin colour situated them outside of ‘accepted’ Irish identity, many
participants immediately responded with words such as “normal” to describe their school experience despite no suggestion being made that their experience may have been otherwise. When I asked Akoni how he found primary school he stated, “primary school, easy enough, there’s nothing, normal education [laughter]”. When I asked Azli how he found primary school he was defensive in his reply saying, “I mean I wasn’t bullied or anything like that”. When I asked Adelina how she found school she said that she “never really experienced racism”. This need by the participants to assert that their experience at school was ‘normal’ may be seen as a way of “distancing” (Keane, 2011, p. 449) themselves from the divide between the Irish and the ‘non-Irish’. By stating that they were not bullied or discriminated against, these participants were attempting to show that they had been accepted as ‘normal’, no matter how limited this acceptance may have been. The need to have a ‘normal’ experience can be read as an assimilative act insofar as participants seemed to perceive that there was an ‘abnormal’ experience that they might be associated with. This generates further questions in regards to perceptions of BME identity in the schooling environment. Devine (2005) has examined the way Irish teachers construct perceptions of BME identity. It was found that white Irish teachers draw on a range of cultural stereotypes and imagery which maintain othering and exoticisation (Devine, 2005). Teachers draw upon this othered, exoticised discourse to peripheralise BME students as ‘abnormal’ in contrast to the norm. From the findings, there is evidence to suggest that the participants were aware of this underlying narrative amongst their teachers and wished to resist this positioning.

5.3 Experiences of Racist Bullying in School and Teacher Responses

Some participants recalled experiences of being bullied in both primary and post-primary school. In all of the cases, bullying was expressed in a racist manner. It was not so much the experience of being bullied that participants reflected on; rather they highlighted the frustration they felt at their teachers who did not know how to deal with incidents or, indeed, understand how racist bullying is different from other forms. Paddy described his teachers inability to help him deal with being bullied stating that they failed to see the “distinct disadvantage and under-privilege” of not having white skin. He explained how his teachers were unable to help him deal effectively with his bullies as they were white:

I think one of the biggest issues I found in secondary school and in primary school with racism was when you reported it to teachers they didn’t see it as different to any other type of bullying which is fine because it is just bullying, but they didn’t understand when they were saying to that person of colour ‘look this is how to deal with it’, they were ignoring entirely the power constructs that exist in society. They
were ignoring entirely the distinct disadvantage and under-privilege that this person has for being, having skin that is not white. (Paddy)

Paddy felt that his teachers could not offer him a voice as they could not relate to anything other than white constructs of Irish identity and experience:

The advice they were giving is impossible to carry out than it would be for another lad who was being picked on because, I don’t know, he missed a goal in a hurling match, you know it’s different. He can actually question it and the teacher can give him a voice where he can stand up for himself. (Paddy)

Similarly, Uzoma described the way he felt overlooked and neglected by his teachers. He describes one particular day at school where he was continuously picked on and teased by his white, Irish peers. He noted how this experience was followed up by a lack of comfort and support from a teacher who found him crying during the lunch break:

I sat in the corner and started bawling my eyes out and a teacher came by and in my head I was like ‘oh thank God someone’s going to talk to me and ask me if I’m alright’. She kind of looked at me ‘are you alright?’ Of course I’m going to say ‘yeah’, I’m a guy but you expect more comfort. I am literally bawling my eyes out. I’m crying here, do something. And she was like’ ok if you’re sure’ and she kind of walked away and that was it. I obviously remember because it was so traumatic. I remember that we were always pushed aside, neglected in all aspects. (Uzoma)

Uzoma further described what he referred to as “race wars” during break time as football and rugby teams were divided into “black versus whites”. He remembered how “it got really violent because of […] individuals from the white side being racist”. In terms of the teachers’ response to such incidents, he recalled how it was only the “black people” who got suspended while white students received a caution as:

Each time it happened the black people would have got suspended whereas the white people would have been just cautioned or something like that but we would have been the ones to get suspended. I don’t why that was, it was easier just to suspend us or I don’t know, it still baffles me and it still happens. (Uzoma)

These experiences highlight the way the participants sought greater understanding from their teachers in terms of resisting and subverting the racism they experienced from their peers. Call-Cummings and Martinez (2017, p. 572), found that white teachers, when working with Latino/a student’s, are unable to recognise the subtlety of racism, forcing students to “prove it” and fail to provide adequate ways for students to define and challenge racist experiences. Through this, Call- Cummings et al. (2017, p. 572) denote how teachers claim “the sole power to identify racism”. Indeed, Davis (2016) found that black/white and Hispanic/white biracial primary level students who had a white mother who interacted with the white teacher
resulted in “higher teaching ratings” for these biracial students when compared to biracial students who had a non-white mother. From an anti-racist pedagogist stance, teachers can become a central point for modes of resistance. Foucault (1988) reminds us that power is transmutable, malleable and in constant negotiation. When power is expressed in order to dominate, subjugate and marginalise there is always space for subversion insofar as within “a power relation, there is a possibility of resistance” (Foucault, 1988, p. 11). Through the implementation of anti-racist teaching and culturally responsive learning pedagogies there is potential for teachers to grasp a better understanding of the racial, ethnic and cultural structures that situate BME students as ‘other’ and marginal.

The experiences described by the participants suggest that teachers’ play a significant role in the creation of an (anti)racist environment. Enhanced teacher education and curriculum reform can ensure resistance and restructuring of divided, racist education spaces. However, Gore (2003, p. 334) notes how teachers are “constrained […] by the historical construction of pedagogy as, and within, discourses of social regulation” thereby enacting their role as replicators of the dominant cultural and social code. The participants’ experiences highlight how bullying was expressed in order to intimidate or marginalise identities which threatened ‘Irishness’ in terms of non-white skin colour and “raced representations” (Tate, 1997, p. 195). Fixed race representations ultimately lead to minoritisation. However, in relation to this, Pawel offered an interesting and significant understanding of constructs of Irish and ‘non-Irish’ identity. His experience suggests that white skin and EU citizenship is not a guarantee of being accepted as Irish. He described how he was bullied when he started post-primary school as he was new to the language and his peers picked up on his lack of English as a way to “mock” him:

First couple of weeks were hard. I won’t lie to you cause, d’ya know, the language barrier and d’ya know, there were some lads who were always going to make fun of me for that.[…] There would be lads trying to you know, mock me and kind of test me, d’ya know […] who did try and take advantage of my lack of language and they were trying to mock me, d’ya know. (Pawel)

When asked how he dealt with the situation, he explained that he did not turn to his teachers stating that he, “just powered through it and I just you know, kept my head held high”. It wasn’t just their peers’ racist attitudes that participants faced. Some participants described how their teachers could also be demeaning towards them. Awande noted one particular teacher who she felt was aggressive towards her. She believed that it was happening due to the way she was (dis)regarded as ‘non-Irish’. She reflected on her experience with one
particular teacher, “well she was just very aggressive especially when dealing with people that were not Irish, speaking to us in a very demeaning tone”. She contrasted her experience with that of a white South African student in her class:

There was a South African but with our history in South Africa it was different so she was treated more normal whereas I was treated like ok. [...] She just got better treatment than me regarding how she was spoken to, you know, how they were patient with her. (Awande)

Niamh recounted similar tensions with her teachers who she felt were less receptive to her due to her non-Irish background:

Teachers who I felt rejected any kind of, not necessarily relationship with me, but were not as open to the fact that they had me in their class or open to being considerate to any of the sensitivities that you might have to have when you have a student from a different country in your class. (Niamh)

Overall, these participants described instances of racist bullying from their peers and aggressive and insensitive demeanours from their teachers. Previous research in Ireland has identified racist discrimination as a common experience for BME students (Devine, 2005; Devine, Kenny and Macneela 2008; Devine, 2009; Gilligan, 2010; Kitching, 2011; Kitching, O’Brien, Long, Conway, Murphy and Hall, 2015; Lynch and Lodge, 2002; Smyth, Darmody, McGinnity and Byrne, 2009). Despite on-going evidence of racist bullying in Irish primary and post-primary school environments, Devine (2005) found that teachers did not perceive racism to be issue within their schools in contrast with the levels of racist bullying reported by their BME students. Indeed, this disconnect was noted by the participants who described how their teachers were unable to engage with the issue of racist hostility and differentiate it from other forms of bullying. They cited frustration at their teachers’ inability to effectively deal with racism in the school environment seemingly aware as to how their teachers othered and whitewashed their experiences.

Additionally, some participants also stated that their teachers were the aggressors and bullies. This may be due to the manner whereby white teachers construct and perceptive BME identity through racist stereotyping and exoticisation (Devine, 2005). This may be perpetuated by a continued dismissal and/or lack of understanding for Irish teachers as to how racial and cultural dynamics underpin interactions within their classrooms and how instances of cultural and racial dominance is enacted and enforced. Bhopal and Rhamie (2014) claim that white teachers are aware of their racial privilege yet remain unable to challenge such
privilege. Rather, it has been suggested that white teachers continue to perpetuate cultural and racial dominance through ‘white talk’ (Smith and Lander, 2012) in the teaching and learning environment. Notably, participants considered the racist bullying from their peers as a reflection, not on their peers, but on the (in)action of their teachers. There is evidence from the participants to suggest that they were aware of the significant role teachers’ play in addressing power relations and racial and cultural friction within the schooling space. As Delpit (2003) notes, teachers can enact either an oppressive or emancipatory stance. There is a continued need for teachers to be critically reflexive in terms of the challenges faced in racialised learning environments:

What are we educators to do? We must first decide upon which perspective from which to view the situation. We can continue to view diversity as a problem, attempting to force all differences into standardised boxes or we can recognise that diversity of thought, language, and worldview in our classrooms cannot only provide an exciting educational setting, but can also prepare our children for the richness of living in an increasingly diverse national community. (Delpit, 2003, p. 1)

Through the use and implementation of anti-racist and culturally responsive pedagogies, teachers have the potential to engage silenced and marginalised voices and identities in a manner which understands that “current calls for “alternative pedagogies”, “inclusive curriculum” and “representative school environments” must be understood as challenges to the hegemonic Euro-cantered norms, values and ideas” (Sefa Dei, 1996, p. 22). Haig-Brown (1995) calls on teachers to embrace the divides in their classrooms:

By acknowledging opposition, by allowing and encouraging the articulation of personal and cultural struggles in the classroom, teachers and administrators, and curriculum developers can provide an opportunity for the legitimation of these experiences: it is no longer possible, with impunity, to limit the expression of contradictions defines solely by the teacher. (Haig-Brown, 1995, p. 254)

Additionally, increased support and training for teachers has been noted as key to dealing with such issues in Irish primary and post-primary schooling (Eurydice, 2004; INTO, 2006; Lynch et al., 2004; NCCA, 2005). However, Lynch et al. (2004, p. 3) have suggested that inclusivity is broadly missing in terms of “curriculum, modes of assessment and pedagogical and organisational practice”. In relation to the Department of Education and Science’s 2005 and 2006 primary and post-primary guidelines on intercultural education, the Irish National Teachers’ Organisation (INTO) (2006, p. 1) referred to the limited insight as to how such recommendations could and should be implemented in terms of integrating diverse cultures and adopting a “whole school approach”. This oversight is reflective of the Irish neoliberal states’ branding of interculturalism (Bryan, 2008, 2010; Robinson, 2012) which produces
reports and recommendations without committing to the structural transformations that need to occur in order to ensure successful integration outcomes.

5.4 ‘Can you speak English?’ Multilingual Identities and Experiences

Many participants had a bi/multilingual identity. While many of the participants had more than one non-English language, they were required to express themselves solely in English in the primary and post-primary teaching and learning environment. Participants were also regarded as somewhat academically impaired if they did not have English as their first language. Despite undergoing and passing an aptitude test, Awande’s first memory of entering post-primary school was her teachers assuming that she could not speak English. She noted how “the first question they asked me was, where are you from? Can you speak English? Do you understand the words that are coming out of my mouth?” Despite being proficient, she described how there was an assumption that she had difficulty communicating in English. When asked how this assumption made her feel, she noted that she regarded it as annoying and patronising but something which happened to “different people” stating that “it got annoying but I understood where they were coming from though because they weren’t used to different people like me but for me it was patronising”. Despite many participants’ ability and proficiency with the English language, some continued to be regarded as linguistically deficient. Despite being fluent in English, Niamh was sent to a resource teacher as there was an assumption that she could not speak English and would need academic support. She described her interaction with the resource teacher:

There were no words I did not understand, there was no lack of understanding and she was like ‘why did you have to come and see me?’ And I was like ‘I don’t know’. (Niamh)

In contrast, Adelina recounted the difficulty dealing with the pressure to learn English. There was a need for her to pick up the English language “really quick”:

It was hard because of the language, like I spoke Portuguese for half of my life, Portuguese and French and a bit of Nganguela so having to introduce another language again was a bit difficult for me but yeah I picked up English really quick. (Adelina)

Adelina further reflected on the experience of not having English as a first language stating that she wasn’t “exactly bullied because you don’t speak English but they wouldn’t get why you don’t speak English”. While she wasn’t ‘exactly’ bullied, it would seem that her lack of

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40 Quote from Awande a South African Irish citizen
English was noted by her white, Irish peers as a way to distinguish her. As we can see from the above, notions of epistemological and cultural deficiency are placed on “black English” (Ball and Lardner, 1997, p. 472) leading to the marginalisation and dismissal of black voice in the learning environment as, “speakers of African [American] English are often perceived to be slow learners or uneducable; their speech is often considered to be unsystematic and in need of constant correction”. Ball et al. (1997, p. 482) refer to the correction of black voice by white teachers as a “discourse of control” whereby black identity and expression must be regulated and disciplined by white neocolonial dictions. In addition, Azli’s experience provided insight to the diverse, multilingual exchange that may be taking place in primary and post-primary school spaces in Ireland. Born in Ireland with Pakistani heritage, Azli described how he learnt Urdu and Punjabi from fellow students who moved from Pakistan and started in his school (re)affirming a link to his heritage and bicultural identity. He also taught English to these newcomer students in an informal capacity after school. Azli’s experience suggests that there are informal learning spaces in primary and post-primary schools as diverse student bodies share their knowledge and cultural background particularly in the case of language:

My friends actually moved over to Ireland when I was 6 or 7 so you know they wouldn’t have English […] so speaking to them on a daily basis during school, after school, they got to learn English off us, we got to learn the language off them and then we were all fluent in both languages. (Azli)

Pawel’s experience in post-primary school further suggests the creation of informal learning spaces. He described how he took students who had moved to Ireland from Poland under his wing as they arrived in post-primary school. He reflected on the way he became an informal teacher as he helped newly arrived Polish students adjust to a new learning system “helping them with their homework and stuff like that because some of them wouldn’t have the language”. This stemmed from his experience of being the first Polish student in his post-primary school which led him to take on a mentor role:

So when I was in 3rd year and then in 5th year more kind of kids started coming in so they obviously had me as a student to look up to. I was always there to help them, the language or whatever else but I was the first one there so there was nobody there to help me. (Pawel)

Pawel and Azli’s experience of creating informal teaching and learning spaces with their bi/multilingual peers suggests that there was a level of support needed by these students which was not provided by the system. Such support was needed as the English monolingual environment of Irish primary and post-primary schools offers limited formal space for
bi/multilingual expression. Rather, BME students who do not have English as their first language are regarded as “peripheral and problematic” (Nowlan, 2008, p. 262) as they challenge the hegemonic English speaking learning environment. This is interesting in the case of Uzoma whose father attempted to enrol him in a Gaelscoil41. However, the Gaelscoil suggested in a manner that he described as unwelcoming, that it would be better for him to go to the English speaking school. This experience “really affected” him as he felt that he was being denied the opportunity to learn the language of the state. He felt excluded from having the opportunity to learn the Gaelic language which is something he may have thought would help him integrate and be accepted as Irish:

   “They told us to go next door that it wouldn’t suit. That’s what they said, that it would be better for me not to be in the Gaelscoil and that really affected me, […] because my thinking of it is why are you essentially denying me the opportunity to learn the language of the state I’m living in.” (Uzoma)

This is comparable to Devine’s (2009, p. 530) study which noted the conflict that occurred for white students when they heard their BME peers begin to speak the Irish language as it “challenged normative understandings of what being ‘Irish’ meant […] potentially subverting the positioning of the migrant child as ethnic ‘other’”. For students like Idai, being proficient in the English language was important. She reflected on her childhood education in Zimbabwe noting that “from crèche and stuff we had to learn English”. Despite being born in Zimbabwe and having Ndebele as her native language, she learnt English from an early age in Africa as it was something she “had to learn”. She believed this helped her integrate to the Irish education system. She described how she entered primary school in Ireland with proficient English noting that “it was ok because when I came I already spoke English so there wasn’t that much difference”.

Indeed, there is a demand for integration through “English only” (Macedo and Bartolomé, 2014. P.25). Consequently, proficiency in the English language has been continuously cited as a social and academic barrier for BME students in Irish primary and post-primary schooling as the system enforces linguistic homogeneity (Darmody, 2011; Darmody, Byrne and McGinnity 2014; Forum Polonia, 2014; Lynch et al., 2002). Enforced linguistic homogeneity was problematic for the participants who had a bi/multilingual identity. These participants described the need to adjust to the English language as a way to integrate into the

41 Gaelscoil is the term for primary and post-primary schools that teach through the medium of the Irish language
monolingual learning and social environment of their schools. Prior Irish studies have identified the way BME students are regarded as having literacy difficulties and/or being academically deficient due to their bilingual or multilingual identity impacting on their academic attainment within the system (Darmody, 2011; Darmody, et al., 2014; Forum Polonia, 2014). There is a need to counteract the dominance of English monolingualism and linguistic imperialism which silences and others multilingual voice through the enforcement of mono integration via the English language (Macedo, et al., 2014). As Freire (2003, p. 358) notes, “language is culture. Language is the mediating force of knowledge; but it is also knowledge itself”. Through the enforced linguistic assimilation and the homogenisation of multilingual expression experienced by the participants’, BME knowledge is silenced, marginalised and potentially erased. Bartolomé, (2003, pp. 408–4111) notes how the underachievement of linguistic minorities stems “from the lack of cognitively, culturally, and/or linguistically appropriate teaching methods” which ultimately leads to “cultural and linguistic eradication”. Through the demand to assimilate to the English language and the silencing of their non-English cultural and linguistic identity, the participants’ experiences can be framed in the words of Memmi (1967) who notes the conflict in multilingual identities whereby:

Possession of two languages is not merely a matter of having two tools, but actually means participation in two physical and cultural realms. Here, the two worlds symbolised and conveyed by the two tongues are in conflict; they are those of the coloniser and the colonised. (Memmi, 1967, p. 107)

In an attempt to decolonise the educational space, culturally responsive pedagogy addresses the need to “recognise and utilise the students’ culture and language in instruction” (Brown and Forde, 2007, p. 66) in order to juxtapose the dominance of linguistic hierarchies which situates one voice above another. Decolonial pedagogy challenges current structures of multicultural schooling which promotes monolingual integration whereby “the underlying assumption is that the celebration of other cultures will take place in English only” (Macedo et al., 2014, p. 25). Bilingual teaching assistants in a UK primary classroom were able to draw on a rich variety of knowledge from bilingual students (Martin-Jones and Saxena, 2003). This allowed bilingual identity to be fostered and contribute to the learning environment (Martin-Jones et al., 2003). Incorporation of bi/multilingualisms in the Irish education system will undoubtedly create additional challenges for under resourced teachers, yet failure to counteract the subjugation, silencing and othering enforced by the demand for English monolingualism will further ingrain societal and cultural repercussions.
5.5 Preparing for the Leaving Certificate and HE Progression

Issues relating to the deficit model were evident in some of the participants’ post-primary experiences. These participants recalled the lack of encouragement and preparedness they received from their teachers with regard to the Leaving Certificate (LC) which impacted on their LC preparation and progression to HE. Participants like Iana were positioned on differing pathways to HE based on assumptions regarding their English speaking proficiency and academic ability. Iana was encouraged to undertake the LC Applied programme, which does not allow direct progression to HE, due to concerns regarding her standard of English as, “the teachers’, guidance counsellors and talking to people, they said Leaving Cert Applied is the best option I can master so I went for it”. Her teachers’ and guidance counsellors’ low expectations led her to overwork to prove her ability. During her LC preparation she described the way she would complete her coursework before it was due:

I need to do excellent, work hard all the time. The teachers even gave us their exam papers, the booklets, all the exam papers and me and the other girls we would finish the whole thing before it was due and they would give us another one. (Iana)

Rather than encouraging her to study, she noted how her teachers commented that she should take a break; “I got a lot of comments from my teachers ‘you’ll be fine’, ‘don’t be worrying’, ‘you’re always worrying’, ‘you should actually take some time off’ they would say”. Her experience compares to Niamh who noted how her teachers were “expecting me to be poor academically”. She believed that such misconceptions were due to the fact that she had schooling experience in Africa. She further noted how she had been actively discouraged from progressing to HE:

Of course there were all these misconceptions about the fact that I came from Africa, the fact that I spoke English and that it was very good. That seemed to kind of shake people up a little bit because they were expecting me to be just a certain way and I wasn’t any of those ways. I was sort of breaking down all those stereotypes. […] Nobody pushed me to go to college. In fact I actually had a conversation where I was told ‘it’s fine, you don’t have to do that’, ‘just whatever’ and I was like ‘no, no, no, I want to do this’. (Niamh)

Uzoma claimed that he had never been made aware of the importance of the LC. Speaking of his teachers he stated that “we weren’t really encouraged to be honest with you. We were just kind of seen as “those guys won’t make it if you know what I mean”. It was only when he reached HE that he reflected on the lack of encouragement he received:

I never really thought about it until I went to college and I started thinking they thought I wouldn’t do something with my life and here I am do you know, so. […]
There wasn’t a big drive to get us somewhere. [...] In Leaving Cert I was given the impression that I couldn’t amount to anything. (Úzoma)

The Golem and Pygmalion effect (Babad, Jacinto and Rosenthal, 1982) has been cited in schooling discourse to explain the (under)achievement rates of minority and disadvantaged groups in the teaching and learning environment (Babad, Jacinto, and Rosenthal 2011; Jussim, Eccles and Madon, 1996; López, 2017; McLeod, 1995; Riley and Ungerleider, 2012). This effect has been used to denote the bias and prejudices teachers place on BME identity “from a position of power” (López, 2017, p. 132) whereby BME academic achievement can be directly linked to teacher expectations of failure or success. In terms of the Golem and Pygmalion effect, studies highlight how teacher expectations of BME students are generally linked to failure. Mckow and Weinstein (2002, p. 180) have described how the schooling system has exasperated the achievement gap between black and white student identities through “favouring nonstigmatised groups” and the penalisation of the racial and ethnic other. López’s (2017) analysis of the Golem and Pygmalion effect on teacher perceptions of immigrant students, notes how oppressive epistemologies perpetuated by teacher bias and prejudice are maintained via the ethos of a school which undervalues the socio-cultural value of non-Western lingualisms, cultures and the prior schooling experience that migrant students bring with them from their native country. Additionally, participants’ accounts suggest that there was limited structural support for the BME identity. Adelina felt that the onus was on her to prepare herself for HE with limited advice and support from her teachers describing her journey to HE as a “fight”:

We didn’t really get much advice when it came to what we could do, what we could choose. Everything was kind of on us. I remember I wanted to do a different course and obviously I didn’t get that course so, I had to do everything by myself and fight for this course that I’ve been doing for 3 years. (Adelina)

The deficit perceptions that the participants’ encountered and the lack of support and encouragement they received in terms of progressing to HE is unsurprising. Racial stereotypes and prejudices are formed and (re)produced by the schooling system through the bias that teachers (in)advertently inhabit. Cultural deprivation is regarded as the reasoning behind BME scholastic underachievement rather than the role of white, Euro-Western teaching and institutional practices which maintain differential outcomes based on racial preference. Murray and Jackson (1983, p. 283) found that black school underachievement could be analysed using “the conditioned failure model” whereby white student ability is regarded as “inherent” in contrast to the success of black students who are deemed to succeed.
through “luck and effort”. This suggests that BME students are regarded as less intelligent than their white peers. This compares to a US study which found that African American students are less likely to be regarded as “gifted” (Sberna and Moras, 2009, p. 29) in comparison to their white peers. Furthermore, teachers confided that they avoided interaction with their black students to the point where they avoided eye contact (Sberna et al., 2009). Additionally, it was found that some teachers did not learn the names of their black students unless they were enforcing discipline. In previous research (Anderson, 2016; Ball et al., 1997; Martinez, 2010; Sberna et al., 2009; Zirkel, 2005), it is noteworthy how the interaction between white teachers and BME students occurs most frequently in instances of discipline and penalisation rather than interaction which promotes or fosters academic achievement. This has been referred to as teachers’ roles in the reproduction and enforcement of an “epistemology of oppression” (Anderson, 2016, p. 47).

In response, students of colour internalise deficit assumptions and prejudices that their teachers impose on them as they struggle to define themselves beyond the labels and expectations of a racialised schooling system (Zirkel, 2005). As a consequence of this, Mac an Ghaill (1988) found that the racialised teaching expectations for black students leads to the creation of black subculture in schools. Emergence of subculture can be seem as both resistance and protection from marginalisation and exclusion (Keane, 2011) enforced by cultural and structural segregation. This links to a study by Martinez (2010, p. 59) where Chicano students reflected on their schooling experience and the need to “act white” in order to succeed. It was found that Chicano students who ‘acted white’ performed better within the school environment (Martinez, 2010). In terms of this, there is a need to challenge the way BME students have to compromise their ethnic and cultural identity in order to “receive the rewards and benefits of education” (Martinez, 2010, p. 62). In the Irish context, Ledwith et al. (2013) found an emerging achievement gap between ‘migrants’ and their Irish peers in terms of academic attainment impacting on progression to HE. Alongside teacher influence, intercultural peer to peer interaction is found to promote or inhibit BME attainment rates (Grantham and Whiting, 2008; Fordham and Ogbru, 1986). Van Ewijk and Sleegers (2010, p. 241) note that “tensions between races may interfere with learning”. In response, Zirkel (2005, p. 119) states how “achievable” it is to incorporate BME identity into the schooling system through the implementation of anti-racist pedagogies and the incorporation of BME epistemologies. Pedagogical and ontological resources are available to educators and
schooling authorities that can help deconstruct racially divisive and oppressive schooling structures.

Additionally, the participants’ non-encouragement to progress to HE may demonstrate the way they were marginalised, side-lined and positioned as ‘non-Irish’ so that they could not inhabit the socio-cultural capital of white, middle-class Irish identity. In terms of Bourdieu’s theory of cultural reproduction, there is an understanding that the education system functions as a means to maintain and perpetuate class inequalities through cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1967, 1974, 1977, 1981, 1990; Sullivan, 2002). The participants may be situated in what Bourdieu (1977, p. 495) refers to as the “culturally unflavoured” which legitimises their exclusion and marginalisation in the views and accepted norms of the dominant cultural class whereby “the negative predispositions towards the school which result in the self-elimination of most children from the most culturally unfavoured classes and sections of a class must be understood as an anticipation, based upon the unconscious estimation of the objective probabilities of success possessed by the whole category, of the sanctions objectively reserved by the school for those classes or sections of a class deprived of cultural capital” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 495). Conversely, Ado and Akoni were two participants who felt that they were actively encouraged to progress to HE despite their status as non-nationals. As Akoni remarked:

They definitely pushed us. They gave us a guide to the Leaving Cert and things like that so they obviously helped us and the career guidance teacher, we could go to him and tell him like different courses available and where you could do it. It was very important. (Akoni)

Similarly Ado felt as though his teachers encouraged him to progress to HE. However, in Ado’s case he stated that it was his own self-motivation that helped him prepare for the LC rather than his teachers encouragement:

Yes, I was encouraged, yeah but in a way it never mattered to me because I always knew, there’s nothing nobody can tell me then and now that would make me say, ‘no I don’t want to go to college’. (Ado)

Despite his Nigerian citizenship status, Akoni progressed to HE after his LC as he was eligible for free fees under the Free Fees Initiative. Ado did not progress to HE after the LC.

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42 The Free Fees Initiative is tuition fees paid to HEIs by the Department of Education and Skills on behalf of Irish/EU students.
as he was in Direct Provision at the time of his post-primary schooling and liable to pay international student fees. This suggests that encouragement at post-primary level to attain and progress to HE does not guarantee equity of access as Ado’s status as an asylum seeker in Direct Provision prevented him from progressing directly from post-primary schooling to HE. The differential outcome for students in Direct Provision is apparent. Regardless of encouragement to progress to HE at post-primary level, the participant placed in Direct Provision had to find an alternative pathway to HE. In recalling these experiences, participants themselves acknowledged the role that primary and post-primary schooling plays in the successful progression to HE. Additionally, the contrast between Ado and Akoni’s experience suggests that despite the best efforts of post-primary schools to foster an encouraging and supportive environment, the ability of Ado and Akoni to progress to HE was ultimately determined by their status in the immigration system.

5.6 Conclusion

The findings in this chapter suggest that BME identity is formed and enforced as distinctly ‘non-Irish’ in Irish primary and post-primary schools. Most notably, this is evident in instances where the participants had a bi/multiracial identity, Irish citizenship and/or self-identified as Irish. English monolingualism and white skin were precursors to claiming an Irish identity. This led to identity crises for multiracial and multilingual participants who struggled to define themselves within the narrow lens of what constitutes ‘Irishness’. This led some participants to emphasise that they had a ‘normal’ schooling experience suggesting resistance to an ‘abnormal’ experience that they may be associated with. Participants who recounted experiences of racist bullying reflected on the whitewashing and inaction of their teachers in dealing effectively with racism in the school environment. Teachers, themselves were also found to be aggressive and dismissive to some participants and were perceived as giving preferential treatment to white students.

Another notable form of teacher dismissal and discrimination occurred for participants who had a bi/multilingual identity. Participants recounted experiences of being patronised, taken out of class to go to the resource teacher and being streamed through the LC Applied programme. There is further evidence to suggest that bi/multilingual identities are generating informal learning spaces within primary and post-primary spaces. Participants recounted learning languages from each other and the way they became informal teachers as they helped their bi/multilingual peers adjust to the Irish schooling system. While this can be read
as an example of how cultural and linguistic sharing takes place in multicultural spaces, there is also evidence to suggest that these informal learning spaces were formed due to a lack of support by the schooling system in terms of integrating bi/multilingual identity. Participants also reflected on the lack of encouragement they received in preparing for the LC. They described instances of being actively discouraged from progressing to HE and dealing with the CAO system with limited support. In the case where participants were encouraged to progress to HE, citizenship status impeded progression suggesting that regardless of teacher support. This highlights how the ability to progress to Irish HE is dependent on citizenship status, an issue which is examined in greater detail in the next chapter.
Chapter Six: Motivations and Barriers in the Progression to Irish Higher Education for Black and Minority Ethnic Students

6.1 Introduction
There are two sections in this chapter. The first examines the motivational factors in the progression to Higher Education (HE) for the participants in this study. Motivational factors included (i) familial and cultural expectations, (ii) increasing socio-cultural capital and (iii) improving employability prospects and contributing to social change. The second section highlights barriers in the progression to HE for the participants who were resident in Ireland awaiting Irish citizenship. Issues included (i) financial barriers (ii) racial labelling and (iii) refused recognition of non-Western qualifications.

6.2 Motivational Factors in the Progression to HE for BME Students in Ireland

6.2.1 Familial and Cultural Expectations
Cultural norms tied in with familial expectations played a significant role in terms of progression to HE for all participants. Participants described how their culture(s) viewed academic attainment as a form of cultural capital leading to increased social mobility. As Ado remarked “without education you can’t really do anything, like, what can you do?” The participants were clear that education was highly regarded and emphasised in their families. As Afiba noted, “from when we were young we’ve always believed in education. My parents and our culture, generally, really, really cherish education and believe in education a lot”. Asali explained how her family directly influenced her progression to HE:

My sisters and everything, they are all very well educated. We’re getting our education. [...] I belong to a family where even my grandmother was a doctor. (Asali)

In such a family context it is clear to see why HE progression was expected of Asali. It is noteworthy how she emphasised that her sisters and grandmother were educated. Coming from a Muslim background, she may have felt the need to dispel assumptions that Muslim women are not encouraged to academically attain stating that she came from “a very progressive family with a very modern mind-set”. Similarly, Aishia described how her aspiration to progress to HE stemmed from her early childhood as her mother was a teacher:

I think it also comes from the fact that my mother was a teacher, always books, from when I was young she used to read to me, she used to teach English, always with books. (Aishia)
Gender was not a factor in the pool of participants insofar as both sexes faced the familial pressure and expectation of achieving academically and progressing to HE. Nehad described the pressure he was under from his father to achieve academically. Yet he voiced this as being prevalent among “people from the sub-continent” stating that:

Their dads are very strict on that point I can tell you for certain. Dads would always pressure, even since you were 8. Once I turned from 7 that pressure was there to do well at school so I never lacked in the academic field, no, I always stuck to it. (Nehad)

He further described how this pressure and expectation played out in terms of his academic work explaining how, “my dad was always on top of it, you know, you got a C here, a B here, that’s not good you gotta get an A”. It is notable that he spoke in the plural, describing how “dads” from countries such as India, Pakistan and Malaysia as well as Asian countries “pressure” their children to academically achieve suggesting that familial expectations tied to broader cultural expectations. Feyisetan described the “stigma” attached to HE progression in Nigeria and the way families made it their priority to educate their children regardless of the financial burden and strain:

It’s a kind of, I say stigma if you don’t go to third level. No matter how poor your parents are in Nigeria they will make it a duty, compulsory, to get their children to university. Their parents might not even be educated but they want their children to go to university. It’s a big thing in Nigeria so that’s why I say 80% of us here are graduates even with master’s level. (Feyisetan)

Overall, familial and broader cultural values and expectations played a significant role in the aspirations of the participants to aspire to HE irrespective of ethno-cultural background. This relates to Bourdieu (1986, p. 15) as “scholastic yield from education action depends on the cultural capital previously invested by the family”. UK black and minority ethnic (BME) students are influenced by their parents and familial choices in terms of choosing what course to study (Dhanda, 2009). In a study examining UK BME students’ progression to science based courses, it was found that UK BME students, particularly those of Asian ethnicity, have high aspirations to progress to HE science courses due to familial expectations. However, these high aspirations contrasted with low progression to HE and low academic attainment once access to HE had been secured (Dewitt, Archer, Osborne, Dillion, Willis and Wong, 2011). Reay (1998) notes how UK BME aspiration to progress to HE is influenced by familial choice, whereby HE attainment is regarded as a way to improve or secure class positioning. Familial and cultural expectations are noteworthy insofar as Western HE has historically been an exclusively white cultural setting (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2007).
In contrast to the segregationist foundations of HE, an emerging trend is occurring as UK and US BME populations are becoming, in some instances, overrepresented in comparison to their white peers within HE (ENT, 2012; HEFCE, 2016; Noden Shiner and Modood 2014b; Perna, 2016). As Irish HE reports a rise in the number of students identifying as BME (HEA, 2015; 2016), there is potential insight in terms of examining why such populations aspire to HE, a space which historically excluded and segregated BME identity.

6.2.2 Increasing Socio-Cultural Capital

For participants in this study who arrived in Ireland as refugees, a HE qualification was regarded as a ‘passport’ out of the poverty and the instability of war they faced in their native countries. These participants described how their country of origin was classified as ‘third world’ and reflected on the way HE attainment was a way to overcome the stigmatisation of this neocolonial label (Spivak, 1985). Ado was resistant and disparaging of the concept, ‘third world’. Yet, he still perceived education to be ‘key’ for someone from this background as he remarked, “we all know that education is the key especially for somebody coming from a ‘third world’ country as people would call it”. In relation to this, Azli seemed aware of how education was a bridge to Western social mobility beyond the ‘third world’. Drawing on his Pakistani background he noted:

Most of the Pakistani people, their parents wouldn’t be educated. They’d be from farming backgrounds or whatever who came over to work as labourers. Most of the parents would know how hard it is to work as a labourer they would very, very strongly encourage the kids to get an education. (Azli)

From this, we can see how educational attainment and progression to HE is undertaken as a mode of social mobility in an attempt to gain access to the ‘developed’ Western world. However, for participants like Paddy who grew up in Ireland, there was also a need to increase his socio-cultural capital. He described how there was an unspoken expectation that he would progress to HE as education had been a “passport” out of poverty for his father:

My father […] always saw education as a passport out of, you know, working class life or a life where you don’t have much and for him that was his way of getting out of a poor Irish background in Dublin, Galway and Birmingham where he grew up. (Paddy)

The notion of HE qualifications as a ‘passport’ was also expressed by participants who saw education as an escape route from war and conflict. For participants like Afiba who arrived in Ireland as an asylum seeker, a HE qualification was regarded in his culture as an escape route from the displacement and economic insecurity that war brings:
There’s a common saying in our language that the greatest task that any child can ever have from his or her parents is education because that is what really belongs to you and that is something that nothing can take away from you. You can’t lose it. Once you have your certificates it’s forever, paper gets burnt, or damaged or destroyed, it doesn’t take away your knowledge. So the knowledge that you acquire is what you can actually claim to be your own no matter what your parents might leave for you as inheritance. It can be taken away, you can lose all your financial security […] but education is like a back door so if there’s any war that is coming to your house you can have an escape route. (Afiba)

Similarly, Iana explained that her family could not leave Somalia due to conflict and financial restrictions. There was an opportunity for one person from her family to leave and she was selected. She noted how her family chose her as she was seen as the most likely to pursue education and progress to HE. She reflected on this decision which was made for her and the way she accepted it as an opportunity for a better life:

I asked ‘why do you think I should go?’ and they said it was because I was after education. I said I would do it and always do my work as best I could. And she [mother] said […] ‘I hope you can manage a better life’. So I decided to go. (Iana)

In this manner, participants who arrived in Ireland displaced as refugees and asylum seekers placed a symbolic value on a HE qualification, regarding it as pathway to freedom and self-autonomy rather than in strictly academic terms. Having overcome war and displacement, a HE qualification was viewed as something which could never be taken from them and a pathway to a more secure, peaceful life. Iana also felt the need to prove her presence in Ireland by progressing to HE after her LC, stating “I left school, the paper was in my pocket. […] I’ve achieved something, to actually prove my presence in Ireland”. As with Iana, Niamh also saw progression to HE as a way to prove her presence in Ireland as she felt “talked down to” and viewed as “beneath”. Progression to HE became a way for her “to be seen as an equal in Irish society” suggesting that she perceived herself to be positioned as less than equal to her white, Irish peers. In this respect, education, and in particular HE, was regarded as an equaliser:

I think I pushed myself which I see now goes back to wanting to prove myself because I felt for so many years talked down to by certain Irish people. I think that I always felt in order to not be talked down to or to be viewed in some way as beneath I needed […] to do very well, extra well just to be seen as an equal in Irish society. (Niamh)

Participants who described ‘third world’ identities, working class backgrounds and immigrant status sought a HE qualification as a ‘passport’ beyond such experiences, using HE as way to increase socio-cultural capital. This aligns to the Bourdieusian (1967, 1974, 1977, 1981,
1990) assertion that education acts as a social and cultural reproducer of the prevailing order insofar as “educational credentials are a major mechanism of social reproduction in advanced capitalist societies” (Sullivan, 2002, p. 154). In relation to this, the current (over)emphasis on combative league tables highlights how the market has been successful in exerting “pressure on universities to comply with consumer demand” (Naidoo, 2003, p. 250). Participants regarded a HE qualification as a ‘passport’ out of the ‘third world’. The presence of these participants bridging links from the ‘third world’ to the ‘developed world’ through the mechanism of HE is significant. However, for participants who aspire to HE in order to secure self-autonomy, equity and increased social mobility, they encounter a HE space that adheres to the neoliberal narrative of the dominant politico-economic groups who have carved up education into “their own terrain—the terrain of traditionalism, standardisation, productivity, marketisation, and economic needs” (Apple, 2006, p. 22). Indeed, in terms of the neoliberal provision of HE as a consumer good, BME students have been found to engage with HE as a way to increase “social mobility” (Noden et al., 2014b, p. 15). This correlates with a number of studies which found that BME groups engage with HE to increase socio-cultural capital via employment from a HE qualification (Archer, 2000; Beck, 2006; Conner, Tyers, Modood, and Hillage, 2004; Fitzgerald, Finch and Nove, 2000; Keane, 2016; Rhamie and Hallam, 2002; Strand, 2007; Torgerson, Gorard, Low, Ainsworth, See, and Wright, 2008).

However, HE may be perpetuating class stratifications. UK BME cohorts remain underrepresented in elite and selective Russell Group \(^{43}\) HE institutions (Boliver, 2013, 2015; Pilkington, 2015). Despite, BME students’ overrepresentation in UK HE, 60 % of BME cohorts are found in the ‘new’ university which is disregarded as less prestigious and delivering lower-quality graduates (Boliver, 2014). Despite attempts at improving the participation rates of UK BME groups in HE, structural barriers remain an issue. In the UK, black ethnic groups attend tertiary and adult colleges in greater proportion to other ethnic groups (Magadi, Beckhelling, Phung, Chzhen, France and Harvey, 2007). In the US affirmative action \(^{44}\) has been implemented to deal with the issue of BME (under)representation in US HE. Affirmative action has improved progression to HE for US BME students and in the last ten years. Hispanic and African American undergraduates have increased and are overrepresented in US HE while the enrolment rates of white Americans

\(^{43}\) The Russell Group refers to the most prestigious and elite universities in the UK

\(^{44}\) Affirmative action is a policy mandate to ensure inclusion and representation of disadvantaged and minoritised groups in areas such as education
has declined (Perna, 2016). Despite affirmative action, black and Latino’s enrolment in elite, Ivy League\textsuperscript{45} colleges has declined when compared to the rates of admission for white and Asian American students (Posselt, Arbor, Jaquette, Bielby and Bastedo, 2012). Additionally, despite the success of affirmative action in increasing BME presence in US HE, African Americans and Hispanics, graduate at a far higher proportion with an associate degree which is a step away from a bachelor’s degree in comparison to their white peers (US Department of Education, 2012). In the UK black students are 50% more likely to drop out of university when compared to their ethnic minority and white peers (Social Market Foundation, 2017). Evidence of BME students withdrawing from HE at a higher rate than their white peers compares to prior research by Dhanda (2009), HEFCE (2016) and Steele (1999). Issues relating to financial difficulties, lack of institutional support, isolation and lack of BME representation have contributed to BME students dropping out of HE prior to graduation (Connor, et. al, 2004; Dhanda, 2009; HEFCE, 2016; Smith, 2017; Steele, 1999). Crozier, Burke and Archer (2016) suggest that as HE becomes an increasingly competitive space due to the need to gain employment via a HE qualification, white students are becoming increasingly unsettled by the presence of their BME peers. Due to the increased representation of BME students in HE, white students may fear that the “symbolic and exchange value of their HE capital” (Crozier et al., 2016, p. 50) will be reduced if shared by their BME peers. It is this unsettlement and competiveness that may encourage white students to perpetuate questions relating to ‘belonging’ as they situate their BME peers as being in the “wrong place” (Crozier et al., 2016, p. 47).

6.2.3 Improving Employability Prospects and Contributing to Social Change

All participants noted the socio-economic capital gained through a HE qualification and its important role in the neocolonial labour market. Nehad explained why he chose to progress to HE and study medicine emphasising his employment focus. In this manner, his progression to HE and the area of study he chose was linked specifically to employability in a global market:

I’m going to be honest. It was kind of more technical. I looked at it like what would it give me. It started off as a selfish thing, I’ll be honest. Medicine is probably the best field to go into because I will be able to work anywhere in the world, I’ll always have a job. (Nehad)

\textsuperscript{45} The Ivy League is a group of the most elite and selective universities in the US
As with Nehad, increasing employability prospects was a key motivator for Akoni to progress to HE as he wanted to “get a good degree and get a good job”. Additionally, some participants recognised that Irish HE was situated within a broader globalised, Western educational framework with strong links to the global marketplace and increased employability prospects. For example, Yasen remarked how he was encouraged to study in Ireland as, “we are kinda looking at the UK or Ireland and also Europe and the US to grow with their economies in medicine, law”.

Participants seemed aware of the role of HE in securing access to the labour market. UK studies on the progression of BME students to UK HE have highlighted how aspirations to progress to HE are directly linked with improving employability prospects within the current economic system (Strand, 2007; Torgerson, et al., 2008). All participants irrespective of ethnicity, culture, gender, socio-economic background and citizenship status were motivated to progress to HE in order to achieve greater employability opportunities suggesting that “a critical view of a colonial past do not seem to be a ‘luxury’ that many transnational learners can afford” (Gardner-McTaggart, 2016, p. 13). In many ways, these participants’ aspirations echo the assertion that “market discourse promotes a mode of existence, where students seek to ‘have a degree’ rather than ‘be learners’” (Molesworth, Nixon and Scullion, 2009, p. 277). 99% of UK BME students stated that employment opportunities influenced their course choice (Magadi, et al., 2007). In contrast, personal interest rather than employment opportunities tends to guide white students decision making regarding their choice of HE course (Connor et al., 2004). Keane (2016) found that Irish students, including a small number of BME participants who entered HE via an Access programme, were motivated to progress to postgraduate level in order to secure employment opportunities. As the Irish HE space becomes increasingly globalised in line with the demands of the global marketplace, postcolonialism gives insight to the impact globalisation has on the dispersal of culture(s). From a postcolonial perspective, Western culture is defined in terms of capitalistic idealism (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2007; Giroux, 2002) which is reproduced through its education system as:

Postcolonial education was not just disciplinary in the sense that it sought to forge postcolonial subjectivities in relation to new political imperatives and identities. It was also disciplinary in that it extended the modernist, economic imperative of schooling. (Tikly, 2004, p. 189)

46 Access programmes target social and economically disadvantaged groups for inclusion in third level education (see 1.4)
However, the aspirations of the participants to aspire to Western HE as a way to gain access to the neocolonial marketplace is problematic as, “if the South grows on a Western model (based around exploitation and profiteering), it may continue and intensify inequalities and Eurocentrism of the past – and the West” (Gardner-McTaggart, 2016, p. 3). The link between HE and employability can be read as a failing of dominant socio-economic frameworks which have monetised the HE experience as a ‘passport’ to the labour market, with intellectualism, creativity and critical thought being called upon to serve the profit margins of Westernised neocolonial industry and business. It is an education process intrinsically linked to the neoliberal doctrine of student “marketability” (Green, 2013, p. 367). Through limited fault of their own, participants engaging with HE for monetary and symbolic return can be read as a reflection of the current demand of neoliberalism for “economically self-interested subjects” and an education based on an “input–output system which can be reduced to an economic production function” in terms of knowledge capitalism (Lynch, 2006; Tilak, 2008) and the “knowledge economy” (Olssen and Peters, 2005, pp. 314-324).

In contrast to these neoliberal demands, for many participants employability was tied in with the desire to contribute to social change. Resistance was evident in the course choices of participants who engaged with HE as a means to enact social change within their chosen field. Examples include Uzoma who battled with the inadequacy of Ireland’s immigration system and is now undertaking a PhD in immigration law; Iana who qualified in social care and hopes to get a job helping unaccompanied minors in the Irish immigration system due to her own experience of growing up in Direct Provision; Ayoluwa who undertook a Masters in Equality and Social Justice after she was subject to a racial dismissal at work, and Aishia who is undertaking a PhD in Peace Studies after the conflict she experienced in her native country. Similarly, Afiba an asylum seeker to Ireland who gained Irish citizenship, described his decision to undertake an engineering degree due to his desire to contribute to development in Africa and beyond:

I believe there is a lot to be done where I come from as an African, in terms of development. There’s a huge gap in development between this part of the world and Africa. Knowledge of engineering will go a long way in being able to contribute into the development of the undeveloped or the underdeveloped part of the world, not only Africa. (Afiba)

Daran who grew up as a refugee in Germany was motivated to undertake a PhD in Human Rights due to his background, “because of my family history my interest was very much led
towards international law with a specific focus on Human Rights”. When asked to reflect why he chose to undertake a course in Community Youth Work, Kalu regarded it as a way to raise the voices of people who are silenced, marginalised and denied their rights:

So for me this working with people, justice, equality and a fair society […] You see there must be some form of justice and equality within that people must have, their voice must be heard. […] That the voices of people will be heard and that people become part of the solutions, mmm, I think that would be, I suppose that’s what I….that’s what I work for, that’s my aspirations really. (Kalu)

In many ways these participants (un)knowingly regarded their qualification as a form of resistance against structural inequities and deficiencies. In terms of course choice, in the US HE, there is evidence that BME students continue to be underrepresented in the sciences (Ovin and Veazey, 2011). In UK HE, white students have a higher enrolment presence in the social sciences and the humanities in comparison to their BME peers (Magadi et al., 2007). This is comparable to a prior UK study which found that there were double the average of proportions of BME students enrolled in medicine, dentistry, computer science and law when compared to less than 10% enrolled in humanities, art and design, veterinary science and agriculture, suggesting a move towards more vocationally-based subjects for BME students (Connor et al., 2004). In terms of this study, the acquisition of a qualification in a field where the participants had experienced marginalisation or outright discrimination, may have promoted the participants to subvert power-privilege dynamics through the attainment of insider knowledge which could potentially allow them to challenge existing structures and frameworks. From a postcolonial perspective there is potential for resistance against marketed dictates of academic and knowledge capitalism. Shahjahan (2014) reminds us that:

Resistance as subversion evokes resistance from within the ‘cracks’ and ‘inbetween spaces’ of colonial power by undermining colonial authority and colonial knowledge systems. In a similar way, neoliberal HE is full of cracks within which we can contest and appropriate neoliberal authority and discourses, and in turn refuse to buy into neoliberal personhood. These refusals in turn could enable us to collectively mobilise for social change in HE. (Shahjahan, 2014, p. 226)

Indeed, the next section which outlines the experiences of the participants who faced barriers in the progression to HE, highlight Ireland’s neocolonial governance and the need for resistance and contestation against structural discrimination and exclusion.

6.3 Barriers in the Progression to HE for BME Students in Ireland

From the 25 participants, six were residents in Ireland who recounted difficulty progressing to HE. This occurred due to their status as a ‘non-Irish’ citizen. The following examines the
experiences of these six participants and how their progression to HE was impeded by the legal restrictions of the immigration system and citizenship process.

6.3.1 Financial Issues

 Participants living in Direct Provision awaiting Irish citizenship spoke of the difficulties accessing HE. Ado completed his post-primary schooling in Ireland. However, he was unable to directly access HE after his Leaving Certificate (LC) as he was liable to pay international student fees. He described the way he believed the funding authorities purposefully divided him from his Irish peers if his name did not look Irish. Due to a lack of financial support, he eventually progressed to HE when he was accepted into the system via an Access programme. As he was unable to progress directly to HE after his LC he described how he was expected to ‘wait’:

If you’re not from the EU or like you’re not Irish […] let’s say I send my application, my name doesn’t sound like… is like foreign, or they ask you your nationality, they put it aside and then they look at other people’s application like ‘ok, let’s look at the Irish student first’. […] Sometimes you are waiting, we want to go there, education, maybe we are here in Ireland for more than two years, maybe four because at some point, […] you can be kinda, I’m sick of waiting and next year it’s gonna be time to apply and you’re kinda tired then. Not to mention your age keeps going up, up, up. (Ado)

Iana also reflected on the way she was excluded from HE after she completed her LC, stating, “I want to go to college, what’s the point of me sitting for three or four more years?” She completed her LC whilst living in Direct Provision. Despite having the required points to undertake the course of her choice she was unable to progress to HE. As with Ado, Iana’s exclusion was not based on academic inability but rather the constraint of her status in the system as a non-EU student despite being resident in Ireland and Direct Provision for a number of years:

I had my Leaving Cert and I thought I did really well, I could do any course I wanted but no I couldn’t. […] I knew I wasn’t entitled but I still applied to colleges just thinking you know what is the worst thing that could happen, say no?, because I was still in Direct Provision because I wasn’t EU at the time so I wasn’t entitled. (Iana)

Unlike Ado and Iana, Akoni was entitled to free fees despite not being an Irish citizen highlighting the conflicting discrepancies within the system. In this respect, Akoni recognized how class and immigration status interlinked and determined progress to HE:

You look at the experience of the migrants whereas you have other people who are maybe in middle class, their parents are earning money, they can afford college or you have the middle class who just became Irish citizens and they’re entitled to grants, they’re pretty much Irish so, they’re living life. (Akoni)
The manner in which participants were streamed through HE preferentially or non-preferentially is problematic as “the transition to college […] can dismantle perceptions of personal, institutional, and societal inclusion” (Garcia and Tierney, 2011, p. 2745) impacting on successful integration outcomes. This issue is further problematised insofar as the experiences of the “undocumented” attempting to progress to HE has been identified as “understudied” (Garcia et al., 2011, p. 2740) as they are “hardly ever studied in their own right” (Kanno and Varghese, 2010, p. 312) in comparison to ‘other’ cohorts of WP targets (Stevenson and Willott, 2007). Similarly, in the US, it has been noted how the undocumented and those awaiting citizenship face barriers to HE in terms of “financial obstacles, academic preparation, and perceptions of belonging” (Garcia et al., 2011, p. 2739). Additionally, participants reflected on their “interrupted education” (Stevenson et al., 2007, p. 679) due to their citizenship status and an expectation to ‘wait’. Linehan and Hogan (2008, p. 18) further describe the support process for non-EU, ‘migrant’ students attempting to progress to HE within the remits of the Irish immigration system as “wasteful, full of duplication, and demeaning to the student”. Afiba who lived in Direct Provision, described how he had to be “on the dole for nine months” in order to get financial support for HE. His reliance on social welfare further racialised his experience as he described how the system had forced him to become a stereotype that the neocolonial press like to perpetuate of the ‘migrant’ relying on social welfare. Despite not wanting to be on social welfare due to a need to resist prejudicial stereotypes, it was the only way he could secure access to HE:

You can’t access back to education allowance unless you’ve been on the dole for nine months. What if you don’t want to and you still need assistance? There’s no way to go in any way. So then, technically, you have to be starving or you need to be unemployed before you can ever be assisted to access education. (Afiba)

Financial issues also related to participants who resident in Ireland but were not in Direct Provision. Ajeigbe outlined the financial difficulties he faced accessing HE as he had to pay international student fees. This issue was eventually eased when he was accepted within the system as an EU student:

Basically I think most of the problem that students encounter are the fees issue, basically, like myself, personally. […] I am entitled to EU fees because initially I paid, I think it was 15,000. It came down to 11,000. I then applied for EU fees and that was granted so that was when I started paying 6,000. (Ajeigbe)
Kalu described how he is living in Ireland on a tourist visa as he awaits Irish citizenship. He explained how he could only access HE as an international student outlining once again the exploitative fees faced by these participants:

I first met my education as an international student that will just put me straight away into the highest paying student of about 12,000 a semester, so that was my first category. And I had to kind of save up. [...] The problem the college was finding itself in was that visa system. [...] You know that immigration policy. It really does cause a hindrance. (Kalu)

Despite being resident in Ireland and awaiting Irish citizenship, the above participants faced being “structurally locked out” (Gonzales, 2010, p. 479) from the Irish HE system due to the distinctions and categorisations placed on them by the immigration system. Restrictive and excessive fees also hindered progress to HE which has been an on-going issue for non-EU nationals resident in Ireland (Immigrant Council of Ireland, 2008). Non-EU student status increased financial strain for participants in terms of funding their progression to HE. This has been documented in prior Irish research, in particular by O’Byrne (2004, p. 1) who describes the current immigration system and its link to HE provision as an “administrative quagmire” with unclear financial pathways. These participants were denied HE as a public good. This can be regarded as a consequence of increased neoliberalisation which has “financially constrained” the HE ‘sector’ in order to “control student intake, making it more competitive and selective” (Lynch, 2006, p. 2).

The Irish immigration system plays a role in the border patrol of Irish HE and the enforcement of HE as an elite consumerist choice. Within the Irish neocolonial state, the immigration system is socially constructed in order to serve the dominant socio-cultural class whereby “individual and institutional actors compete on an unequal basis under conditions of shifting rules, including the policies, laws, regulations and economic transfers of governments” (Marginson, 2013, p. 356). This is a reflected in Ireland’s neoliberal branded multiculturalism which espouses political buzzwords such as “‘democratisation’, ‘equality’ and ‘fairness’” (Archer, 2007, p. 636) whilst simultaneously reinforcing the political structures that maintain socio-economic and ethno-cultural segregation. It would seem that equity of access is based on consumer power rather than the intrinsic right to access HE as a public good (Kezar, 2004; Lynch, 2006). In relation to the rights of the participants to pursue HE as a social good, the Irish neocolonial state, propagates a commercially branded form of interculturalism (Bryan, 2008, 2010; Robinson, 2012) insofar as there is “a fundamental dissonance between equitable (diversity as ‘a barometer of societal inequalities’) and
economic (diversity as ‘good economic/business sense’) rationales for increasing student diversity” (Archer, 2007, p. 642).

6.3.2 Racial Labelling

The Irish immigration system racially labels identities, creating disparate pathways to HE for those categorised as Irish and ‘non-Irish’. Some participants felt that the EU student categorisation labelled and stigmatised students in the system impacting how they were perceived and accepted within the Irish HE system. In relation to this, Akeem referred to enforced racial “distinctions” and people “being put in separate boxes”:

There are lots of things you can’t apply to if you are a non EU citizen and then if you have a student visa that’s kind of like another hurdle, horrible label to have. When you have a non-EU label it’s just very glaringly obvious you know. […] It doesn’t make any sense when the civilised countries and the well developed countries, they claim to have humanitarian approaches and then they do these distinctions, put people in different boxes and make rules according to those. […] Why are people being you know distinguished or being put in separate boxes? (Akeem)

Some participants actively challenged the enforcement of neocolonial labelling. Afiba openly questioned me, asking, “when you use the word migrant, what is your definition of migrant student, who is a migrant student?”. He also stated that the use of the term “ethnic minorities” was “disgusting”. He went on to question:

Are you talking of, mmm, people who are non-Irish, officially, as in, who are not official Irish citizens or are you talking about migrants who are settled in the country and who are now Irish citizens on paper but who are from different parts of the world or are you talking about people who are from different parts of the world but who might have relatives or families who are Irish, you know? (Afiba)

Ado also described being racially labelled while applying for HE:

I remember signing this, I don’t know if it was for school or whatever, sign this, they put, ok, they put, they put, they put, it was about race. […] I mean, ok, like, it’s like this as I say. It’s about label. I mean people, they label people, you have people like, first of all like, you just have the words, people come out with things, to name people, to call people and you have a foreign student, migrant, some people say foreign student, international student. Even they say, like, ‘oh and do you study as a black student’ or ‘he’s white’, or whatever colours that exist out there […] Why did you describe me black, why did you describe him or her white? Which doesn’t make sense right? (Tut) Just people label. There’s nothing I can do. (Ado)

When I asked Ado if there was anything he could do to respond to being labelled, he replied “What can be done? Why can’t you just call me by my name? […] When you label me ‘migrant’ that’s not even my nationality”. Buenavista (2016, p. 1) describes how “carcerality” affects immigrant, undocumented students in the US in terms of discipline, punishment and
incarceration. It was found that undocumented students in US HE undergo trauma due to punitive immigration policies and the threat of deportation. The criminalisation of undocumented students in the US prompted them to develop resistance strategies to “physically and psychologically protect their presence” (Buenaivastra, 2016, p. 1). The participants’ descriptions as to how they were categorised by the Irish immigration system demonstrate the significance of racial language. Being labelled based on ethnicity and skin colour despite being resident in Ireland created and enforced barriers to HE. This can be read as a result of neocolonial definitions of racial and ethnic identity. The apparatus of the neocolonial Irish state is racialised in order to preserve notions of white hegemonic identity and control (Rockquemore, Brunsma and Delgado, 2009). It has been argued that this almost eugenic notion of fixed national Irish identity is plamásed by the ruling structure through neoliberal concepts of egalitarianism (Bryan, 2008, 2010; Robinson, 2012) which rebuffs the realities of racial power dynamics through an oppressive political mantra that we are all equal under the laws of the neocolonial nation state “while implicitly constructing those who are deemed illegitimate and undeserving of the state’s self-perceived generosity as ‘other’ within the Irish national space” (Bryan, 2010, pp. 265-266).

This relates to our understanding of the Bourdiesian concept of education; an education system which reproduces and enforces social stratification and marginalisation of the non-dominant groupings within a society (Bourdieu, 1967, 1974, 1977, 1981, 1990; Sullivan, 2002). Indeed, the participants’ experiences in relation to the Irish immigration system replicates the governing structures across the Western world. Writing in the context of US racialisation, Rockquemore et al. (2009) articulate the manner whereby race is constructed and enforced by the political socio-cultural ruling force through mechanisms such as the immigration system insofar as:

…the primary arm of our public racial categorisation system, is not simply a counting of the US population. It is a highly political apparatus, reflective of social and cultural discourse regarding race in the United States. It is also an indicator of our national racial structure as well as a partial macro-level structure giving grounding and antitheses to multiple racial projects within meso and micro-level social systems. Racial identity, as a specific expression of private racialised selves, becomes a political device that simultaneously challenges and reinforces existing racialised social structures. It is also a cultural boundary marker rooted in negotiations, strategies, and tactics. (Rockquemore et al., 2009, p.30)

The tactic of racially labelling these participants reinforced their minoritisation which can be regarded as an intended output of the dominant ruling structure which secures its own identity
and resources through the withholding and marginalisation of groupings deemed ‘other’. Indeed, it has been noted how the exclusion of minorities is often purposefully enforced to protect neocolonial standards of cultural and ethnic homogeneity and purge BME presence as:

Linking the denial of access to education for those undocumented to this history demonstrates how [...] immigration, criminal justice, education—are intertwined and actively work to render particular targeted populations disposable, superfluous or in need of further containment [...] Undocumented students are being systematically purged from the higher education system. Immigration policy and financial aid regulations are working to constrain vulnerable populations deemed undesirable and undeserving. (Diaz-Strong, Gómez, Luna-Duarte and Meiners, 2011, pp.110-117)

The experiences of the participants suggest that they encountered policies and regulations that reinforced this notion of undesirability and ‘undeserving’. Through the racialised labelling of the immigration system, participants were othered as distinct from their white Irish peers in what Bennett (1998, p. 1) terms “ethnic otherness”. Participants had to accept the racial label and racial categorisation placed on them by the Irish immigration system in order to access education. This can be read in relation to Essed (1991, p. 119) who notes that “terminology being used to refer to students from non-traditional backgrounds fuels the dominance of the “deficit’ model” and ultimately “fosters a ‘them’ and ‘us’ divide”.

The participants resisted racial labelling, voicing how it was not representative of their identity and identities. Herein is a key issue that researcher’s in the field of racial studies face. While there is acknowledgement that race is a social construct (Frable, 1997; Gilroy, 1998; Nagel, 1994; Rockquemore, 2002; Rockquemore and Brunsma, 2002) and “black and biracial people may construct a black identity only because society, in accordance with the one-drop rule, defines them black” (Rockquemore, 2002, p.487), there is a concern that if students are not identified within the system as black, minority and ethnic (BME) that a post-racial argument has been validated and legitimised. Post-racialism (Howard and Flennaugh, 2011; Lentin, 2014; St. Louis, 2002) dangerously asserts colour-blindness and diminishes race struggle and discrimination. Indeed,

perhaps most insidious among conservative post-racialisms is the contention that society has arrived at the ‘post-racist’ moment. Post-racist assertions mystify existing racial stratification, dismiss the effects of racist discrimination and argue that racism has been legislatively overcome (Paul, 2014, p. 704).

Such post-racial contentions are perhaps evident in the current HEA (2005, 2008, 2015) access plans which have yet to include BME students, with the exception of
Travellers/Mincéir, as an access target group. The exclusion of BME target groups by the HEA is problematic as “race must be invoked because it is crucial to political and ontological positioning” (Paul, 2014, p. 715). Race must be drawn upon as a tool for social analysis. Failure to do so “will exacerbate current achievement gaps and guarantee that equity in terms of school funding and quality of non-racist teacher instruction for non-white students will not be achieved or even addressed” (Warren, 2012, p. 197). The participants’ sought to be acknowledged and identified beyond racial categorisations and labels, providing insight to the exclusionary ‘naming’ processes that they were forced to negotiate and how the racial label that they were ascribed impacted on how they were integrated and/or excluded within the Irish HE system. Yet, inclusive BME discourse needs to be integrated within Irish HEA.

It is precisely because whiteness is seen as an unmarked racial category that the loss of race for white theoreticians can appear inconsequential. In contrast, for minority ethnic groups the erasure of race may equate with the obliteration of an identity and shared way of life, so coming to silence our racially marked historical experiences. (Nayak, 2006, pp. 422-423)

As critical theory evolved from the African-American Civil Rights movement in the US, this study aligns to the argument voiced by many Civil Rights activists “that existing racial categories should remain unchanged because the data is used to monitor discrimination and track population inequalities, and the categories themselves are reflective of historically rooted racial groupings” (Brunsma and Delgado, 2009, p. 14). Indeed, through the act of reclaiming raced labels, there is potential to utilise them to overcome discrimination and ‘othering’ as we articulate the struggle for racial equity. In this manner, we can perhaps allude to Lorde (1981) that by using the master’s tools of racial labelling and categorisation, we can at least attempt to use them to dismantle the master’s house.

6.3.3 Non-Recognition of Non-Western Qualifications

Further demeaning restrictions encountered by the participants are exemplified in the refused recognition of prior qualifications from the participants’ non-Western country of origin suggesting a bias for Western qualifications over non-Western ones. Participants described how the lack of recognition for their non-Western qualifications impacted on their academic progression as many had to reenter the Irish HE system as graduates or postgraduates despite having qualifications from their native countries. Despite having a Masters from Pakistan, Amal undertook a second Masters in Ireland as an international student to help her get accepted onto a PhD programme in Ireland:
I wanted to get into the system somehow so then I knew that if I have to go into my own field, [...] for that I needed to do a Masters in bio medics because that was the thing that it was in, so I got admission in DCU as an International student because I didn’t have my Irish passport then and that was a very good intensive course that I did for a year. So after that, obviously I had an Irish qualification so it was easy for me to get a PhD. (Amal)

Akeem described how he entered the HE system in Ireland despite being qualified in his field in Pakistan. He regarded his Pakistani credentials as less ‘credible’ and having less ‘value’ in comparison to Western HE qualifications:

I wanted to pursue my studies. I was qualified there but Pakistani qualifications wouldn’t be very credible or you know, wouldn’t have as much value in terms of the standard of teaching there so I thought I’ll get myself into a course here and that would give me an opportunity to learn about the system also and get acquainted with the education system also so maybe it will help me find a good job. (Akeem)

Feyisetan explained how she and her husband had to re-enter HE in Ireland as undergraduates as their Nigerian qualifications were “not recognised”. She noted the difficulty and stress of having to re-enter HE in order to be ‘recognised’ and attain “Irish knowledge”:

Because our qualifications are not recognised I can’t work in a position, do you understand? So that is why some of us, not all of us, go back into school to re-educate ourselves. We don’t find it that easy. [...] I’m educated back home. It’s stressful going back to school. All the issues, who wants to encounter all these things? You need to be tough to fit in. It’s not easy. [...] My qualification from Nigeria, it’s very hard. It’s not recognised here. My husband, he had to study only because, to get a job, you know, his qualification is not recognised here. It’s hard for us so, that’s why I had to get back to school, get some Irish knowledge and all that. (Feyisetan)

The non-recognition of non-Western qualifications in Irish HE has been noted by Linehan et al. (2008) as a barrier to HE progression. In an Irish context, it has been noted how limited attempt is made to assess the “worth” (Coghlan, Fagan, Munck, O’Brien and Warener 2005, p. 8) of non-Western qualifications. The experiences of the above participants describe how the non-recognition of prior qualifications both impeded and promoted progress to the HE. Participants were prompted to attain a Western HE qualification in order to become ‘re-educated’ within that system. From a Bourdieusian (1967, 1974, 1977, 1981, 1990) perspective it is clear that these participants did not have the required Western socio-cultural capital required to progress to HE on par with their white, Irish peers. Through the delegitimisation of their prior qualifications we can see how the ruling structure and its systems and institutions strictly govern the distribution of cultural capital insofar as:
Higher education is conceptualised as a sorting machine that selects students according to an implicit social classification and reproduces the same students according to an explicit academic classification, which in reality is very similar to the implicit social classification. (Naidoo, 2004, p. 459)

Despite having qualifications from their native countries, these participants had to ‘re-educate’ themselves within the structures and frameworks of Western HE in order to be ‘recognized’. Western qualifications were regarded as being more credible. This suggests that non-Western qualifications were regarded as having limited socio-cultural capital and value. Such perceptions can be read as a form of epistemological racism which places Western institutions in a dominant, hierarchical position above the ‘third world’ in what Spivak (1985, p. 50) refers to as the “theoretical elite”. It is this notion of theoretical elitism which mandates what can be construed and valued as legitimate knowledge. The experiences of these participants highlight how a Western qualification is regarded as the only legitimate source of HE attainment.

6.4 Conclusion

Progression to Irish HE was underpinned by cultural and familial expectations that a Western HE qualification can lead to increased socio-cultural capital. All participants, regardless of socio-economic, ethnic and cultural backgrounds were motivated to progress to HE to increase their employability prospects. Some participants aspired to HE as a way to become proficient in fields such as law, human rights and social work to challenge the biases and barriers of institutionalised inequities which they had personally experienced enacting modes of (un)knowing resistance. As HE historically excluded BME identity, aspirations to progress to HE challenge the border patrol of HE space. However, there is evidence to suggest that structural barriers remain an issue. Participants who were resident in Ireland awaiting Irish citizenship faced the greatest barriers in terms of progressing to HE. Barriers included being racially labelled by the immigration and HE system leading to a lack of financial support. Additionally, the lack of recognition of non-Western qualifications prohibited and promoted progression to HE. Participants had to ‘re-educate’ themselves and repeat courses they were previously qualified in, in order to gain access to the labour market via a Western HE qualification. Having overcome these racially imposed barriers in the progression to HE, the next chapter examines the social and academic experiences of the participants once access to Irish HE had been granted.
Chapter Seven: The Social and Academic Experiences of Black and Minority Ethnic Students in Irish Higher Education

7.1 Introduction
This third and final Findings and Discussion chapter examines the social and academic experiences of the participants in Irish Higher Education (HE). At the time of data collection 22 were enrolled in a University. Three were enrolled in an Institute of Technology (IT). 15 participants were at undergraduate level, four were enrolled in a Masters programme, and six were at PhD level.

There are two sections in this chapter. The first section examines the social experience of the participants. These experiences included (i) divided lecture halls, (ii) divided and/or limited socialising and (iii) identity crises and battles. The second section presents the academic experiences of the participants. Issues included (i) adjusting to unfamiliar teaching and learning styles, (ii) restrictive English monolingualism and (iii) being undermined academically.

7.2 The Social Experiences of BME students in Irish HE

7.2.1 Divided Lecture Halls
The participants described divided lecture halls based on skin colour. Uzoma noted the “huge divide” between black and minority ethnic (BME) students and their white Irish peers:

In class we wouldn’t tend to sit beside each other. […] There was always a big divide. You’d have the majority separated. There’s a huge divide. (Uzoma)

For participants like Paddy, this divide was on-going from primary school to HE:

I used to go into my law lectures, maybe 300, 400 people in there, if you sat down you were often on your own and if you looked around you would see other non-white students on their own too and that didn’t look any different to secondary school and primary school. (Paddy)

Feyisetan described similar experiences of divided lecture halls and the way this impacted on mixing with white, Irish students outside of the lecture hall. In the following account she refers to African students walking “among themselves” throughout the campus and a “cold attitude” from the white Irish. She described this divide in terms of “black” and “white”:

I mean the attitude, the attitude is kind of cold. […] I noticed that some Africans that are undergraduates on full time courses, I noticed that most of them they walk among themselves, I mean they walk in a group. They don’t kind of mix. They are on their
own, the white on their own, the Irish on their own and then black on their own. They're not kind of mixed up together. […] Even if we are in the same class they kind of isolate themselves (Feyisetan)

Niamh remembered how she was “the only one who looked how I did” in her lecture hall:

I remember sitting in an English class, really, really big lecture theatre that held hundreds and I was the only one who looked like I did in the whole theatre. (Niamh)

Similarly, Idai was “the only African person” in her class when she began HE. When asked how it felt to be “the only” one, she remarked that it was “just normal” for her:

In my class yeah, the only African person in my class and then this year a good few other people joined as well. […] I don’t really think it made much of a difference. It’s just normal for me. (Idai)

The early social experiences that students have in HE is an indicator of how they develop a sense of belonging or dis-belonging (Hausmann, Schofield and Woods 2007). In Ireland, lecturers have noted instances of “ghettoization” in their lecture halls where “the international students sit in the front and all the Irish students sit in the back” (Sheridan, 2011, p. 129). BME students in the UK have reported the issue of colour blindness whereby the HE staff and their white peers claim to not see race, thus leading to feelings of further peripheralisation (NUS, 2010). BME students feel both “invisible” and “hyper-visible” due to their race and/or ethnicity, with students reporting that they experienced being noticed “wholly as a result of being black” (Davies, Dias-Bowie, Greenberg, Klukken, Pollio, Thomas and Thompson, 2004, p. 430). In addition, UK BME students have described feeling ‘tokenized’ and categorized in a fixed grouping of ‘race’ by both the HE institution and their peers (Connor et al., 2004). In terms of this, in HE social spaces there is evidence of what Cabrera (2014, p. 32) refers to as “racially homogenous sub-environments”. White students have described ‘cliques’ on campus in what they refer to as “black people sticking together” (Crozier, Burke and Archer, 2016, p. 44). The experiences of the participants being divided from their white Irish peers can be read in comparison to analysis of white student populations who may regard their BME peers as threatening interlopers on a traditionally exclusive white, middle class space (Berry and Loke, 2011; Cabrera, 2014; Crozier et al., 2016).

In terms of divided lecture halls there is potential insight from Troyna’s (1992, p. 87) assertion that racism is “embedded in social relations” insofar as it “not recognised as being integral to the ways in which society is structured, organised and legitimated”. In this
manner, divided lecture halls can potentially be regarded as a replication and indicator of ethnic-cultural divides within the broader society beyond the HE space. Research has highlighted how the blame for lack of integration bypasses white students as BME students are the ones who are regarded as ‘sticking together’ (Crozier and Davies, 2008, 2016; Read, Archer and Leathwood, 2003). It has been noted that such insularity may be maintained by BME groupings as a form of safety and protection from their outsider status (Crozier, Reay and Clayton 2010) perpetuating the emergence of divided lecture halls as experienced by the participants. In terms of “distancing to self-protect” (Keane, 2011, p. 449). Keane (2011a) found evidence of Access students ‘cliquing’ together and ‘distancing’ from ‘other’, middle class students in Irish HE. Indeed, it was found that working class and middle class students deliberately remain in class divided cliques (Keane, 2011). The participants in this study may well have been engaging in this type of distancing behaviour as a way to self-protect as they found themselves minoritised in a predominately white campus. As BME students are positioned as the ones who maintain the segregated divide we can begin to “unveil the rhetorical, political, cultural, and social mechanisms through which ‘whiteness’ is both invented and used to mask its power and privilege” (Gillborn, 2005, p. 1).

Overall, the participants’ relationship(s) with their white, Irish peers seemed difficult to maintain due to differing cultural values and norms. While mixed interaction could be maintained on a brief, superficial level, groupings tended to revert back to their insular divides. In terms of this “cultural separatism” Bennett (1998, p. 18) notes that “constructing ‘ethnic difference’ is an interactive, multilateral process: a matter of negotiation and contestation no less within and between minoritised groups than between the ‘ethnicised’ minority and the ‘national’ majority”. If BME students are perceived as interlopers, outsiders and ‘other’ in HE social spaces, it can be argued from a Bourdieusian (1990; 1981; 1977; 1975) perspective that BME groupings exist on the peripheries as they are not regarded as having the required socio-cultural capital to ‘belong’. Therefore, divided lecture halls can be justified and/or maintained as “Bourdieu sees social capital as the investment of the dominant class to maintain and reproduce group solidarity and preserve the group’s dominant position” (Dika and Singh, 2002, p. 33). In relation to this, Nakay (1999, p. 177) found that white students perceived anti-racism and endorsement of multiculturalism in HE education settings as “techniques for the surveillance of white racial identity” in what they referred to as “white backlash”.

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7.2.2 Divided and/or Limited Socialising

Some participants mixed and socialised only or mostly within their own cultural-ethnic group. When asked to reflect on the divide with their white, Irish peers, participants felt that they naturally grouped together as they had an affinity to people who shared the same language and culture as them. Participants seemed to describe this process as natural, unconscious and instinctive. Participants like Idai explained why they felt these divided groupings formed. She reflected on why she mostly mixed with other students from a similar background:

You kind of like tend to become as a group because you’re like ‘oh my God, you’re from the same country as me’, whatever, so you kind of come together, you kind of just naturally come together. (Idai)

Similarly, Iana explained that she was naturally drawn to those from the same cultural background. She felt a sense of mutuality towards her African-Irish peers rather than her white, Irish peers due to shared language with the “same story”:

I just feel I benefit because we are the same, we both speak the same language, we probably have the same story. I don’t know if there is any unconscious feeling inside me that I just wanted to stay with different African individuals. (Iana)

While Idai and Iana perceived the divide in racial and cultural groupings as natural and instinctive, Amal saw homogeneity across groups as something that wasn’t going to happen. Rather she saw the divided groupings between her and her white Irish peers as evidence that homogeneity cannot be enforced or indeed, achieved, as cultural and ethnic groups tend to naturally group together as there is a sense of familiarity and shared experience. She further noted that BME students interact with the white, Irish, yet revert back to their cultural-ethnic group:

Ethnic minorities have their own group and they are happy in it. They interact with the other majority but they have their personal groups. I think you shouldn’t try too much to homogenise everything because that’s not going to happen. (Amal)

Similarly, Omar described how Irish students were “very open” yet tended to socialise in their own groups. He explained how he also tended to socialise in his own group:

They [white Irish] are very open but my experience is, they are very close, they probably socialise more within Irish students but it’s my personal experience. […] I think it was mostly myself because we kind of tend to socialise within our own groups or with people I know already. (Omar)
In relation to the issue of cliques in US HE, white and black students stated that they wanted to belong to groups “where they did not stand out” (Fisher and Hartmann, 1995, p. 123). Issues relating to “distrust” and fear of victimization also led to groups cliquing together (Fisher et al., 1995, p. 122). Gurowitz (1991, p. 260) suggests that BME students self-segregate due to discomfort with their perceived lack of “institutional membership”. This can be seen in contrast to white students who have reported feeling “right at home” on campus (Fisher et al., 1995, p. 122). BME students perceive racial hostility from their white peers and report experiences of alienation and isolation from their white peers while the white students did not perceive racial exclusion or discrimination to be an issue on campus (Cabera and Nora, 1994; Cureton, 2007; Smedley, Myers and Harrell 1993). It was found that black students and their white peers recognized the importance of interracial peer relationships, they also recognized that this was not reflective of daily campus life (Fisher et al., 1995). 59% of white students and 70% of black students stated that making friends was affected by race (Fisher et al., 1995, p. 121). In one study, 59.3% of BME students who stated that they had been made to feel uncomfortable and unwelcome in Oxford due to their race and/or ethnic background (OSOU, 2014). Similar findings are highlighted in US studies in terms of white students being less nuanced in perceptions of BME exclusion. US BME students perceive racial hostility from their white peers and report experiences of alienation and isolation from their white peers while the white students did not perceive racial exclusion to be an issue on campus (Cabera et al., 1994; Cureton, 2007; Smedley et al., 1993).

It has been found that positive cross-racial peer to peer interaction results in a “greater sense of belonging” in HE, benefiting white and BME students (Locks, Hurtado, Bowman and Oseguera, 2008, p. 277). However, in terms of this, Ajeigbe described how it was difficult to make friends with his white, Irish peers due to some having “attitude problems”:

I mean like attitudes you know. Some have attitude problems. [...] I do observe it. I see people, or hear complaints, you know, people relate to it. Some could be discussing, maybe like in a group. You have five, six people together and one is your friend. You approach your friend there are some reactions from the rest like, you know. (Ajeigbe)

Further factors that led to a lack of peer to peer integration was due to the drinking culture of Irish HE. Nor, reflected on Irish culture as being a particular barrier for her in terms of making friends as she comes from a culture that doesn’t drink. She noted how it was “hard to get into the clique” if you didn’t drink:
I think maybe the Irish culture they like to drink so you know we don’t drink. In my culture we don’t drink so, that’s the one thing because I would love to, like to get to know someone, my colleagues and all that. If you don’t drink it seems so hard to go into the clique. (Nor)

Asali also described the difficulty of socialising with her white, Irish peers due to the drinking culture where she would be “really out of place”. She then went on to say that the lack of socialising between her and her white, Irish peers was due to individual choice on “how much you want to mix with people”:

The thing is I don’t go out when they have events. For example we have events, they go out for drinks so I don’t go because when I go there I think I will be really out of place. […] It’s all individual experience and how much you want to mix with people and how much you don’t want to mix with people. (Asali)

BME international students in an Irish HEI were found to undergo experiences of sociocultural adjustment as they tried to adapt to the culture of the Irish HE space in terms of the drinking culture of their Irish peers (O’Reilly et al., 2010). It is reported that Irish students distance themselves from BME international students as they feel ‘judged’ due to their alcohol use and the role in plays in Irish students’ social experience of HE (Dunne, 2009). Dunne (2009) suggests that it is this perception of judgement that leads Irish students to exclude BME international students from their social activities. As with the Irish case, the drinking culture of UK HE has been noted as an obstacle for international Muslim students as they attempt to socially integrate with their local peers (Bartram, 2007). Hopkins (2011, p. 164) refers to non-drinking minority ethnic students’ “experiences of campus geographies” whereby they are excluded from certain social spaces due to the dominance of drinking culture on HEI campuses. In an analysis of studies relating to religion in HE, Freeden (2009, p. 265) found that religious students “become less religious on traditional indicators of religious practice over the course of their collegiate careers”. Additionally religious students reported to be more satisfied with their college experience despite non-engagement with the “drinking, drugs, and partying” (Freeden, 2009, p. 268) social side of HE. For participants like Pawel who could relate to the Irish drinking culture, bringing his Polish friends and white, Irish friends together remained difficult due to cultural differences. This caused him to inhabit “two separate lives” between two disparate groups of friends despite his attempts to “keep it all together”:

I have two separate lives but at the same time I try and get everybody together, you know, […] I try and keep it all together. [R: Is it tough?] Yeah, yeah it is. It wouldn’t
be easy, d’ya know, because obviously the culture it is, it is somewhat similar but at the same time there are differences. (Pawel)

Daran spoke about the importance of integration but noted his fear of assimilation which leads to “abandoning something”. Within this abandonment there is the potential loss of “roots, culture, tradition”:

I would say integrating is one thing but assimilating is abandoning something. Something I really oppose is that we shouldn’t assimilate. We should lead a new generation that respects and honours the culture [of the current country] but also is aware their own roots, culture, tradition and religion probably, if you are religious. (Daran)

Molinsky (2007, p. 624) describes cross cultural assimilation as “the act of purposefully modifying one’s behaviour in an interaction in a foreign setting in order to accommodate different cultural norms for appropriate behaviour”. Bhabha (1984) uses the term ‘mimicry’ in relation to assimilative processes, describing it as the way the colonised take on the mannerisms, language, customs and socio-cultural values of the colonizer. Rather than improving integration, Bhabha (1984) notes how the coloniser and/or dominant culture, views mimicry as a threat as it threatens the divide and hierarchal dominance maintained by the ruling group. Mimicry also blurs the colonisers’ own identity as they see marginalised groupings which they have positioned as ‘other’ take on the traits and identity that they have formed and maintained in order to assert their own validly, ‘civility’ and socio-cultural value. The ruling culture is threatened by mimicry and the way it blurs the line between the coloniser and the colonized, the dominant and the minoritised, as “mimicry reveals the limitation in the authority of colonial discourse” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2007, p. 125).

In terms of cross-racial peer to peer integration and/or assimilation, in the US, BME students reported a fear of ‘selling out’ and trying to adjust to HE without becoming white (Fisher et al, 1995). Bernal (2002, p. 114) found that bilingual identity was used by Chicana/ Chicano students to resist assimilation as they protected their identity by “maintaining their home language”. McKinley and Brayboy (2004, p. 125) found that First Nation students in elite US HEIs make themselves ‘invisible’ on campus in order to protect their “cultural integrity”. However, these First Nation students also make themselves ‘visible’ when they want to “emphasise” their voice as being part of the campus community (McKinley et al., 2004, p. 125).
Some participants regarded the divides they experienced in dismissive terms stating that their objective was to study rather than socialise and make friends. Ajeigbe was interested in mixing with people “in a good manner”. However, as a result of the divisions that exist in HE social spaces he felt that he couldn’t “push it” and “force” people to like him or be his friend. As a way to dismiss the division he may have downplayed the need to socialise by stating that his main focus was to study:

I have not come to meet people. I've come to study. My focus is to achieve my aim, at the same time, you know, socialise and mix up with people in a good manner. You can't push it. You can't force somebody to be your friend or like you. (Ajeigbe)

This dismissal of the social side of HE in favour of the academic side was also seen in the case of Feyisetan who stated that her goal was to focus on her studies. She dismissed the lack of socialising and integration with her white, Irish peers as something which did not affect her remarking that, “It doesn’t bother me because I’m here to learn and study. […] I’m just here to study so it doesn’t affect me much”. However, the manner in which she stated that the lack of socialising with her white, Irish peers didn’t affect her “much” suggests that it did in fact affect her. While Ajeigbe and Feyisetan may indeed have been unaffected by the isolation from their white Irish peers as they were focused on the academic side of their HE experience, their dismissal of socialising may have been a defence mechanism based on the division they experienced in relation to their white, Irish peers.

In relation to this, BME students have described an overwhelming pressure to strive for and maintain high levels of academic achievement to prove their worth (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002) impacting on the social experience of HE. Focus on academic attainment also aligns to a number of studies which found that BME groups engage with HE to increase socio-cultural capital (Archer, 2000; Beck, 2006; Connor, Modood and Hillage, 2004; Fitzgerald, Finch, and Nove, 2000; Keane, 2016; Rhamie and Hallam, 2002; Strand, 2007; Torgerson, Gorard, Low, Ainsworth, See and Wright, 2008). This contrasts to Irish students who were found to feel “less pressure to succeed academically” in comparison to their BME peers (Dunne, 2009, p. 222). Rather, Irish students were found to be more “laid back” and “less focused” on their studies preferring the social side of the HE experience in comparison to their BME peers (Dunne, 2009, p. 222). Keane (2012, p. 154) found that middle class Irish students perceive HE as a “rite of passage” where the HE environment becomes an extension of their social lifestyle. This compared to the experience of working class students where “the states were so high” (Keane, 2012, p. 155) to academically achieve and succeed that it impacted on the
ability to engage with the social aspect of the HE social experience. The need to focus on the academic side of HE rather than the social side may be due to BME “stereotypes about their ability to succeed” (Syed, Azmitia and Cooper, 2011, p. 450). In the US, it was found that Asian-American’s perceive themselves to be more academically motivated than their white peers resulting in them being termed the “model minority” (Wong, Lai and Nagasawa, 1998, p. 95). Additionally, white students also perceived their Asian American peers to be more academically focused and “superior” (Wong, Lai and Nagasawa 1998, p. 95). This compared to African-Americans, Hispanics and First Nation students who perceived themselves to being “inferior” to whites in terms of being academically motivated (Wong et al., 1998).

In terms of the participants focusing on the academic side rather than social side of their HE experience, there is perhaps space for a Bourdieusian (1990; 1981; 1977; 1975) argument that the participants entered HE with limited socio-cultural capital and therefore focused on academic attainment as a way to increase their social capital. Alternatively, the participants may have been excluded from the social space of HE due to a perceived lack of cultural capital from their white, Irish peers in a manner that led the participants to overemphasise their focus on study and academics rather than express exclusion from the social space. Another potential argument relates to the competitiveness of the current neoliberal HE space where a qualification is needed in order to gain access to the labour market leading to increased competition within the student body.

This competitiveness can be expressed across racial lines as white students view their BME peers as a competitor and threat (Crozier, Burke and Archer, 2016) due to the surplus of HE graduates in contrast to limited employment opportunities (Keane, 2016). In relation to this, the participants may have focused on the academic side of their HE experience in order to be competitive due to the ‘scarcity’ of available social capital and potential for social mobility. Drawing from Bourdieu (1986), it can be argued that the scarcity of social capital imposed by neoliberal economics and the mandate of ‘competition’ fuels racial conflict and divides due to a need to compete for limited resources and what Bourdieu (1986, p. 19) refers to as the “unequal distribution of capital”. It is this neoliberal inequity and ‘scarcity’ of available social-capital that may have promoted the participants to focus on the academic side of HE, rather than engage with the social aspect.
7.2.3 Identity Crises and Battles

Issues relating to identity were noted by some participants when they reflected on their interactions with their white, Irish peers. Participants, particularly those who self-identified as Irish yet were perceived as ‘non-Irish’ due to their skin colour, described how their biculturalism led to identity crises. When I asked Niamh what identity she brought to HE, she laughed and replied “I brought an identity crisis to college”. She recalled how she was continuously asked by her white, Irish peers where she was from and how she just wanted to be regarded as “a normal Irish girl from Dublin”. It became easier for her to lie than to explain her biracial Kenyan and Irish identity when questioned:

By the time I had finished school and was going into college I did not want to be associated with anything else other than being a normal Irish girl from Dublin. I hated being asked where I was from. I used to lie, I used to come up with different places just because I didn’t want to have to go through the whole rigmarole that I’m actually Kenyan dadada so for some reason I used to say Fiji, I’d never been to Fiji, I don’t know what people from Fiji look like. (Niamh)

Uzoma described the identity battle he underwent in HE where he was forced to question “what am I?” Within this identity battle all he wanted was to “belong”. He described how he believed his sense of identity was influenced by the groupings within which he socialised. This impacted on how he viewed himself creating an identity crisis as he struggled to be validated and legitimised in his Irish identity, and was “battling to belong”. There was no space for him to be accepted as both Nigerian and Irish:

We’re battling with ourselves, ‘am I Irish or am I Nigerian?’ My Nigerian friends say I’m not Nigerian enough, ok I’m Irish, my Irish friends say I’m not Irish enough so what am I? It’s a constant identity battle. You don’t stop that battle until the end of your education, that growing up process because the friends you make in college is going to define who you are and if you are segregated, if you are just with our black friends or your minority friends that’s where you’re going to see yourself. [...]We all want to belong to a certain group. You’re constantly battling to belong. We all have our own battles but it’s intensified because of your skin colour. (Uzoma)

Paddy viewed himself as both Pakistani and Irish. His experience in HE reinforced his sense of identity as he remarked, “for me what university did, for somebody who wasn’t white and who was conscious of it, who is also Irish, it just, it hardened my identity of who I saw I was and my understanding of racism”. In relation to this, he reflected on a particular instance where he perceived that a fellow student “gave up” her non-Irish identity in order to “fit in” and not “suffer abuse”: 
I remember an interesting experience I had and I suppose this is something else which people don’t really talk about but there was this girl in my class who had an Irish accent but looked Indian and she was sitting down and there was a space beside her and I was in late and I sat beside her and she got up and sat closer to her friends who all happened to be white and Irish and I thought it was interesting because you do see that a fair bit where you do see some migrant students in school and university they’ll just give up everything of their culture so they don’t have to suffer abuse so they just try to fit in as much as they can with the majority people around them, the white, Irish people. (Paddy)

Asali reflected on how she was often perceived based on her cultural and religious background. While she did identify as Muslim, she did not want her religion to define her within the HE space. There was a sense of conflict in this process. In response to how her religious identity distinguished her as ‘different’ to her white, Irish peers she remarked:

I don’t think my religion has anything to do with my existence. I’m just a normal student who comes here, does her work and goes away. I don’t think being Muslim has to play a part. I’m my own individual person, it doesn’t define me. It does define me. It doesn’t define me here. (Asali)

Kalu spoke about the difficulties he had maintaining his identity which was something he often felt as though he had to hide. When asked how one hides their identity, he described how he would deny “ethnically, my language, the group that I belong to”. Through these experiences Kalu became overly aware of his identity and the way he “literally stood out” in comparison to his white, Irish peers and how this could lead to “potential clashes”. In response to this he described the need to bridge spaces and overcome racial assumptions:

I kind of was aware of who I am and also aware of the potential clashes that might be there […] I kind of really stood out like, literally stood out. […] Basically, make spaces for each other. There is dialogue instead of just making assumptions about each other. (Kalu)

In a study of second generation Irish boys born in Britain, Mac an Ghaill (2003, p. 389) explores the issue of racial and cultural hybridity in terms of how ‘Irish’ identity is formed and framed as, “one way to conceptualize responses to the processes of changing definitions of Irishness and nationhood is to view them as a set of narratives of ‘self-production’ that are dispersed through a multiplicity of power relations”. In relation to racial identity crises and imposed power dynamics, “the problems facing ethnic minority males have been located inherently within their ‘race’ and culture, and the young men themselves have been positioned as part of ‘the problem’” (Archer, 2001, p. 80). Asians and Latinos who had an immigrant background and attended selective US HE were perceived based on their country
of origin rather than their American ethnicity. However, it was also found that these students’ ethnic identities were “quite stable” during college, yet neither was their identity “strengthened” (O’Sears, Fu, Henry and Bui, 2003, p. 419). This contrasts with the experiences of African American college students who experience racial attitudes at cultural and individual level within the HE environment which impacts negatively on their ethnic identity (Johnson and Arboa, 2006). African Americans have higher ethnic identity and self-esteem when compared to Hispanics (Shreve, Jensen and Uddin 2003). In a study correlating discrimination with depressive symptoms amongst Latino adolescents, it was found that high self-esteem in relation to ethnic identity and cultural orientation led to lower instances of depressive symptoms (Umaña-Taylor and Updegraff, 2007). Asian American’s, Mexican American’s and black students reported higher self-esteem if issues relating to race and ethnicity were resolved via the HE curriculum (Phinney and Alipuria, 1990).

The above experiences demonstrate the identity battles experienced by the participants in HE as they were continually positioned as distinct from their white, Irish peers even in instances where the participants identified as Irish. There is evidence to suggest that biracial and multiracial identity is marginalised within the hegemonic white Irish HE space through the maintenance of strict racial divides. Bicultural and multiracial identity poses a threat as it challenges normative assumptions in regards to what constitutes an Irish identity. Kao (1999) found that biracial identity led to isolation and marginality due to “campuses not set up to accommodate those who do not fit into previously defined categories” (Renn, 2000). Harris (2017, p. 440) examined how biracial black women experienced microaggressions, exclusion and isolation in HE settings as self-identified biracialism is erased via a “monoracial-only paradigm of race”. In relation to this, Jourdan (2006) found that students who were secure in their biracialism and cultural identification integrated more successfully within the HE environment. Indeed, there is a need to examine how Irish schooling via the HE system can incorporate non-white, biracial and/or multicultural identity:

How can the implantation of multiculturalism avoid operating at the level of aesthetic representation- or the token of showing many faces of the nation? How can the practice of multiculturalism avoid its commodification and inclusion in the socialising function of the school that has remained unchanged in its mission of begetting ‘the right kind of national pride’? Under the logic of multiculturalism, whose ‘national pride’ would this be- given that different individuals and groups maintain different versions of the nation in their culture(s)? (Koundoura, 1998, p. 70)
As evidenced by the participants’ experiences, HEIs “are rich sites for studying identity” (Kellogg and Liddell, 2012, p. 524). Indeed, for many participants, their identity was challenged and (re)constructed in the HE space. Biracial and bicultural identity threatens the strict parameters of racial categories as it juxtaposes and resists the neatly defined racial hierarchy. Indeed, as Literte (2010) notes, HE continues to be a “racial battlefield” as:

…students’ development of their racial identities, whether biracial or monoracial, can be greatly impacted by institutions of higher education, which are intimately involved in the production, contestation, and negotiation of racial identities. Concomitantly, they have assumed a prominent role as racial battlefield. (Literte, 2010, p. 119)

BME students find themselves “struggling to exist-to just “be”” (Ladson-Billings and Donnor, 2012). Ogbu (2004, p. 14) notes how black identity must learn to negotiate the parameters of “acting white”. There is a need for black identity to consolidate with white frames of reference. This process if exasperated by white refusal of black integration as well as peer pressure from fellow black students to not “act white” (Ogbru, 2004, pp. 14-29). This is problematic from the perspective of anti-racist discourse insofar as, “the connection between the inner self and the external (social) conditionalities is of utmost concern to the anti-racism struggle for change” (Sefa Dei, 1996, p. 31).

7.3 The Academic Experiences of BME Students in Irish HE

7.3.1 Adjusting to Unfamiliar Teaching and Learning Styles

Participants who had experienced primary and/or post-primary schooling and/or HE outside of Ireland spoke of the difficulty in adjusting to new styles of teaching and learning. Akeem described how this unfamiliarity impacted on his academic experience. He had to ‘catch up’ and get “acquainted” with how he was expected to learn and assimilate to the Western teaching and learning system:

The education system was completely new, like all the semesters and continuous assessment kind of thing and essay writing. I was quite good in English in my own country but when I came here I just found out, no, standards are much higher. I had a lot of catching up to do and I used to be very disappointed to get my grades in the essays because I couldn’t believe that I could do so bad but it was the case. There were lots of things I had to get acquainted with. (Akeem)

Amal also reported difficulty adjusting to new teaching and learning styles. She described how her lecturer would get frustrated at her as she was “naïve” about the Irish HE learning system. She described how her unfamiliarity with new teaching and learning styles impacted negatively on her learning experience as she felt discouraged and did not know how to approach people for help:
Sometimes he [lecturer] would get frustrated because I was totally naïve to the learning system and he would expect me to do some homework at home and I wasn’t used to that because in our university the teacher starts from scratch all over. […] Sometimes you just try to figure out your problems at random and you get really discouraged and you end up screwing your assignment up or something because you’re stuck and it’s a new system of education and you don’t know how to approach people. (Amal)

In terms of UK BME students’ academic under-attainment while enrolled in HE, Richardson (2015, p. 278) asserts that “we do not know what aspects of teaching and assessment practices are responsible for variations in the attainment gap”. There has been suggestion that UK HE implements a racially imbued “deficit modelling of teaching” (Tatlow, 2015. p. 10). UK BME students have reported higher levels of dissatisfaction with the teaching quality they received at university in comparison to their white, British peers (Neves and Hillman, 2016). Osler (1999, p. 39) suggests that in academic settings UK BME students undergo “discriminatory teaching and assessment exercises” by both their lecturers and white peers. UK BME students have reported that their lecturers do not ‘push’ them to succeed academically (Mclean et al., 2015). The issue of “silence” (Housee, 2010, p. 421; Zhou et al., 2005, p. 287) has also been identified in the UK HE learning environment in relation to Asian cohorts whose indigenous knowledge is not incorporated into the Western, monolingual English curricula. Indeed, issues relating to isolation have been reported by UK BME students in relation to the white HE curriculum and syllabus that does not cater to the diversity of the student population (Connor et al., 2004).

Gillborn (2010, p. 231) refers to a “new eugenics whereby black students are systematically disadvantaged but blamed for their own failure by assessments that lend racist stereotypes a spurious air of scientific respectability”. The participants in this study described the need to adjust to new modes of learning and spoke of the difficulty in having to ‘catch up’ and felt ‘behind’ their white, Irish peers. Such experiences can be regarded as being a result of ‘epistemological racism’ whereby:

Epistemologies embedded in the fundamental principles of the dominant culture, are the direct result of epistemological racism resulting from ongoing patterns of dominance and cultural superiority that further perpetuate discourses that marginalise minority groups and result in disparate outcomes. (Berryman, Soohoo and Nevin, 2013, p. 390)
This notion draws in many ways from Foucault’s (1980, p.131) theory of power and knowledge in terms of how “regimes of truth” are constructed and maintained. This is evident in the participants’ experiences of the dismissal of their non-Western learning style:

Each society has its regime of truth, its general politics of truth, that is, the types of discourses which it accepts and makes functions as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault, 1980, p. 131)

In epistemological hierarchies where one way of constructing knowledge dominates above another, we can understand how minoritised, BME students undergo a teaching and learning process of “accepting the world always according to someone else” (McKenna, 2003, p. 436). In prior studies, BME students have reported what they regard as a white HE curriculum and syllabus (Connor et al., 2004, p. 93). Similarly, participants reflected on the difficulty of adjusting to unfamiliar Western teaching and learning styles which can be regarded as part of a “one size fits all” (Bartolomé, 2003, p. 409) HE system. In response, Essed (1991, pp. 84-86) questions, “does curricula reflect a wide range of genres, times and places?” and how does HE teaching and learning methodologies facilitate the “inclusion and integration of voices, perspectives, works and ideas that come from beyond a ‘white’, ‘Eurocentric’ one?”

Due to the way “education in itself is a dimension of culture” (Freire, 2003, p. 357) the HE space maintains the cultural and social norms of the ruling society as “teaching remains embedded within a history of [white] moral and cultural regulation” (Gore, 2003, p. 344) impacting on the integration and representation of BME academic voice.

7.3.2 Restrictive English Monolingualism

This need for counter hegemonic voice is particularly evident in relation to the restrictive monolingual teaching and learning environment of Irish HE. Within the borders of Irish HE, the English language is legitimated as the only valid mode of expression. Difficulties relating to English speaking proficiency led to a lack of confidence amongst some participants causing them to isolate themselves from their white, Irish peers. Yasen described how there was a “stigma” attached to those who did not have English as their first language. He explained how this led to low self-confidence and barriers interacting with his Irish peers due to a fear of being mocked:

We have this small stigma if I can say that because English is not our first language. You can see that not everyone speaks comfortable when it comes to speaking English. It becomes a barrier of language, not because we are afraid of you guys but we a low
self-confidence speaking in English, because someone is mocking them for having bad English. (Yasen)

He further described how this language barrier prevented fellow students from contributing to class discussions due to a fear of being mocked and the lack of confidence they had in fully articulating their views:

Mostly you can see, in my group as well, they are not responsive of any question being asked. [...]Not that they are incapable or incompetent in terms of knowledge it’s just that they are not confident in terms of speaking English.[...]Because someone is mocking them for having bad English simply because they have low self-confidence. (Yasen)

Further issues were voiced by Feyisethan who spoke of the difficulty thinking in her native language and having to translate it on paper into English:

It’s hard to put your thoughts on paper, into writing. I don’t know how I managed to get into my 3rd year. It’s hard. It’s a challenge. For some people, you’ve had English all your life so it’s easier to write down, you know for us it’s hard, you know. [...]That aspect is really challenging, having to write. It’s easier for you guys having to write. You can flow and talk about things in English. It’s easier for you guys to write. I wish it was like that for me you know because I have loads up here [touches head]. (Feyisethan)

Asali described how she had to “think in one language” and “try to explain it another”. The English language remained a difficulty despite Asali learning the language throughout her schooling experience in Pakistan:

It’s different, we think in one language and try to explain it in another [...] but I will get it with time because you know everything improves with time and the more I say it the more I get a grip on the language but I learnt English in Pakistan, the studies and everything, the mode was English. (Asali)

It was noted by participants that many of their white, Irish, English-speaking peers viewed this as evidence of them being somehow academically deficient, as Amal stated, “they were expecting me to be a bit faster, even expecting me to be a bit more communicative”. Ado described how it was “key” to have the English language despite how difficult it was to learn:

The key is you have to have the language, I mean, it’s not easy for people to learn. Some people just find it difficult to learn another language, you know, so, these things, it becomes, it’s very, very difficult. (Ado)

Rather than demonstrating the linguistic deficiency of the participants who were proficient in a number of languages, the experiences of these participants highlights the restrictions imposed by monolingual HE teaching. In terms of this enforced monolingualism,
Varatharajah (2015, p.1) describes the process of linguistic assimilation where there is a "required modification in order to become pronounceable, representable". There is a demand for non-English identity to be modified in order to assimilate into the English vocabulary. Within this process, the participants are assimilating into an English speaking word view “to Westernise or replace, to build bridges to the hemisphere that prevents us to exist as we are” (Varatharajah, 2015, p. 1). Afiba explained that he did not have any issues relating to language as the official language of Nigeria is English. It is noteworthy that English is the official language of Nigeria, further highlighting the colonisation of linguistic territory.

Despite Afiba being proficient in the English language, he noted how his friend from a French-speaking part of Africa dealt with language barriers, with the “accents of the lecturers” being an added issue:

For example, there’s a friend who is also from Africa, from a French speaking part of Africa who has to deal with the language barrier and then sometimes the accents of the lecturers could be an issue. (Afiba)

Similarly, Nor described how she had to get used to the Irish accent. She had difficulty writing in English yet had adjusted to speaking the language. In the following she spoke about how she and her friend would practice their Irish accents while talking English:

I think honestly, I’m not really good with writing but I think I can speak, I can speak. I try to get used to the local accents like [puts on Irish accent] ‘how are ye, how are ye? Ok’. [Laughter] but I talk to my friend [puts on Irish accent] ‘how are ye, how are ye?’ [Laughter]. That’s one thing that I learnt. (Nor)

Participants described the difficulty of maintaining a bilingual or multilingual identity in the academic space of HE. There was a constant need to translate their thought processes and present their academic voice in English. Language barriers were found to be a stressor in UK HE which impacted on learning (Mori, 2000; Poyrazli and Lopez, 2007; Smith and Khawaja, 2011). Issues relating to English language proficiency for BME international students has led to low academic achievement (Dhanda, 2009). This is further impeded by the adjustment needed to adapt to the “cultural setting” and “educational practices” of UK HE (Dhanda, 2009, p. 10). Issues relating to English language proficiency was also found to be a key issue for BME students in Irish HE (Linehan and Hoogan, 2008). Harris and Chonaill (2016) found that difficulties with the English language impacted on academic performance. An Irish study on BME international students’ academic literacies found that this cohort of student is expected to assimilate to and “fit into” the existing teaching and learning practices of Irish institutions particularly in the case of language (Sheridan, 2011, p. 129). These students
described the difficulty of finding an “academic voice that can express complex meanings in the second language” (Sheridan, 2011, p. 129). Sterzuk (2015) describes how Western HE upholds “white varieties of English” which is then used as “the benchmark” on which academic ability and “legitimate participation in learning” is marked and scored.

In relation to this, Raz (1998) describes how liberal multiculturalism “requires the existence of a common culture”, thus erasing, silencing and assimilating counterhegemonic voice. Participants themselves were aware of the socio-cultural capital of having proficient English as some learnt it from a young age outside of the Western schooling system demonstrating the neocolonial demand to linguistically assimilate to dominant Western languages. The lack of provision for linguistic diversity in Irish HE teaching and learning spaces is problematic insofar as multilingualism is needed in order to “explicate the validly of different types of […] language and world views” (Freire, 2003, p. 358). However, the Irish HE space maintains the linguistic imperialism of the English language via the “linguistic purification” (Varatharajah, 2015, p. 1) of its academic settings. In response, decolonial, culturally responsive pedagogy calls on educators “to provide frameworks for hearing silence and listening to the voices of the silenced” (Smith, 1994, p. 136) in order to ensure successful cross-cultural and linguistic integration.

7.3.3 Being Undermined Academically

As participants attempted to adjust to the academic setting they recounted experiences of being dismissed and talked down to by their white, Irish peers in class discussions and debates. Feyisetan described one such experience:

There was an instance, we were doing this group thing together. I’m the only black in my group you know (sigh). I don’t know, they see, they feel that if you are black that you haven’t got intelligence which is a lie. […] If you talk or contribute to, because it’s a compulsory thing, you have to contribute, you will be scored on that and all that. When you talk they kind of (Impression of a sarcastic sigh) undermine your contributions, your suggestions and all that. I noticed that some of them would snigger and talk behind my back and all that.[…] Maybe because you are black and all they feel that you don’t really know what you are talking about it’s quite challenging you know, to be in an environment like this you know. (Feyisetan,)

As we can see above, Feyisetan described being mocked and undermined in class when she contributed. She links this behaviour to her white, Irish peers believing that black people are somehow less intelligent. Such experiences may have a negative impact on academic attainment as class contributions are becoming increasingly marked as a form of assessment.
For participants like Ayoluwa who were assertive and confident in expressing their voice in academic spaces, there were accounts of their viewpoints and contributions being dismissed. She defined this as “just what happens to the stranger in our midst […] Everybody just kind of blocks the person out”. She described the way her white, Irish peers blocked her out and ignored her contributions in the class. Despite dismissing her contribution her white, Irish peers would then appropriate her viewpoint as their own without referencing her input:

I was being ignored and maybe they thought, I don’t know, I was being ignored and my suggestions were not taken, like somebody at the table, they would all discuss it and they would take everybody’s suggestion […], would write it on yellow sticky papers and put it on the board and they would vote. So you can imagine if there are twelve of us and eleven suggestions are on the board and you’re wondering what happened to mine. They [white, Irish] underestimated me and they were always giving jobs to other people and I was being left out. Every time I suggested we do something they would not take it but it was always funny because they would go all around and come back to what I said. (Ayoluwa)

In terms of contributing his viewpoint, Uzoma described how he was unable to position himself as Irish in his academic work. He reflected on an essay he wrote on the 1916 Rising:

When I was speaking of Ireland I would use terms like “we” and “us” and this is what we fought for, this is “our” freedom and I would use you know, association terms. I would associate myself with Ireland and my lecturer said maybe you should use “the Irish” or she just gave me alternative suggestions basically where I don’t associate myself. (Uzoma)

The fear of being mocked and dismissed by their white, Irish peers as well as the demand to fully assimilate to Western styles of teaching and learning led some participants to feel isolated and deficient. Ado reflected on the difficulty he had in class. He described the way he sat in class wanting to leave due to the discomfort he felt. There was a need for him to feel “ok”. Additionally, Ado in many ways internalised the perceptions of him being somehow academically deficient believing that the others in the class knew what they were doing:

It’s difficult because sometimes I feel like I’m alone in the class. I feel like most people understand what they are doing in the class. […] Sometimes I feel like I just want to walk out after the break or something and come back the next day or whenever I got something done. Whenever I feel comfortable, ok, I can go back now, I’m ok now. (Ado)

Participants described how their voices were side-lined, ignored, marginalised and appropriated when they contributed to class discussions. Some participants described how they were overtly ridiculed and mocked when they spoke in the class. Studies have highlighted how BME students are perceived in the HE academic setting based on prejudicial
stereotypes and assumptions (Solorzano, Ceja and Yosso, 2000). Such experiences include expectations of failure and having to prove themselves in a classroom environment (Cabrera, 2014; Cabrera and Nora, 1994; Davies et al., 2004). This contrasts to the perception of white students who are regarded as “bright”, “intelligent” and “good students” (Crozier et al., 2016, p. 49). There is evidence to suggest that BME students undergo deferential treatment in academic settings (Cabrera, 2014; Cabrera et al., 1994) which “stigmatise” (Dunne, 2009) BME students as needing academic assistance due to their cultural and linguistic background as well as their prior learning experience outside of the Western system (Asmar, 2005; Hanassab, 2006; Volet and Ang, 1998). This has been noted by Osler (1999) as a precursor for “discriminatory teaching and assessment exercises”. Connor et al. (2004) reported issues relating to inadequate teaching quality, isolation and hostility in academic settings for BME students in HE settings. This was impacted further by a lack of institutional support (Conner et al., 2004). Additionally, Hausmann et al. (2007) found a significant decrease in the academic integration of BME students in comparison to their white peers. Based on these prior studies, it is unsurprising that BME students report higher levels of dissatisfaction with the teaching quality they receive at HE in comparison to their white peers (Neves et al., 2016).

In terms of this study, many participants described how they were perceived to be academically deficient by their white, Irish peers and teachers due to their race and ethnicity. Decolonial pedagogy provides reasoning for such instances insofar as, “Eurocentrism ultimately privileges the voices and perspectives of predominately Western thinkers and practices whilst marginalising the voices and perspectives of those deemed ‘non-Western’” (Turney, Law and Philips, 2002, p.22). Yosso (2005) remarks on the deficit modelling of teaching in HE in relation to race and culture:

…as part of the challenge to deficit thinking in education, it should be noted that race is often coded as ‘cultural difference’ in schools. Indeed, culture influences how society is organised, how school curriculum is developed and how pedagogy and policy are implemented. (Yosso, 2005, p.75)

This relates to Spivak’s (1985, p. 25) reading of the “theoretical elite” and the concept of “sanctioned ignorance” whereby Western educators teach a singular world view which maintains white social and cultural dominance. Those who do not assimilate to the thought processes of the Western HE system can be regarded as having a “third world view” (Spivak, 1985, p. 50). Participants described how they believed that their peers regarded them as being
less intelligent. This fits into the notion of “progress and the West” which is a “particular world-view that posits the ‘Rest’ as backward and lagging behind” (Turney et al., 2002, p.22). The participants’ experiences of being regarded as academically and linguistically deficient within the academic space of Irish HE links to the Western notion of the developed world and the ‘third world’ (Spivak, 1985) whereby, “the minoritised indigenous or migrant culture is defined by post-imperial, Western national culture as ‘behind’ or belated in time, still to catch up and conform itself with the modernity of national culture” (Bennett, 1998, p.9). In response, decolonial praxis suggests the need for the inclusion of ‘minority’ knowledge as:

…the struggles against hegemonic knowledge is not simply an attempt to do away with centric forms of knowledge. The idea of centric education should not be confused with hegemonic education. There is no natural connection between the two practices; thus, any connection should be challenged and resisted. Given the historical dominance of Eurocentric knowledge, what is required are additional forms of centric knowledge that empower minority youth in particular to counter their history of being treated as inferior. (Sefa Dei, 1996, p. 83)

The tension between the West and the ‘Rest’ was evident in some of the participants’ encounters with their white, Irish peers. As a way to enact resistance, there is a need to be aware as to how teachers facilitate theoretical elitism through the hegemonic teaching structures demanded by Irish neocolonial HE:

One way whiteness is manifest in higher education is via the assumption that faculty are unbiased conveyors of knowledge, unaffected or influenced by their own or students’ social identities or the larger structure of race. […] Recognising that the dominant narrative in our society is based on the perspective of the white racial group and publicly acknowledging a social location within this system of white privilege is another transforming enactment of whiteness. White faculty do this in pedagogical practice by explaining patterns of white dominance and hegemony as they arise in course materials, classroom dynamics, and the university itself. (Charbeneau, 2015, pp. 665-669)

Indeed, the experiences of these participants can be regarded as a result of “epistemological racism” (Berryman et al., 2013). In response, there is a need for decolonial praxis and the incorporation of counterhegemonic epistemologies and ontologies. Rather than viewing counter narratives as a threat, their integration allows for potential new modes of knowledge production as, “a just curriculum does not mean a curriculum that automatically reflects the currently existing culture of the least advantaged. All curriculum-making requires a critique of culture and a reflective selection from a vast range of possible knowledge” (Connell, 2017, p.11). Through the incorporation of such a curriculum, there is perhaps, potential to resist the
“sanctioned ignorance” (Spivak, 1985) existent between the West and the ‘Rest’. When asked to reflect on the academic relationship with her peers, Nor remarked that “the competition is fierce amongst the locals and the international students”. This suggests an underlying tension between disparate cultural and ethnic groups competing in an increasingly competitive, neoliberalised HE space. Despite the difficulties experienced, many participants’ adjusted to the Western academic setting and described how they intended to progress as far as possible within the system in terms of gaining a Masters, PhD and postdoctoral qualification. Afiba noted this ambition as he worked towards a first class honours degree so he could potentially go straight into a PhD programme:

My goal is to have a PhD in engineering. […] Hopefully I’ll be able to achieve 2.1 or first class and I will be able to start a PhD straight off or a Masters but definitely at least the goal is to get the highest peak of academic that is possible. (Afiba)

Afiba’s comment that he wished to reach “the highest peak of academic that is possible” reflected many of the participants’ comments. Iana did an extra year on her course to progress from level 7 to level 8 in order to increase her employability prospects:

I didn’t know if I would do the 4th year or not. With three years you get your honorary like a level 7 but if you want to do 8 like your honours degree do one more year. […] You get an automatic letter inviting you because you did your three years so I said, yeah after contacting all the people I know. I say ‘ok this is it’. For three months I didn’t get a job so I didn’t want to sit another year while my brain still knows how to do this sort of thing. (Iana)

This suggests that despite the difficulties of adjusting to Western teaching and learning styles and being undermined and dismissed in classroom settings, the participants’ negative experiences did not impact on their aspirations to academically attain. Aishia provided an insight to the drive and motivation of many of my participants to progress academically. She described how she started her PhD ten days after she finished her M. Phil. She did not even attend her M. Phil. graduation as she “was back at work”:

I’ve never graduated because when I finished my M. Phil. I started my PhD. […] I remember I submitted my thesis in August and then the following day I sent my application through the central admissions and then after 10 days I was free to get books and I was a student again. So while my peers were graduating I was back at work. (Aishia)

Currently there is a lack of data of the retention and progression of BME cohorts in Irish HE. In the UK, black students are 50% more likely to drop out of university when compared to their ethnic minority and white peers (Social Market Foundation, 2017). Evidence of BME
students withdrawing from HE at a higher rate than their white peers compares to prior research by Dhanda (2009), HEFCE (2016) and Steele (1999). In the US, a “marginally significant decrease” in terms of academic integration was found, with males reporting a higher level of lack of integration than females (Hausmann et al., 2007, p. 819). Additionally, white students reported a greater level of peer support than African Americans. In terms of academic support, parental support was found to be “the only statistically significant predictor” for students to academically “persist” as they encountered instances and experiences of dis-belonging in the academic environment (Hausmann et al., 2007, p. 819). There is additional evidence to suggest that the socio-economic status of UK BME students influenced academic retention and progression rates (Cureton, 2007; Rodgers, 2013). Lack of BME staff is also affects retention rates as there are limited role models in the HE learning environment for BME students (Dumangane 2016; Johnson, 2015). Issues relating to financial difficulties, lack of institutional support, isolation and lack of cultural diversity have also contributed to BME students dropping out of HE prior to graduation (Connor, et. al, 2004; Dhanda, 2009; HEFCE, 2016; Smith, 2017; Steele, 1999). Smith (2017) found that low confidence has impacted UK BME student’s academic attainment. In the US, Hausmann et al. (2007, p. 829) found that feelings of belonging lead to greater instances of “persistence” to remain in HE.

Irrespective of variables such as socio-economic background, it was found that BME students attain a lower degree than their white, British peers (Connor et al., 2004). UK BME students are less likely to get a first or upper second class degree in comparison to their white peers. Black students attain a third degree or lower in comparison to their white peers and other BME groupings. In terms of gender, females generally outperform males (Connor et al., 2004). The latest figures show that 60% of UK BME students achieved a 2:1 in 2013-2014 in comparison to 76% of white students (Neves et al., 2016). Broecke and Nicholls (2006) suggest that status as an ‘ethnic minority’ was statistically significant in terms of explaining academic attainment rates. As with the UK, in the US there is a notable attainment gap between BME students and their white peers (Horn, Peter and Rooney 2002; Richardson, 2012).

It was also found that UK BME students are more likely than white graduates to progress to taught masters level (HEFCE, 2016). Despite lower attainment rates than their white, British peers, UK BME students are more likely to further their academic study to postgraduate level
The participant’s motivation to academically attain and progress as far as they could within the HE system may be read in comparison to UK based research where it was found that such a desire is motivated by the need to increase employability prospects (HEFCE, 2016; Noden, et al., 2014). This has been noted in a number of studies which found that BME groups engage with HE to increase socio-cultural capital to secure employment opportunities via a HE qualification (Archer, 2000; Beck, 2006; Conner et al., 2004; Fitzgerald et al., 2000; Keane, 2016; Rhamie et al., 2002; Strand, 2007; Torgerson, et al., 2008). Indeed, the participants’ aspirations to academically attain and progress to the highest level can be denoted as a need to secure and increase their employment opportunities within the current neocolonial labour market where the successful employment rates of BME cohorts is “less than expected” (Connor et al., 2004, p. 1). This is an issue deserving further examination in the Irish context.

7.4 Conclusion

The findings suggest that division was a key experience in the socialising process of BME students in Irish HE even in instances where participants identified as Irish. Participants recalled how they were divided from their white, Irish peers due to their skin colour. There was evidence of this divide in the social and academic settings of Irish HE with reports of divided lecture halls and social groupings which were separated based on ethnicity and/or cultural background. The findings suggest that the lack of integration between BME students and their white, Irish peers can be seen as a result of cultural difference. Some participants described the way it was natural for people to group together based on shared cultural backgrounds. Some participants described how their cultural values did not align to Irish cultural traits making it difficult to integrate and socialise. In some instances, participants dismissed the need to bridge the divide between them and their white, Irish peers by stating that their objective was to study rather than socialise. For some participants the divide led to identity crises. This was particularly evident in instances where participants identified as Irish, yet were positioned as ‘non-Irish’ by their white, Irish peers.

In terms of the academic experience of the participants, issues arose for those who had teaching and learning experience outside of the Western education system. These participants described the difficulty of adjusting to unfamiliar teaching and learning styles. Adapting to the monolingual environment of Irish HE was an issue for some participants, impeding their academic work, self-confidence and interaction with their Irish peers and lecturers.
Participants noted how they were perceived as being intellectually deficient due to their ethnic and cultural background. These participants described how their academic contributions were ignored by their white, Irish peers. Participants who did assert their voice described instances of being appropriated and positioned as ‘non-Irish’ in a manner which dismissed and silenced their academic contribution. Despite the lack of inclusive curricula and the social and academic racisms encountered, all participants were keen to remain in HE and progress to postgraduate and postdoctoral level. However, it is difficult to read this as evidence of successful integration. Rather, the aspiration of BME students to remain within the racially discriminatory environment of Irish HE may be promoted by a need to secure and/or increase socio-cultural capital and employment opportunities. The following concluding chapter revisits the three Findings and Discussion chapters to ascertain what the implications of these findings are and what recommendations can be made in relation to policy, practice and further research.
Chapter Eight: Conclusion

Ours is a late-twentieth-century world profoundly fissured by nationality, ethnicity, race, class and gender. And the only way to transcend those divisions - to forge, for once, a civic culture that respects both differences and commonalities - is through education that seeks to comprehend the diversity of human culture. Beyond the hype and high-flown rhetoric is a pretty homely truth: There is no tolerance without respect - and no respect without knowledge. (Louis Gates Jr., 1993)

8.1 Introduction

There are five sections in this concluding chapter. The first section provides a brief overview of the study. The second section outlines the key findings on the factors impacting the Higher Education (HE) experiences of black and minority ethnic (BME) students in Ireland. The third section locates the contribution of this study while the fourth section addresses the limitations of this study. The fifth and final section draws on the rationale and key findings of the study to set forward recommendations in terms of policy, practice and further research.

8.2 A Brief Overview of the Study

This study was devised in response to an insulated Irish culture sustained by a dominant narrative that Irish identity has historically been white, Roman Catholic and English speaking. This false narrative is particularly problematic at a time when inward migration to Ireland has increased (Mac Éinrí and White, 2008) and brought about swift socio-cultural changes in terms of the ‘new Irish’ who challenge assumptions and prejudices of what defines ‘Irishness’ and the right to claim an Irish identity (see 1.2). While I initially undertook the study to explore the democratisation of the Irish HE learning space (see 3.2.1), what I discovered was an exclusionary HE space with further examination needed in relation to BME representation in Irish HE.

Structural barriers to HE progression for BME cohorts is identifiable in the racial segregation enforced by Direct Provision which violates domestic and international law relating to the human rights of refugees and asylum seekers including restrictive access to Irish HE (Breen, 2008; Fanning and Veale, 2004; Thornton, 2014). Further structural barriers include a state funded primary and post-primary system which is dominated by the interests of the Roman Catholic Church in terms of syllabi, curricula and the socio-cultural ethos of the schooling environment (Devine, 2005; Lodge and Lynch, 2004). These issues are compounded by a lack of Widening Participation (WP) targets for BME cohorts (HEA, 2005, 2008, 2015) with
the exception of Travellers/Mincéir who have been included as a WP target for the first time (HEA, 2015).

The marginalisation, segregation and erasure of BME groups from mainstream Irish discourse prompted this study to explore the concept of BME ‘voice’. However, this was problematic due to my positionality as a white, Irish researcher. In response, a paradigmatic framework was devised drawing on a constructivist lens to ensure that I did not impose or construct ‘truth’ or voice without negotiating and co-constructing with the ‘truth’ of the participants (Bernal, 2002; Fuss, 1989; Lather, 1986; Schwandt, 1998). Additionally, the study aligned to a transformative paradigm due to the underlying epistemologies of the study which included critical race theory (CRT), postcolonialism and culturally responsive research methodologies. Therefore, I found myself ‘in between’ a constructivist and transformative paradigm (see 3.3).

The underlying epistemologies further developed the framework of the study. In order to generate counterhegemonic voice, CRT advocates for testimonio (Delgado, 1989; Delgado and Stefancic, 1993) which can be understood as a form of counter-storytelling and the voiced experiences of minoritised and silenced groups. In relation to this, postcolonialism provided insight to how BME identity has historically been (mis)represented, subjugated and assimilated by white Western hierarchal castes of cultural and racial supremacy. Representation of BME identity and voice was problematised in this study due to my white positionality. In response, culturally responsive research methodologies provided insight to best practice in terms of the ethics and critical reflexivity necessary for cross-racial and cross-cultural research in order to decolonise white, hegemonic voice.

Despite working within a culturally responsive framework, my success in the research field was hindered by my white positionality affecting the development of the research question(s), participant recruitment, categorisation of race(s), transcription and analysis of the data (see Chapter Four). While negotiating these issues, the results of the fieldwork led to voiced testimonio of 25 participants from a range of Irish Higher Education Institutes (HEIs). In alignment with CRT and culturally responsive research methodologies, the participants devised the scope and focus of the research question(s) through the issues they voiced relating to the factors that impacted on their HE experiences. The three strands that came forward for analysis relating to the HE experiences of BME students in Ireland were (i)
primary and post-primary schooling experiences, (ii) aspirations and barriers in progression to HE and (iii) HE academic and social experiences.

8.3 Summary of Key Findings

8.3.1 The Schooling Experiences of BME students in Ireland

When asked to reflect on their HE experiences, participants recounted their primary and post-primary schooling experiences in Ireland. This demonstrates how the primary and post-primary social and learning environment impacts on the HE experience (see Chapter Five). Indeed, the teachers, peers and culture of the primary and post-primary school had a significant impact on the construction of the participants’ identities. Participants described how they were positioned as ‘non-Irish’ by their peers and teachers even in instances where they were biracial, an Irish citizen and/or self-identified as Irish. This has been identified by Ní Laoire, Bushin, Carpena-Méndez and White (2009) who found that migrant children in Ireland describe themselves in a ‘hyphenated’ manner, e.g., African-Irish. However, many migrant children are provoked to question their identity and choose one nationality and/or identity over another, usually the ‘non-Irish’ identity and/or nationality (Ní Laoire et al., 2009). Being positioned as ‘non-Irish’ led to identity battles for many of the participants. In some instances this prompted attempts at assimilation and repression of any ethnic and/or cultural distinctions that may be deemed ‘non-Irish’. This assimilative practice has been noted by Devine (2009, p. 532) as migrant students’ attempt at “proving their Irishness”. However, within this study there is no evidence to suggest that assimilative attempts led to successful integration. Rather, the experiences of the participants being denied their Irish and ‘non-Irish’ identity raises concern as to what identity the participants ‘can’ or ‘could’ express.

Indeed, the notion of ‘abnormality’ arose. Many participants felt the need to stress that they had a ‘normal’ primary and post-primary schooling experience. Further analysis of this, may be read in relation to white, Irish teachers who have been found to exoticise and ‘other’ BME students by drawing on cultural and ethnic stereotypes (Devine, 2005). In terms of this study, the participants seemed to want to distance themselves from an ‘abnormal’ experience that they may be associated with as they attempted to align their experience to the ‘norm’. White skin and English speaking monolingualism was identified as the accepted ‘norm’ in the primary and post-primary schooling environment. In the context of this study, the identity
divides experienced by the participants, lack of and/or refused integration and fear of being perceived as ‘abnormal’ demonstrates how the primary and post-primary schooling environment fosters a demand for white, Irish cultural homogenisation while simultaneously side-lining those attempting to enact the homogenisation process.

There was a significant demand for linguistic assimilation in the social and learning space at primary and post-primary level. Participants recounted an expectation to be fluent in English. Despite many of the participants being bi/multilingual, their English was disregarded as being suitably proficient. There was a noted uneasiness in regards to the participants having English as a second language prompting many of the participants to be patronised by their teachers, streamed in lower age classes, sent to resource teachers and in one case steered towards the Leaving Certificate (LC) Applied course despite evidence of academic ability. Indeed, proficiency with the English language has been identified as an integrative barrier for BME children in the Irish schooling system at primary and second level (Darmody, 2011; Darmody, et al., 2014; Forum Polonia, 2014). Issues relating to bi/multilingualism were a key site of analysis in the participants’ testimonios. As a key finding of the study, there is evidence to suggest that informal learning spaces are emerging in primary and post-primary Irish schools particularly in relation to language(s). Participants described how they learnt languages from their bi/multilingual peers. English was taught and exchanged alongside languages such as Polish and Urdu. While this exchange may be regarded as organic as ethnic and cultural backgrounds intermix in the social space of the school, there is argument to suggest that there was a level of support lacking in the teaching and learning environment.

Wallen and Kelly-Holmes (2006) note how the Irish education system should be open to bilingualism due to the native Irish language which is incorporated into the primary and post-primary curriculum. However, it was found that Irish bilingual identity is not successfully integrated into the primary school environment (Harris, 2008; Wallen et al., 2006). Furthermore, it was found that the bi/multilingual identity of migrant children in Ireland undergoes limited integration as teaching support in the form of English as an Additional Language (EAL) is lacking due to government policy which is inconsistent with international best practice (Nowlan, 2008; Wallen et al., 2006). In terms of this study, it was noted that restrictive English monolingualism was enforced with limited integration of bi/multilingual voice. The restrictive enforcement of English monolingualism and the silencing of non-English voice in Irish schools is indicative of a (neo)colonial schooling structure. There is an
argument to suggest that the enforcement of English in Irish primary and post-primary schools harks back to the provision of Irish state education when the ‘bata scoir’\(^{47}\) was used to physically ensure that English was spoken in the school environment. The results of this practice may continue to influence the rigid enforcement of English monolingual identity and the disparagement and silencing of bi/multilingual identity in the primary and post-primary environment to date. There was an inability to incorporate bi/multilingual identity into what the participants have described as a very rigid English monolingual social, teaching and learning environment at primary and post-primary level. This is problematic as non-English knowledge and voice is silenced and potentially erased (Ball and Lardner, 1997; Bartolomé, 2003; Macedo and Bartolomé, 2014) perpetuating the dominance of white voice.

Furthermore, rigidity in terms of accepted ‘norms’ led to instances of peer to peer bullying experienced by the participants. Bullying, in all cases, was expressed in a racist manner. Peer to peer racist bullying has been identified in Irish primary and post-primary schools as an ongoing issue (Devine, 2005, 2009; Devine, Kenny and Macneela, 2008; Gilligan, Curry, McGrath, Murphy and Ní Raghallaigh, 2010; Kitching, 2011; Kitching, Brien, Long, Conway, Murphy and Hall, 2015; Lynch and Lodge, 2002; Smyth, Darmody, McGinnity and Byrne, 2009). In relation to this, BME students perceive favouritism from teachers who are perceived as giving preferential treatment to their white, Irish students (Gilligan et al., 2010). Gilligan et al. (2010, p. 30) has also found that BME students note “failure” and lack of awareness from their teachers when dealing with the issue of racist bullying. In terms of this study, the participants reflected on the (in)action of their teachers in dealing with the issue. The participants sought greater support and insight from their teachers in terms of addressing racism in the school environment. There is evidence to suggest that support was significantly lacking. Rather, there is evidence describing how the teachers were the aggressors and bullies in some instances towards their BME students which is a site of concern needing immediate intervention (see 8.6.1).

Overall, participants may have reflected on their primary and post-primary schooling experience when recounting their HE experience as this initial early education stage seems to

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\(^{47}\) In 1831 Irish state education under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Church was introduced to teach via the medium of the English language. A tally stick, known as a ‘bata scoir’ in the native Gaelic language, was a teaching tool involving a piece of wood that was tied around the child’s neck with string. If the native Irish child was caught speaking Gaelic, a notch was carved into the wood. At the end of the school day the child would be beaten according to how many notches were on the bata scoir
have been the space where many of the participants’ identities were constructed. The Irish primary and post-primary school was where many of the participants learnt that they were ‘not Irish’. This is significant in terms of this study, as this divided and ‘abnormalised’ identity is the identity that the participants brought with them into the Irish HE space. The positioning of the participants as ‘abnormal’ to accepted constructs of ‘Irishness’ was further enforced by the silencing and diminishment of non-English bi/multilingual identity. This too, is carried into the HE space by the participants who were schooled at primary and post-primary level to express themselves as “English only” (Macedo et al., 2014, p. 25). The early education experiences of the participants whereby they experienced racist bullying from their peers and teachers along with an inability on the behalf of the teachers to deal constructively with the issue further impacted on the HE experience of the participants insofar as they learnt that the Irish education system has not been structured to ‘voice’ the discrimination they encounter(ed). Further analysis is necessary to examine how an anti-racist, decolonised, education system from primary to HE level can be successfully incorporated via initial teacher education and continuing professional development (CPD), policy, institutional support and curricula and syllabi review (see 8.6.1).

The participants’ post-primary school experiences also had a significant impact on the HE experience insofar as many of the participants described how they were not encouraged to progress to HE. Active discouragement and lack of teacher ambition for BME students to aspire to and progress to HE is particularly concerning and requires immediate attention in terms of WP in Irish HE. For participants who were encouraged by their teachers to progress to HE, successful progression was hindered by citizenship status and being resident in Direct Provision highlighting the intersection of state imposed structural barriers and the neoliberal provision of Irish HE as a consumerist choice rather than an inherent right or social good. This issue is examined as a key finding in the following section.

8.3.2 Motivations and Barriers in the Progression to Irish HE for BME Students

Irrespective of gender, citizenship status and cultural and ethnic background, participants were motivated to aspire to HE due to familial and cultural expectations to academically attain. These familial and cultural expectations aligned to a belief that a HE qualification leads to increased socio-cultural capital. Indeed, many of the participants were motivated to progress to HE in order to secure and broaden employment opportunities. In this manner, a HE qualification was regarded as a pathway to the labour market. This aspiration compares to
UK and US research (Connor; Tyers, Modood and Hillage 2004; Dhanda, 2009; Griffin, 2006; Magadi, Beckhelling, Phung, Chzhen, France and Harvey, 2007). This highlights how the participants engaged with the neoliberal concept of HE as a site for increasing employability rather than a site of critical thinking, creativity or personal development and learning beyond labour market dictates. Rather, a HE qualification was attained as a way to commodify the self and make one-self available and as attractive as possible to the global labour market. Indeed, the participants specifically aspired to attain a Western qualification. This can be read as a form of neocolonialism, insofar as the dictates of neocolonial education ensure that BME identity is assimilated, Westernised and commodified in order to be productive labourers in the global economy (Apple, 2006; Gardner-McTaggart, 2016; Giroux, 2002; Green, 2013; Sullivan, 2002; Tikly, 2004). Indeed, this study found that a HE qualification was also regarded as a ‘passport’ out of ‘third-world’ identity for many of the participants who came from low socio-economic backgrounds and refugee and asylum seeking backgrounds. The notion of ‘third-world’ is a colonial construct (Spivak, 1985) internalised by these participants as being representative of their native country and identity even in instances where such a term was rejected or challenged. Additionally, it was found that the participants in this study regarded a HE qualification in symbolic rather than academic terms as a pathway to a better life, self-autonomy and indeed, hope beyond the constraints of ‘third-world’ status.

There was also noted resistance from some participants in relation to their course choice. Many participants aspired to undertake HE courses relating to human rights, peace studies and social work due to their personal experiences of discrimination, structural violence and marginalisation. In these cases, participants viewed a HE qualification as a way to enact social good from within their chosen field of study. In this manner, such aspirations can be read as a form of resistance to inequitable and unjust social structuring. Therefore, these participants did not view a HE qualification as a mode of assimilation but rather as a method of instigating structural change from within the system itself in terms of the fields they chose to be qualified and employed within. Overall, it is clear that the participants viewed a HE qualification in symbolic terms. All of the participants attached symbolic meaning to their HE qualification beyond strictly academic terms. A HE qualification was a gateway to the labour market to increase and/or secure socio-cultural capital, a ‘passport’ out of war, working class life and the ‘third world’ and a form of resistance in the fight for social justice.
All of these aspirations can be read as an attachment to a HE qualification as a form of hope for a better life and/or world. However, this hope may be short-lived, particularly for participants who aspire to HE in order to gain access to the labour market. Due to the global dominance of neoliberal economics and a surplus of graduates for the labour market, the hope of a HE qualification increasing or indeed, securing socio-economic capital is quickly diminishing (Connor, Tyers, Modood and Hillage, 2004; Keane, 2016). This study joins the argument that the relationship between HE and the labour market needs to be redeaddressed in order to ascertain what the role of HE is, or indeed, if the role of HE should be to serve industry and corporate demands (Apple, 2006; Giroux, 2002; Green, 2013; Lynch, 2006; Naidoo, 2003; Tikly, 2004). Within this debate there is potential to reclaim the HE space to focus on intellectualism, creativity and critical thinking beyond the neoliberal consumerist drive to commodify the student body. With a surplus of qualified graduates and an increasingly restrictive and shrinking global economy, preparing students for the labour market can no longer be promoted by HEIs to potential students as a viable reason to attain a HE qualification. Therefore, HE needs to ‘rebrand’ and reclaim the purpose and ethos of a HE qualification if it is to ethically endure the demands of neoliberalism. This study found that the participants aspired to HE as they viewed a HE qualification in symbolic terms as a symbol of hope. As a HE qualification no longer guarantees successful access to the labour market, what hope can a HE qualification provide to potential students? This is perhaps the first question in the reclamation of HE from neoliberal and consumerist constraints. Indeed, praxis in regards to this issue can be regarded as a decolonisation of the education system and the neocolonial construction of the student body as an output for the demands of the capitalistic labour force. In terms of the objectives of this study, it is hoped that this can be achieved through deconstruction of what a HE qualification constitutes.

Despite increased attempts to increase WP in Irish HE (Keane, 2011, a, b, 2012, 2016) the findings of this study suggest that Irish HE remains a structurally exclusionary space. This was evident in instances where the participants were resident in Ireland and did not have Irish/EU citizenship status. Therefore, these participants were prohibited from the Free Fees initiative\textsuperscript{48} and obliged to pay extortionate international student fees highlighting the provision of Irish HE as a consumerist rather than a social good. Despite this, these

\textsuperscript{48} The Free Fees Initiative is tuition fees paid to HEIs by the Department of Education and Skills on behalf of Irish/EU students
participants paid the international student fees regardless of the financial burden, perhaps investing in the symbolic hope of their HE qualification.

This study found that for participants who were resident in Direct Provision there was an expectation for them to ‘wait’ before pathways to HE were made available to them. In these cases, participants did not progress directly to HE with their peers from post-primary school to HE despite having the LC points to enter their chosen HE course. This study highlights how this violates domestic law as evidenced in legal scholarship (Breen, 2008; Fanning and Veale, 2004; Thornton, 2014). As a key finding, the experiences of these participants highlight the border patrol of Irish HE. Indeed, there is evidence highlighting how the participants were racially labelled by both the immigration and HE system. For participants who sought access to Irish HE, they had to undergo racial documentation where their identity was racially ascribed leading to further marginalisation with strictly imposed divides between the white Irish students and the BME ‘other’. This is evidence of neocolonial racial construction and the segregation and minoritisation of BME identity. Participants had to sign documentation and ascribe to a distinct race, even when the label was not ethically or culturally appropriate, in order to access Irish HE. In the context of this study, there is a need to challenge why racial identity is fixed and imposed in the provision of access to Irish HE. This study argues that the immigration system and an unresponsive HE structure have enforced border patrol on access to the Irish HE space in a highly racialised and neocolonial manner.

Indeed, further evidence of the neocolonial structuring of Irish HE was evident in the non-recognition and refused acceptance of non-Western qualifications. Linehan and Hogan (2008) have noted this barrier and in the Irish context it has also been found that “no attempt was made in most cases to assess their worth” particularly in the case of African students (Coghlan, Fagan, Munck, O’Brien and Warener, 2005, p. 8). The participants who had undergraduate or postgraduate degrees from non-Western countries had to re-enter these programmes in Ireland in order to attain a Western qualification highlighting how progression to HE was not a choice. Rather, the participants had to be ‘re-educated’ in the Western framework to gain access to the labour market. This can be read as a form of theoretical elitism whereby non-Western knowledge is (dis)regarded as ‘third-world’ (Spivak, 1985) and highlights the demand for white, Western assimilation of BME identity. While the issue of non-recognition of non-Western qualifications has been noted as barrier to HE progression in
Ireland (Coghlan et al., 2005; Linehan et al., 2008), this study found that this lack of recognition promoted progression to Irish HE as participants noted how they had to ‘re-educate’ themselves within the Western system in order to successfully gain a qualification which would let them enter the global labour market.

Non-recognition of the participants non-Western qualifications may be understood as a response by Irish HEI’s to the rise in fake degrees and qualifications, “a 1 billion US dollar ‘cottage’ industry which has tainted HE […] and does not appear to be abating” (Brown, 2006, p. 71). The proliferation of fake qualifications can be best understood as a consequence of the continued neoliberalisation of HE. Obtaining a fake degree is a way to buy cultural capital and is fuelled by the competiveness of the HE marketplace and the role of a HE qualification in gaining access to the labour market. Indeed, “the fake degree problem reflects an inefficiency or at least an inequality in the labour market. […] Employers play a substantial role in the demand for fake degrees by demanding a more educated workforce and overly relying on education credentials as proof of job competency” (Johnson, 2006, pp. 274-275). Addressing this issue at its core demands a radical reimagining and decolonisation of the role of HE in society by challenging the neoliberalisation of HE as a means to transmute students and learners to productive labourers within the global capitalist workforce. The need for fake degrees will abate when a HE qualification is no longer a perquisite for fair and equitable access to economic security.

In terms of addressing concerns relating to “theoretical elitism” (Spivak, 1986) and ‘third-world’ bias in relation to non-Western qualifications, Irish HEI’s should attempt to ensure that legitimate qualifications are recognised. Unfortunately, at present, there is a lack of clarity as to how this can be achieved as Ireland shares in a broader global problem insofar as “the lack of coherence and harmonisation in national and international policies and procedures for the accreditation of institutions leaves an open door for dubious quality assurance systems” (Grolleau, Lakhal and Mzoughi, 2008, p. 675).

For the participants in this study who had to repeat undergraduate and post-graduate courses in Ireland that they had previously been qualified in outside of the Western system due to a lack of recognition, there is evidence that they faced increased financial pressure as their progress to the labour market was stymied and prolonged. Consequently, they have unfairly experienced the brunt of the fallout from the continued marketisation of HE as a consumerist
exchange. Indeed, the manner in which fake degrees continues to rise, merely highlights how HE has been reduced to a commodity whether our qualifications are ‘authentic’ or ‘fake’ as both can be bought in the ‘scholarly (black) market’ (Ansahl, Aikhuele and Yao, 2017, p. 1237).

Overall, the barriers to Irish HE experienced by the participants in terms of being identified in the system as an international student despite being resident in Ireland, being racially labelled within the HE system and having to ‘re-educate’ themselves via a Western qualification suggest that the barriers and prompters to HE experienced by the participants were imbued with a distinctly racial undertone. From the perspective of this study, it is argued that this is perpetuated by a neocolonial immigration system and an enforced border patrol of the Irish HE space that was racially subjective in the admittance of BME identity.

8.3.3 The Social and Academic Experiences of BME students in Irish HE

Participants described a divided Irish HE social space due to limited cross-racial and cross-cultural interaction. There were numerous accounts of divided lecture halls as students remained in distinct cultural and ethnic insulated groupings. In the Irish HE context, Keane (2011a) found that working and middle class students grouped together and ‘distanced’ themselves from others in various ways on campus in class-based ‘cliques’ as a form of self-protection and based on a sense of similarity and ‘comfort’. This may be occurring in the case of BME students also. The issue of BME international students being divided from their white Irish peers in lecture halls has been noted as a form of “ghettoization” (Sheridan, 2011, p. 129) developing in the Irish HE environment.

In terms of the contribution of this study, it was found that participants who were Irish citizens and/or identified as Irish were also divided from their white Irish peers, remaining in distinct cultural and ethnic social groups. This led to identity battles for these participants who were biracial and/or an Irish citizen as they were not accepted into their white Irish peers’ social group due to a denial of their ‘Irishness’. Some participants described the divide as natural, stating that specific ethnic and cultural groups are more comfortable socialising with those from a similar background and shared experience. While such reasoning by working class participants was also found by Keane (2011a), my study shows that a similar rationale may be employed by other minority groups, in this case BME students. For participants who did attempt to cross the divide and engage with their white Irish peers,
interaction remained superficial as cultural and ethnic groups reverted to insulated divides. Participants stated that this occurred due to cultural clashes and distinctions in cultural values and norms making it difficult to integrate and socialise.

Some participants also stated that they had been made to feel unwelcome or experienced a cold attitude from their white Irish peers when they attempted to cross the divide. In these cases, the participants disregarded their exclusion, stating that their objective in HE was to study and academically attain rather than focus on the social aspect of the HE experience. This was also found to be a key motivation for the working class Access students’ Irish HE (Keane, 2011a, 2012). This study has shown that a similar orientation applies for BME students, who also constitute a disadvantaged and minoritised group. In relation to this, the participants may have focused on the academic side of their HE experience in order to be competitive due to the ‘scarcity’ of available social capital and potential for social mobility from a HE qualification in the current economic climate. Drawing from Bourdieu (1986), it can be argued that the scarcity of social capital imposed by neoliberal economics and the mandate of ‘competition’ fuels racial conflict and divides due to a need to compete for limited resources in what Bourdieu (1986, p. 19) refers to as the “unequal distribution of capital”. It is this inequity and ‘scarcity’ that may have promoted the participants to focus on the academic side of HE, rather than engage with the social aspect.

Overall, this finding relates to previous studies which have found HE to be a racially divided space (Cabrera, 2014; Connor et al, 2004; Dunne, 2009; Harper and Hurtado, 2007; Hughey, 2008; Locks, Hurtado, Bowman and Oseguera, 2008; Jessop and Williams, 2009; Poyrazli and Lopez, 2007; Smith and Khawaja, 2011; NUS, 2010; O’Reilly, Ryan and Hickey, 2010; OSOU, 2014) suggesting that Ireland is not a unique case. Indeed, the divide experienced by the participants is of limited surprise. There is a need to note the historic foundations of HE which excluded and segregated BME identity (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2007; Bernal, 2002; Shillilam, 2015). Structurally and culturally, HE was not designed to incorporate BME identity impacting on cross-cultural and cross-racial integration. Due to the white cultural dominance of the HE environment (Berry and Loke, 2011; Osler, 1999; Torgerson, Gorard, Low, Ainsworth, See and Wright, 2008), BME identity continues to be marginalised and as seen in the case of this study - divided. This led to accounts of identity crises amongst participants. The lack of cross-racial interaction in the HE space has been noted as white students’ “ambivalence” (Fiske et al., 1999) to their BME peers. Additionally, it has been
argued that as the neoliberalisation of the HE experience has made it more competitive, white students may regard their BME peers as a threat and therefore, perpetuate and enforce the notion that BME identity does not belong in the HE space (Crozier et al., 2016. See also Keane, 2011a) in order to territorialise the HE space for their own benefit due to a ‘scarcity’ of socio-cultural capital.

This study found that the neocolonial structuring of the Irish HE environment was also evident in the participants’ academic experience(s). Participants who had prior HE experience outside of the Western education system described difficulties adjusting to the teaching and learning style. This was compounded by the restrictive English speaking monolingualism of the Irish HE teaching and learning environment. This has been described as an integrative issue by BME international students in previous Irish studies (Dunne, 2009; Sheridan, 2011). Participants recounted a fear of contributing to class discussions due to a fear of being mocked due to their accent and English pronunciation. This study found that participants’ who did contribute their academic voice described instances of being appropriated, silenced and undermined. The academic experiences of the participants can be analysed in reference to the concept of epistemological racism (Berryman, Soohoo and Nevin, 2013) and theoretical elitism (Spivak, 1985) whereby BME identity is regarded as academically deficient. In this regard, Irish HE enforces the (re)production of homogenous white, Western knowledge through the undermining of bi/multilingualism and prior knowledge and learning styles developed outside of the Western HE system. There is a need to review the curricula and syllabi of Irish HE to gauge how it responds to the representation and theorisation of BME identity in order to decolonise knowledge (re)production and broaden subjectivities beyond a white, Western, monolingual cultural lens. Indeed, there is much to be gained in such a process, as the teaching and learning environment has the potential to expand its knowledge base and incorporate multiple and diverse viewpoints (see 8.6.2).

Despite experiencing a racially divisive social and academic space, this study found that all of the participants aspired to progress within HE to the highest academic level that they could achieve. This may be prompted by a need to increase and/or secure socio-cultural capital and broaden employment opportunities. This motivation has been noted in prior studies (Archer, 2000; Beck, 2006; Conner, 2004; Fitzgerald, Finch and Nove, 2000; HEFCE, 2016; Rhamie et al., 2002; Strand, 2007; Torgerson, Gorard, Low, Ainsworth, See and Wright, 2008). However, due to the exclusion of BME cohorts in the HEA (2015 and previous) WP target
groups there is a lack of data on the retention and progression of BME cohorts in Irish HE making it difficult to ascertain how successful BME cohorts have been in securing this aspiration.

8.4 The Contribution of this Study
This study contributes to the scholarship of BME students in HE from a distinctly Irish perspective. This is one of the first qualitative studies on BME students in Irish HE that does not focus solely on the BME international student experience. This is significant as BME students resident in Ireland are an equity group requiring additional needs and resources to progress to HE and successfully attain at HE level. This study has emerged in response to the erasure of BME voice and representation in Irish HE and has found, through the use of testimonio, evidence of racist discrimination and marginalisation in the Irish schooling system from primary to HE level.

This study has identified how the participants experienced racism in the Irish education system from primary to HE level. Racist discrimination has been found to be an experience for BME students at primary and post-primary level (Devine, 2005, 2009; Devine, Kenny and Macneela, 2008; Gilligan, Curry, McGrath, Murphy and Ó Raghallaigh, 2010; Kitching, 2011; Kitching, Brien, Long, Conway, Murphy and Hall, 2015; Lynch and Lodge, 2002; Smyth, Darmody, McGinnity and Byrne, 2009). However, this study has identified how BME students experience racism and marginalisation in the Irish HE system also. There is evidence in this study to suggest that exclusion of BME identity begins in the primary and post-primary school environment whereby some of the participants felt that they had to distance themselves from an ‘abnormal’ experience that they may be associated with. This issue of ‘abnormality’ is a new finding in the literature relating to the Irish primary and post-primary schooling experience of BME students.

This study also exposes the restrictive monolingual English speaking teaching and learning environment in primary and post-primary schools. This has been identified in prior studies as an integration barrier (Nowlan, 2008; Wallen et al., 2006). However, this study found that restrictive English monolingualism is leading to the creation of informal learning spaces whereby students are teaching languages to each other and taking on mentor roles to their peers due to a lack of structural support and successful integration of bi/multilingual identity.
Previous studies have found evidence of peer-to-peer racist bullying (Devine, 2005; Devine et al., 2008; Devine, 2009; Gilligan et al., 2010; Kitching, 2011; Kitching et al., 2015; Lynch and Lodge, 2002; Smyth et al., 2009). However, of immediate concern is evidence from this study highlighting how teachers in primary and post-primary schools were perceived to be aggressive and show signs of bullying behaviour when interacting with BME students. Additionally, this study found that BME students are not encouraged and in some instances actively discouraged by their teachers to progress to HE. This is a concern for WP policy in Ireland and highlights the role of post-primary schooling in securing WP to Irish HE for BME cohorts.

In terms of aspirations to progress to Irish HE, this study found that many participants specifically aspired to attain a Western qualification. This may be due to many of the participants’ belief that a Western qualification was a ‘passport’ out of working class backgrounds, refugee and asylum seeker status and ‘third world’ identity. Furthermore, this study found that some participants aspired to HE as they regarded a HE qualification as a form of resistance whereby they could enact social change within their chosen field of study. In relation to the above aspirations, this study found that the participants aspired to HE as they regarded a HE qualification as a symbol of hope for a better life and/or world. This is noteworthy insofar as the participants regarded a HE qualification in symbolic rather than academic terms. This is potential new insight to the motivation and aspirational factors leading to BME student enrolment in Irish HE.

In terms of barriers to progression to Irish HE, this study has found that Irish HE is a structurally exclusionary space for BME identities. This study has evidence to suggest that structural exclusion is imbued with racial undertones. The findings in relation to this highlight the border patrol of Irish HE. The participants had to undergo being racially labelled by the immigration and HE system even when the label was not ethically or culturally appropriate, in order to access Irish HE. Previous research has highlighted how non-recognition of non-Western qualifications is a barrier to Irish HE (Coghlan et al., 2005; Linehan et al., 2008). However, this study found that the non-recognition of prior qualifications promoted progression to Irish HE as participants had to be ‘re-educated’ in the Western system in order to gain access to the labour market.
The social experiences of the participants in Irish HE are not a unique case when compared to international studies in terms of HE being a racially divided space (Cabrera, 2014; Connor et al., 2004; Cureton, 2007; Crozier et al., 2016; Davies et al., 2004; Fisher et al., 1995; Grasmuck et al., 2010; Harper et al., 2007; Hughey, 2008; NUS, 2010; OSOU, 2014; Smedley et al., 1993). There is evidence of divided social space between the white Irish and their BME international student peers in Irish HE (Dunne, 2009; O’Reilly et al., 2010; Sheridan, 2011). However, this study found that participants who were Irish citizens and/or identified as Irish were also divided from their white Irish peers into distinct cultural and ethnic social groups. In terms of the academic experience of BME students in Irish HE there is new evidence that BME academic voice is appropriated, silenced and undermined by their peers and lecturers in the Irish HE teaching and learning environment. Despite evidence of discrimination and marginalisation in the social and academic spheres of the participants HE experiences, this study found that all of the participants were motivated to progress within HE to the highest academic level that they could attain. This new finding is noteworthy in terms of WP policy as it demonstrates the academic aspiration and motivation of BME students to succeed in Irish HE.

This is a new study in the context of WP for BME students’ in Irish HE. This study drew on BME students nationally from a range of Irish HEIs to address the lack of literature on BME HE experience in Ireland. As a contribution to the field, there is insight to BME student experience that does not focus solely on BME international student experience. This is significant as BME students resident in Ireland are an overlooked equity group who have concerns and needs that do not pertain to BME international students. Overall, a key intention and contribution of this study was to present the ‘voice’ of BME students in Irish HE. This was deemed necessary due to the marginalisation, silencing and erasure of BME identity in mainstream Irish narrative. Additionally, there was an imperative to present the voice of BME students due to the exclusion of BME cohorts from the HEA (2005, 2008, 2015) WP access plans. This is of significant concern due to the potential erasure and increased marginalisation of BME identity in Irish HE. Through the use of testimonio (Delgado, 1989; Delgado et al., 1993), the intention and contribution of this study was to ensure that BME student experience and presence was voiced in an Irish context.

Additionally, through a transformative paradigm drawing on CRT and postcolonialism, this study has demonstrated how BME student identity encounters a neocolonial Irish education
system from primary to HE level. This occurred in terms of the participants being constructed and positioned as ‘non-Irish’, forced to express themselves via the English language only, racially bullied by their peers and teachers, structurally excluded from Irish HE, racially labelled, socially divided from their white-Irish peers and undermined academically due to their non-Western ethnicity and cultural background. In response, this study intends to contribute to analysis as to how an anti-racist, decolonial (re)structuring of the Irish teaching and learning environment from primary to HE level, can occur in conjunction with teacher practice, policy implementation and on-going research to ensure successful integration and inclusion of Ireland’s diversified student body (see 8.6).

8.5 The Limitations of this Study
My positionality as a white, Irish researcher was a barrier in this study in terms of successful participant recruitment. My positionality also raised a number of ethical concerns in relation to the categorisation of the participants and transcription and analysis of the data in terms of presenting BME voice. Therefore, this study can be best read as a ‘negotiation’ in the co-construction of cross-cultural and cross-racial voice. Additionally, despite the paradigmatic framework of the study which included a transformative and CRT lens which demands research as praxis, my positionality limited how far I could go in ‘voicing’ and representing BME experience without appropriating, whitewashing and further marginalising and silencing BME struggle. Indeed, I became aware of my limitations as a white researcher early in the study as one participant asked me what potential social change I intended to make in relation to this research. The following is an account from my reflective notebook on this question as I struggled to define my role in this study and the broader struggle for racial equity:

He pointed to a highlighted section of the paper and talked about how he was interested in one of the objectives of the study which was to feed into policy. I stifled once again. How can I make assurances that this study will actually make an impact? How can I say, yes, it will make a positive impact on students’ situations? Is that even my role? They are the same questions that were brought up with the interview with [participant one]. And in my head, I am thinking, does this black man get frustrated when he sees a white girl like me asking students what it’s like to be black and a minority in a university. Is it insulting? I couldn’t hold it in any longer, I asked him ‘do you get annoyed when white people like me do studies like this and ask these kind of questions?’ He responded matter of fact, bemused somewhat by saying, ‘well I come from Zimbabwe where there are not many white people so I have to accept that in Ireland it is mostly white people’. That was not the answer I wanted. I almost
wanted him to say yes so I could justify my own discomfort. (Reflective Interview, November 2014, Interview 2)

Despite the intention of this study to present BME voice and set forth recommendations for anti-racist, decolonial schooling from post-primary to HE level, there are limitations to advocating for racial equity due to on-going structural discrimination and ingrained racism within Irish socio-cultural discourses and national systems perpetuated by constructs of Irish and ‘non-Irish’. Therefore, this study finds itself situated within the on-going struggle to highlight, challenge and deconstruct an unresponsive political establishment and ingrained socio-cultural values which preferences and enforces white voice as the dominant narrative. This study is limited, not by the issues it seeks to address but, rather, by the societal and political unwillingness to address the issue(s) of cultural and racial supremacy and the subjugation of the cultural and ethnic ‘other’.

A related limitation is the relatively small sample of 25 participants involved in this study. As previously outlined (see 4.2) significant difficulties in recruitment were encountered as a result of my positionality (see 3.2.1) and the legacy of academic research with BME populations which have reinforced ‘othering’ and victimisation narratives from a white cultural lens leading to a distrust of the white researcher (Bartolomé, 2003; Berryman, Soohoo and Nevin 2013; Bishop, 2008; Smith, 2008, p. 121; Tillman, 2002). As such, this study does not purport to provide findings and recommendations which can be generalised for the whole BME student population. Rather it is argued that for this relatively small but diverse group of BME HE students in Ireland in the 21st Century, a number of useful findings have been identified demonstrating how Ireland, a ‘postcolonial’ nation state and Republic, enforces a neocolonial schooling structure from primary to HE level.

8.6 Implications and Recommendations for Policy, Practice and Further Research

8.6.1 Provision of Pluralistic Primary and Post-Primary Schooling

Participants voiced their primary and post-primary experience in terms of how it influenced their positioning in the Irish education system and the construction of their identities as being distinctly ‘non-Irish’. Participants felt that they had to distance themselves from an ‘abnormal’ experience that they may be associated with. It is suggested that structural and political change must occur at primary and post-primary level to provide a pluralistic schooling system. This cannot occur under the current patronage of the Roman Catholic

49 ‘Postcolonial’ nation status does not denote that the country has been successfully decolonised
Church which indoctrinates its ethos and socio-cultural values via a state funded education system to a multicultural and multi-faith student body. There is a distinct conflict of interest in the Irish primary and post-primary school system whereby the religious doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church sets the standards and ethos of the Irish primary and post-primary schooling environment (Devine, 2005; Lodge and Lynch, 2004; NCCRI, 2007). There is a need for political action to separate the state and church in the provision of education as Ireland is defined as a Republic.

Due to the current provision of Irish primary and post-primary schooling under Roman Catholic patronage, there is viable argument to suggest that Ireland veers towards theocracy. Undoing this potential threat to the Republic values of the Irish state can only be achieved through political action with a policy mandate for the provision of pluralistic, intercultural and interfaith primary and post-primary education. Indeed, “multicultural policy matters. In the past it has often served as a significant organizing tool in the ‘politics of recognition’ and the empowerment of community groups who have been disenfranchised and marginalized by the school system” (Johnson, 2003, p. 108). In the Irish context, intercultural schooling has not yet failed as it has not yet been given the opportunity to succeed due to the current dominance of the Roman Catholic Church in conjunction with the state funded provision of education. Addressing this issue is a key and vital step if successful, socio-cultural cohesion is to be achieved via the education system. Indeed, it is a necessary step if Ireland is to truly call itself a Republic.

8.6.2 Integrating Bi/Multilingual Identity

An important step in development of successful intercultural schooling relates to the integration and ‘voicing’ of bi/multilingual identity. In terms of linguistic imperialism and the demand for assimilation, the issue of language(s) was a key site of analysis in this study as the participants voiced how they were silenced and undermined due to the restrictive English monolingual teaching environment from primary to HE level. This study exposes the restrictive monolingual English speaking teaching and learning environment at primary, post-primary and HE level. This is leading to the creation of informal learning spaces in primary and post-primary schools whereby students are teaching languages to each other and taking on mentor roles to their peers due to a lack of support and successful integration of bi/multilingual identity. It has been found that Ireland has failed to incorporate international best practice in the provision of EAL teacher education and curriculum at primary and post-
There is a need for curriculum review to ascertain how EAL can be successfully integrated into the primary and post-primary classroom as well as the HE teaching and learning environment.

Provision of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for teachers must also be invested in to ensure that teachers are supported (Department of Education and Skills, 2012). In the context of this study, provision of EAL must not be incorporated in order to assimilate BME identity. This has been reiterated by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2006, p. 165) who note that “children’s first languages continue to be important in their linguistic, social, and cognitive development. Therefore it is important that the school would use every opportunity to respect the children’s native languages and encourage continued development of these languages, where possible”. Currently, during the LC bi/multilingual students are “restricted to taking one non-curricular EU language exam only” (Forum Polonia, 2014, p. 10). Provision of non-English exam papers is also restricted to a limited number of EU languages excluding non-Western languages. Academic attainment is therefore affected as bi/multilingual students must undertake a majority of the LC via the English language. In terms of this study, this may have a significant impact on success rates of progressing to HE.

Currently, there are ‘complementary schools’ existing in Ireland outside of the mainstream schooling framework which provide English teaching support and maintenance of mother-tongue language(s) to bi/multilingual students with Polish complementary schools being the largest (Forum Polonia, 2014). As a grassroots initiative working with bi/multilingual students in Ireland with first-hand experience of the issues affecting bi/multilingual students’ integration and academic attainment, Forum Polonia has called on the Irish government to officially recognise these ‘complementary schools’ and has noted the importance of developing links between ‘complementary’ and mainstream schools. State recognition is important as students undertaking additional schooling outside of the mainstream system have recounted feelings of stigma and marginalisation (Forum Polonia, 2014).

There is a need to challenge the restrictive enforcement of English speaking monolingualism in the Irish teaching and learning environment from primary to HE level. The demand for English speaking monolingualism may be best understood as a postcolonial hangover and there is potential for this issue to be addressed from such a perspective. There is a need for
teacher practice and curricula to address the presence of bi/multilingual student identity to incorporate voice beyond white, hegemonic perspectives. There is a vast richness of knowledge and cultural viewpoints to be gained in the incorporation of non-English voice. There is a need for further research on the cause and consequence of restrictive English speaking monolingualism in the teaching and learning environment at primary, post-primary and HE level. Incorporation of bi/multilingualisms in the education system is necessary. Failure to counteract the subjugation, silencing and othering enforced by the demand for English monolingualism, will further ingrain the silencing and marginalisation of BME voice.

8.6.3 Curricular Reform

In terms of achieving a successful intercultural schooling model in the Irish context, there is a need for further research which can propel the development and implementation of culturally responsive pedagogical practice at primary, post-primary and HE level. Analysis and insight to successful intercultural schooling models can lead the way in terms of what provisions can be structured and set in place for teacher education and curricula and syllabi review. As part of an anti-racist, intercultural framework, there is a need to review the curricula and syllabi at primary, post-primary and HE level to ensure that BME identity is represented and integrated. This is a necessity in terms of this study which found that the participants’ were divided and ‘abnormalised’ by their peers and teachers as ‘non-Irish’ due to colonial constructs of how BME identity should be perceived and integrated. There is a need to establish how teacher education and institutional support can aid in the development of anti-racist pedagogy and the facilitation of inclusive schooling in line with international best practice.

The need for anti-racist teacher practice and culturally responsive pedagogy is of significant importance insofar as the participants recounted racist bullying and discrimination from their white Irish peers and teachers. This is not acceptable and needs to be urgently addressed. There is a need for an anti-racist framework endorsed at policy level to be implemented and primary, post-primary and HE level. Currently, the provision of anti-racist ethos is endorsed at an individual school level. This does not go far enough in ensuring that all schools and HEIs adapt a positive anti-racist framework. Policy can address this concern via the mandatory provision of anti-racist teacher education and CPD. The Irish Immigrant Support
Centre (NASC) has developed an anti-racist toolkit for post-primary teachers.\(^5\) However, it is a voluntary tool for teachers to use in their classroom. On-going anti-racist teacher education must be mandatory at primary, post-primary and HE level with the necessary state support mechanisms put in place to ensure its success.

In terms of the academic experience of BME students in Irish HE, there is evidence that BME academic voice is appropriated, silenced and undermined by their peers and lecturers in the teaching and learning environment. This issue can be addressed via curriculum and syllabi review at HE level that integrates non-Western voice and knowledge via culturally responsive pedagogy (Brown and Forde, 2007; Delpit, 2003; Haig-Brown, 1995; Ladson Billings, 1995; Sefa Dei, 1996). Indeed, engagement with a diversity of world views promotes and fosters an opportunity to broaden knowledge spectrums. In response, this study advocates for the implementation of a culturally responsive pedagogy that “recognizes and utilizes the students’ culture and language in instruction, and ultimately respects the students’ personal and community identities” (Brown et al., 2007, p. 66). Development of culturally responsive teachers is key if successful integration and socio-cultural cohesion is to be achieved. Becoming a culturally responsive teacher is a highly reflective and personal process and one that needs to be supported via initial teacher education and an Irish state that endorses racial equity as a key value of the Irish schooling system. It is recommended that provision of intercultural schooling, frameworks for anti-racist and culturally responsive teacher education and integration of BME identity in the syllabi and curricula of primary to HE level can ensure that BME students are supported to academically succeed.

**8.6.4 Diversifying the Teaching Body**

Initial teacher education is a site of particular importance in terms of developing and preparing teachers for a diversified cultural and ethnic school environment. Keane et al. (2015, 2016) have identified how the majority of applicants to primary and post-primary teacher education courses in Ireland identify as ‘white Irish’. The homogeneity of teachers in the primary and post-primary schooling system (McDaid and Walsh, 2016) is yet another restriction on the success of intercultural schooling in Ireland, impacting on “identity work, pedagogical development and student support” (Keane et al., 2016, p. 520). Additionally, there is a need to respond to the lack of BME academics in the Irish HE space and establish

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the cause and the potential consequence of their lack of representation and visibility. Indeed, this is an important area needing greater research focus in the Irish context. There is a need for targets for the increased representation of BME teachers and role models in the primary, post-primary and HE environment in order to diversify the teaching body beyond white, Irish cultural homogeneity. Increased representation of BME cohorts in initial teacher education for primary and post-primary level ensures that the teaching practice is an inclusive space. In relation to the lack of BME academics in Irish HE, there is a need to ascertain how their presence can be increased and integrated successfully within the Irish HE environment. This is a new research and policy concern relating to Irish HE that needs urgent attention.

8.6.5 Targets for BME Students in HEA Access Plans

There is an immediate need for a robust and detailed WP framework to be set in place for BME students in Irish HE. There has been successive exclusion\(^\text{51}\) of BME WP targets by the HEA (2005, 2008, 2015) access plans. This raises concerns relating to the provision of racial equity at HE level. There is a need for BME populations resident in Ireland to be included as a HE WP target group in order to gauge the progression and retention rates of these student groups in Irish HE in comparison to their white, Irish peers. Exclusion of BME cohorts at HEA policy level raises concerns as to why racial equity and representation is being dismissed and undermined particularly at a time when student populations are becoming increasingly diversified. Inclusion of BME identity in the HEA WP targets can ensure that these cohorts of students do not undergo whitewashing, colour-blindness and erasure.

Indeed, continued exclusion of BME representation in Irish HE and lack of HEA data to ascertain progression and retention rates will essentially result in these students being lost in the system. Therefore, there is an immediate need to address this issue to deal with the present concern of structural exclusion, discrimination and apathy in terms of racial equity in the Irish HE system. Additionally due to the continued exclusion of BME cohorts in WP policy by the HEA (2005, 2008, 2015) key data for researchers in this area will be difficult to obtain hindering the success of this research field in Ireland.

\(^{51}\) With the exception of Travellers/Mincéir who have been included as a WP target for the first time (see HEA, 2015)
In terms of this study, it was found that BME students are not encouraged and in some instances actively discouraged from progressing to HE during their post-primary school experience. This is a concern for WP policy in Ireland and highlights the role of post-primary schooling in securing WP to Irish HE for BME cohorts. This study has found that Irish HE is a structurally exclusionary space for BME identities. Indeed, this study has evidence to suggest that structural exclusion is imbued with racial undertones. The findings highlight the border patrol of Irish HE. The participants had to undergo being racially labelled by the immigration and HE system even when the label was not ethically or culturally appropriate, in order to access Irish HE. Participants in Direct Provision had an expectation to ‘wait’ before pathways to HE were made available to them. There is an urgent need for policy to address the rights of asylum seekers, refugees and non-EU citizens resident in Ireland, to progress to Irish HE. Drawing on the limitations of this study, there is an acknowledgement that such change cannot occur without political will which is lacking in the current Irish socio-political climate. This is highlighted by the state institutionalisation of BME populations in Direct Provision which demonstrates the current legislative and state enforcement of racial discrimination and segregation. In response, this study advocates for the eradication of Direct Provision which currently exists in opposition to domestic and international law (Breen, 2008; Fanning and Veale, 2004; Thornton, 2014).

Currently, Irish HE structurally excludes those caught within the immigration system. There is a need to respond to the border patrol of Irish HE to challenge the exchange of HE as a consumerist choice rather than an inherent right or social good particularly in the case of Ireland’s most marginalised populations. In terms of further research, there is a need to assess how the Irish immigration system (re)enforces structural barriers to HE and impinges on the success of BME WP rates. In terms of this study, it was found that the border control of Irish HE contrasts with the aspirations of the participants who regarded a HE qualification as a ‘passport’ to a better life and/or world.

There is evidence highlighting how BME students encountered a racially divided HE space. Indeed, participants who were Irish citizens and/or identified as Irish were also divided from their white Irish peers into distinct cultural and ethnic social groups. This has implications for WP policy insofar as it demonstrates how successful WP does not necessitate successful integration into the HE social environment. Addressing the impact(s) of this on the HE experiences of BME students in Ireland is worthy of further research. Despite evidence of
discrimination and marginalisation in the participants’ social and academic experiences in HE, all of them were motivated to progress within HE to the highest academic level that they could achieve.

Inclusion of BME cohorts as a HEA WP target can ensure that the retention and progression rates of these students is accounted for in order to see if aspirations are sufficiently met. Alongside on-going assessment of the progression and retention rates of BME populations in Irish HE there is also a need for quantitative analysis on BME (under)representation in Irish Universities in comparison to Irish Institute of Technologies (ITs). This is of particular importance as UK research has identified how BME cohorts tend to be overrepresented in post 1992 universities (Boliver, 2013, 2014, 2015; Pilkington, 2015; Shiner and Modood, 2002) reinforcing issues relating to classism and elitism.

8.6.6 Privileging the Voice of BME Students in Research

Overall there is a significant need for further research in the area of BME experience in Irish HE due to an “under-theorisation of racism in Ireland” (Mac an Ghaill, 2002, p. 101). In the context of this study, it is argued that such research must present the ‘voice’ of BME populations. It is also suggested that research relating to the WP rates of BME students in Irish HE in terms of progression and retention, “needs to foreground students’ lived realities and to broaden its theoretical and empirical base if students’ capabilities to navigate change are to be fully understood and resourced” (Gale and Parker, 2014, p. 734). Additionally, in order to resist victim narratives and white researcher subjectivity “research should equally focus on the powerful ways the undocumented [and BME populations] draw from their identities and experiences to push back, challenge, resist, and transform” (Pérez Huber, 2017, p. 14).

In relation to the underlying paradigmatic framework of this study which addressed the issue of racial (mis)representation from a CRT, postcolonial and culturally responsive lens, it is suggested that future research in this area has an ethical responsibility to decolonise white voice so that counterhegemonic narrative can be co-constructed and integrated. This is of significant importance as BME voice remains on the peripheries of dominant Irish socio-cultural discourse. The representation of BME voice can challenge enforced silencing, marginalisation and invisibility.
8. 7 Conclusion

As the landscape of the Irish education system has diversified in recent years, the need for research relating to racial equity, interculturalism and integration will continue to grow in importance. Primary and post-primary schooling has been noted as significant due to the role it plays in successful integrative outcomes in Ireland at a broader societal level (Ní Laoire et al., 2009; The Equality Authority, 2004). This study argues that HE schooling is also of significant importance in securing positive integration in an Irish context. Research plays a key role in aiding this development as “sociology may also be strategically important in helping to identify the specificity of Irish racism, anti-racist mobilisations and the processes of post-colonial nation building, in order to establish effective points of intervention, in developing a modern, multi-ethnic and inclusive society” (Mac an Ghaill, 2002, p. 103). As this study was written during the period of the 1916 centenary, it prompted this study to reflect on how the Irish Republic has achieved ‘the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and all of its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally’52. It is hoped that the voice of the participants presented in this study has highlighted how the ideals of the Irish Republic have not yet been achieved. In the context of this study, it is argued that the provision of decolonial education from primary to HE level plays a key role in ensuring fair and equitable integration and representation.

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52 Quote from Forógra na Poblachta, The Proclamation of the Irish Republic
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Oxford University Student Union (2014). *The 100 voices campaign 2: Black and minority ethnic students at Oxford speak out. Campaign for racial awareness and equality*. Oxford University Student Union.


Appendices

Appendix A: Participant Advertisement Material

Research Participants Required

Students are invited to take part in a study on their experiences in university/college as part of research taking place in the School of Education, NUI Galway.

If you would be interested in taking part please contact:

email-@nuigalway.ie

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53 This was tailored to individual groups, see 4.2.2
Appendix B: Letter of Invitation to Interview Participants

Letter of Invitation

School of Education
National university of Ireland, Galway
University Road
Galway

Date:

Dear

I am a doctoral research student in the School of Education at the National University of Ireland, Galway. My research focuses on the experiences of _________ students in Higher Education (HE). I would like to invite you to take part in this research project. This involves participating in an individual interview, which would be organised at a time, date and location that would suit you. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you are under no obligation to take part. The overall objective of this study is to identify challenges and opportunities in relation to diversity and interculturalism in Irish HE. The interview will be approximately an hour long in duration and will be audio-recorded. Information which is collected during the course of the interview will be kept strictly confidential and your input will be anonymised. In relation to this, please refer to the consent form attached. In addition, you will find an information sheet attached with further details relating to the study. If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact either myself, or my supervisor, Dr. Elaine Keane by email at -@nuigalway.ie or by telephone on - If you would like to participate in this study you can contact me at -@nuigalway.ie or by telephone on - and we can arrange an interview.

Kind Regards,

54 This was tailored to individual groups, see 4.2.2
Appendix C: Information Sheet For Interview Participants

Information Sheet

The following information is provided to help you decide whether you wish to participate in the study. You should be aware that your participation is entirely voluntary and that you are free to leave the study at any time and withdraw any information that you have provided.

The study is part of PhD research in the School of Education in the National University of Ireland, Galway. It will examine the HE experience of ______ students in Ireland. The overall objective is to identify challenges and opportunities in relation to diversity and inclusion. Data will be collected through an individual, semi-structured, audio recorded interview.

Do not hesitate to ask any questions about the study, either before participating or during the process. Your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way. Any information about you will be anonymous. Only my supervisor, examiners and I will have access to the recording and transcripts. In the case of a transcription assistant being employed they will be obliged to sign a confidentiality waver to ensure complete confidentiality.

Due to potential risks or discomfort taking part in the study, please see details of counselling supports available in the attached documents. The expected benefits associated with your participation include the opportunity to reflect on your views and experiences in relation to your experience in HE.

Please sign the consent form with full knowledge of the nature and purpose of the procedures. A copy of this consent form will be given to you for your personal records.

Contact for further information:

email @nuigalway.ie

55 This was tailored to individual groups, see 4.2.2
Appendix D: Interview Consent Form

Consent Form

Please tick as appropriate

1) I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet provided for the above study. Yes [ ] No [ ]

2) I confirm that I have had the opportunity to ask questions. Yes [ ] No [ ]

3) I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without providing a reason. Yes [ ] No [ ]

4) I agree to the interview being audio-recorded. Yes [ ] No [ ]

Signature of Participant: Date:

Signature of Researcher: Date:
Appendix E: Counselling and Support Services

Confidential Support Services

The Irish Immigrant Support Services
021 4503462  info@nascireland.org
NUIG Student Counselling Services
091 492484  counselling@nuigalway.ie
Report Racism at www.ireport.ie
01 8897110  infor@enarireland.org
Appendix F: Transcription Confidentiality Agreement

This research study is being carried out at the School of Education, National University of Ireland Galway. As such, any information that you read as a transcriptionist in this project must be kept entirely confidential and private, and is not to be shared with any other persons. This is to protect the safety and identity of the research participants, as well as to preserve the intellectual integrity and originality of the research project.

Statement of Confidentiality

As a transcriber to be employed in the above named project, I ________________ understand that all of the data that I review, as well as any information obtained about and from research participants must be kept completely private and confidential to the study.

I furthermore testify that I understand that any and all information obtained from my review of the data collected in this study will not be divulged under any circumstances, unless first discussed and agreed with the principal investigator.

Signed: ____________________________ Date: _________________

Name of Transcriber
Appendix G: Interview Schedule

Tell me about yourself
- What nationality are you?
- How long have you lived in Ireland?
- Do you regularly speak a language other than English?
- What is your parent/s occupation?
- What is your parent/s educational background?

Tell me about your experience with the Leaving Certificate
- Have your parent/s and/or siblings had experience with the Leaving Certificate?
- Did you receive Career Guidance? If so, did you find it beneficial?
- Tell me about why you decided to apply for University?
- Did you receive any support or advice from your immediate family or friends?
- Did you get the required entry points for your choice of 3rd level study?

Tell me about your experience transitioning from post-primary school to university
- What motivated you to want to attend university?
- Do you have family and/or friends in university?
- Were there any funding opportunities available?
- Did you have any concerns and/or challenges in relation to getting into university?
- Were any resources made available to you when you got accepted into university?

Tell me about your experience with the Access programme [If applicable]
- How did you find out about Access?
- What motivated you to enrol in the Access program?
- Do you have any family or friends who enrolled in Access?
- Tell me about the application process
- Did you have any concerns in relation to your Access application?
- Were any resources made available to you when you got accepted to the Access programme?

Tell me about your academic experience in first year of university
- What are you studying?
- Tell me about aspects of your study that you enjoyed
- Tell me about aspects of your study that you did not enjoy
- Tell me about your assignments and coursework
- Have you sought academic support?
- Have you been satisfied with your grades?
- Tell me about your experience of feedback from your lecturers and tutors

Tell me about your social experience in first year of university
- Did you attend the same university as your peers from secondary school?
- Do your friend’s and social group have a similar cultural background to you?
- Did you get involved with any societies or clubs?
- Did you take part in student nights out?
- Do you work full time and/or part time or not at all?
Appendix H: Who am I? A Poem Constructed on Reflection of my Identity

I can trace me name back ta d’early days a Ireland
me early identity formed by St. Patrick’s Day
wi’ shamrocks painted on me face an’ a leprechaun hat on me head
growin’ up spakein’ English in a land called Ireland
I grew up learnin’ tourist Irish, Fáilte an’ Sláinte
goin’ ta mass hearin’ Latin
I learnt that bein’ Irish had somethin’ ta do wi’ leprechauns, spakein’ English
an’ prayin in Latin
so I formed meself around those things
an’ held them closely as I could so they would be a part a me
I grew up as part a Ireland Inc.
me identity formed by its marketin’ strategy
I know I’m Irish ’cause I look like I’m straight out of a Fáilte Ireland video
I’ve pale skin an’ freckles
I ’ave curly hair like Luke Kelly, bu’ not Phil Lynott
I can’t play d’fiddle or d’bodhrán, an’ I’m not much of a sean-nós dancer
bu’ I do write, ta help me understand d’world, ta make sense out’a Ireland Inc.
I suppose that makes me Irish, like Behan or Kavanagh
bu’ not Joyce, wasn’ there somethin’ abou’ him bein a Jew
an’ not Beckett, shure he wrote most of his work in French
I ’ave ta think some days abou’ emigratin’
that’s wha’ makes me Irish
I see people migratin’ ta me country
ya’d think I’d hate them
ya’d think I’d be bitter that I have ta leave an’ they’re comin’ here ta stay
nil, I don’ envy them
Direct Provision
ta be tauld ya don’t belong
céad míle fáilte
when they introduced that new word that we n’er heard a before
when they kept sayin that word ‘austerity’
an ‘lads an lassies we’re all in this together’
when ya see the Irish wo(men) sleepin’ on d’streets, hungry, bein’ evicted
shure wha’ hope is there for d’African, d’Pakistani, d’Middle Eastern
as part of Ireland Inc. they’ll also ’ave their parts ta play
we can paint shamrocks on each other’s faces
an’ wear leprechaun hats on our heads once a year
an’ then we’ll send ya back ta yur camp, that place they call Direct Provision
still, I have me privileges
I’m writin from me ivory tower
’cause d’women in me family were always tauld ta get an education
I’m part of a lineage a hedge schools56 ta graduation ceremonies in Latin
this university that I’m sittin in ta’day was not built for d’likes a me or me family
still, we got here in the end
who am I?
I’m Irish, what e’er that means
In terms a Ireland Inc. it has somethin’ ta do wi’ pints a Guinness
leprechauns an’ wearin’ green
white freckled faces
havin’ d’culcha
havin’ d’culcha too much durin’ d’Celtic Tiger
an’ somehow deservin’ a thing called ‘austerity’
I’m Irish, bu’ I don’t speak me language
I’m fluent in ‘English only’ ’cause of a thing called d’bata scóir57
I’m not e’en bilingual
I speak solely d’language a d’coloniser
me identity was formed by Ireland Inc.
stereotypes, appropriations an’ cultural mistranslations
hedgeschools an’ d’bata scóir
I’m white an’ spake English only

56 Hedge Schools were hidden places of learning created by the native Irish who were forbidden to attend school due to the Penal laws enforced by the British state against Roman Catholic schooling in the 18th and 19th century
57 In the 19th century, Irish state education under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Church was introduced to teach via the medium of the English language. A tally stick, known as a ‘bata scóir’ in the native Gaelic language, was a teaching tool involving a piece of wood that was tied around the child’s neck with string. If the native Irish child was caught speaking Gaelic, a notch was carved into the wood. At the end of the school day the child would be beaten according to how many notches were on the bata scóir