

Why My Curriculum Is Not White

Contrary to what the BME Network campaign, my curriculum is incredibly diverse

Rayhan Chouglay

I HAVE BEEN HEARING A lot about the 'Why is my Curriculum White?' campaign at LSE and have watched the Youtube video on the subject. Overall, I respect the efforts of everyone involved and I think it's a really interesting campaign but from my perspective, I do not find the curriculum to be 'white'. This is just my own personal view. I have had limited experiences with courses in LSE so I can only give a very narrow viewpoint and am therefore not in a valid position to comment on the campaign as a whole. Nonetheless, I thought I should share the diversity in my curriculum to provide a contrast and show other departments and courses what they should aspire to be.

I am studying history at LSE and have loved it, overall. This is partly due to the diverse nature of the modules that I have taken. HY113 was one of the most diverse modules and is probably one of my favourite modules. Studying the history of countries such as India, Japan, Gha-

na, Rwanda, Cuba, Nicaragua and Palestine was interesting and was used as a springboard for my choice of modules in my second and third years. Furthermore, the reading lists were very diverse and included figures such as Frantz Fanon and Ayesha Jalal. In the video, I heard one student say that HY116 was very Europe-centric and I agree with that. However, I feel this is unfortunate for them because I think the module was designed to be studied in accompaniment with HY113, as it is mostly structured for history students to get the best perspective and fullest enjoyment from the history of the twentieth century. The former is designed and focused on Europe and the United States, while the latter focuses as much as possible on the rest of the world. Anyway, this diversity also spilled into HY114 in my first year where we studied mostly early modern European history but also the history of the Ottoman Empire, some history in Central America and some of the military history of the Mughal Empire in the early modern period.

This diversity continued into my second year with HY233 where I studied the history of India (and later Pakistan and Bangladesh) from the Mughal period up till the present day and included figures such as Edward Said and Sumit Sarkar on the reading list, among others. There was a specific topic and theme in that module focusing on orientalism and how the history of South Asia has changed over time and was distorted by Europe-centric thought. It basically explored the exact themes people in the video were asking for. The module HY203 focused on the Arab-Israeli conflict and was both interesting and useful as it gave me a much wider understanding of the conflict as a whole up until the present day, which I believe the vast majority of people lack, whichever side of the debate they are on. This module included a wide variety of historians on the reading list ranging from Arab historians such as Rashid Khalidi to Israeli historians such as Avi Shlaim. The HY242 module focused on the history of the Soviet Union and had a uniquely Russian per-

spective with historians such as Vladislav Zubok, Elena Zhubkova and Yuri Slezkine on the reading list.

Now in my third year this diversity continues with HY321 focusing on the struggle for the Persian gulf and has focused on the history of Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Yemen and Oman. The reading list has included great diversity with western historians such as W. Taylor Fain and William Roger Louis but also includes historians such as Trita Parsi and Ali M Ansari. The HY311 module has been more American focused but as it is a module on US involvement in Korea and Vietnam, this is understandable. Even then historians such as Lien Hang T. Nguyen have been used. Finally, my dissertation (HY300) has allowed me to really delve into India's history from an Indian perspective. Going to Delhi for my research was a brilliant trip and I have been able to use the letters of figures such as Dadabhai Naorji as well as historians such as S.R. Mehrotra and Sudhir Chandra and many more too numerous to list.

I believe this shows a huge diversity in my curriculum and one which is far from 'white'. I think this is one of the reasons why I have really enjoyed my time at university. My friends know how much time I spend studying my subject, gleefully sharing with them what I have learnt. I believe that if you ask some other students from the history department they will share similar views. However, I can't guarantee it and have found from the video and my own experiences that there is some 'white' focus in the degree, at least in some areas. I guess I might have just gotten lucky with my choice of modules.

Again I would like to express my interest in the campaign and am not intending to criticise it in anyway. On the contrary, I hope my experience can be used as an example to show the rest of the university what they can do to introduce diversity into the curriculum, if they are indeed 'white'.