RINA MALAGAYO ALLURI – HENRI-MICHEL YÉRÉ

Old or new territory? Perspectives On Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging

Abstract: This article aims to question the concepts of diversity and inclusion by reflecting on the historical political traditions that have enabled the emergence of the practice in different societal contexts. This contribution situates diversity and inclusion in its origins from rights-based theories and practices such as global decolonization processes, the U.S. civil rights movement, critical race theory, and intersectionality. It then uses an autoethnographic methodology coupled with Yuval-Davis' framework of 'belonging' to reflect on the authors' experiences of doing PhDs in a global higher education programme. The article aims to provide both theoretical and autoethnographic insights into reflecting on the politics of identity within diversity, inclusion, and belonging (DIB). By using the authors' diverse experiences as a valuable source of data, the article aims to reassert agency and complexity in diversity practice.

Keywords: diversity, inclusion, belonging, citizenship, autoethnography, politics of difference

Introduction

Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) have become, in our time, all-encompassing buzzwords of sorts that are used and spoken of in all walks of life, from corporate boardrooms to interdisciplinary academic classrooms. There is a tendency to focus on the definition of D&I from a perspective that reinforces a tendency to decontextualize and to decouple D&I from the historical reasons for its emergence in the first place. This article aims to show that it is relevant to acknowledge that the concepts of D&I have their roots in many historical and political traditions that were connected to and embedded in ideologies of nationhood, citizenship, and human rights.

Diversity is a multidimensional concept that varies depending on cultural contexts, levels of awareness, and societal perceptions. It makes reference to a wide variety of individual differences and similarities as well as different identity groups that includes both personal/internal categories and external categories (Horry Georgetown Technical College, 2022). Personal or internal categories may include race and ethnicity, sex, gender identity and gender expression, ability status (physical, intellectual), age, national origin, and sexual orientation/sexuality. External categories might include education background and level, family (role, kind), income/socio-economic status, physical appearance, political beliefs and affiliation, language (first language, proficiencies), religious/spiritual affiliation, work experience, and organizational role (Ibid). Roberson (2006) interprets diversity

and inclusion as independent, yet related concepts. Diversity places emphasis on understanding the heterogenity and the demographic composition of groups or organizations while inclusion focuses on the deliberate, intentional and process-oriented policies and practices that integrate diversity into organizational systems and processes (Ibid). Some institutes make the distinction between diversity being about the 'individual' and inclusion being about the 'collective'. D&I is thus about both highlighting the unique characteristics of individuals while fostering an environment where particular collective values are able to emerge. When it comes to diversity in higher education, there is the integral aspect of the politics of access and ensuring that institutions widen participation to include groups who have not historically been included but also take care to address what happens to them once they are in institutions (Tomlinson & Basit, 2012, p. 1).

Four political traditions that have influenced D&I theory and practice

The concepts and practices of Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) have a long history rooted in human rights struggles on a global scale, centred on the notion of the extension of citizenship rights. Struggles have emerged such as decolonization and liberation processes with the fall of colonial powers around the world, as well as other identity and rights-based approaches such as the civil rights movement, the women's liberation movement, and the queer rights movement. However, Ahmed (2006) argues that often the term 'diversity' has become separated from its political traditions as it fails to connect to aspects of social justice, commitment to change, or systemic inequalities. Specifically, in higher education, D&I has been critiqued as being linked to specific practices such as sensitivity training, tokenism in academic contribution and hiring, cultural programs, and diversity and inclusion efforts that still exclude minoritized students and their experiences on a structural level (Sai Suresh, 2020). This section focuses on how four political traditions have influenced D&I theory, including decolonization theory, civil rights movement, critical race theory, and intersectionality. They will not be explored in-depth, but reflected upon to demonstrate the historical roots of D&I.

Decolonization is a reclamation of citizenship rights that is not limited to a specific time period, but it is both an event and an ongoing process (Mbembe, 2021). Decolonization is directly linked to the liberation struggles that emerged; it follows from this that independence from colonial powers was conceived as a means towards the recovery of full citizenship rights on the part of the people under colonial regimes in Asia, Africa and in the Americas (Cooper, 1996). Decolonizing thus includes formal state-building and nation-building processes that are connected to the ceding of colonial power in certain contexts. It also entails a political and normative ethic and practice of resistance and intentional undoing, which involves unlearning and dismantling unjust practices, assumptions, and institutions that continue to exist even today. It also includes the persistent positive action to create and build alternative spaces, networks, and ways of knowing that transcend our epicolonial inheritance (Kessi et al., 2020).

The Civil Rights movement in the United States claimed that despite being a formally constituted democracy, legal policies and practices were not offering equal rights for all (King, 1963). This led ordinary people, alongside union leaders and political activists to fight for the rights of Black citizens in America to access education, work opportunities, and equal pay. This launched a process where Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (1964) insisted that employees and unions are lawfully accountable to consider all possible job applicants, and they are not permitted to discriminate on the basis of colour, gender, race, religion, or national origin. This would later lead to affirmative action laws in the 1980s that

focused on the quotas of women and Black Indigenous People of Colour (BIPOC) within the workplace. The 1980s also saw the evolution of the term 'diversity management' and eventually diversity initiatives in corporations emerged in 70% of Fortune 500 companies in the 1990s (Kelly & Dobbin, 1998; Hooks, 2014).

Critical race theory (CRT) emerged in the 1970s as an intellectual and social movement from an African American civil rights lawyer and the first Black man to teach at Harvard Law School, Derrick Bell. At that time, the Civil Rights movement in the United States slowed down and experienced regression (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998). Initially writing on interest convergence as it pertained to Western racial history, the field of CRT evolved in the 1980s through the work of hooks (1981) as well as Crenshaw (1989) and Delgado (1998) and other critical scholars on issues such as speech, the social construction of racial reality, and the critique of rights and liberalism (Ibid). Today, CRT has become particularly controversial since 2020 as there have been attempts by US conservative factions to ban CRT from being taught in schools, arguing that it is "divisive" (Zurcher, 2021). CRT is based a few key arguments. Firstly, there is the notion that racism is ordinary and not aberrational. Secondly, civil rights gains are not as a result of Black needs, but as a response to White interests (interest convergence). Thirdly, race is socially constructed, an argument that has been illustrated through numerous court cases wherein African Americans have been excluded based on their perceived racial difference. Fourthly, there is an emphasis on revisionist history and the pedagogy of education that focuses on the points of view of people of colour (storytelling and counter-storytelling). Fifthly, critical social science examines how race and racism are connected to law and the notion that whites have been the recipients of civil rights legislation (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998; Hartlep, 2009). Although CRT initially focused on African Americans, it has now expanded to other marginalized groups with complementary ideologies such as "LatCrit, FemCrit, TribalCrit, DesiCrit, and QueerCrit" that focus on critical pedagogies on Latin American studies, feminist studies, tribal studies, Desi studies and LGBTQIA/queer studies respectively (Crewe, 2021, p. 416).

Intersectionality emerged following to CRT and highlights that Black women in America face overwhelmingly more barriers than other groups of people due to a lack of reflective framing that helps to identify and understand their specific challenges (Crenshaw, 1995). It explores the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, and ableism as they apply to individuals or groups, and it is regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination, disadvantage, or oppression (Crenshaw, 1995). It is based on the argument that women experience oppression in varying configurations and in varying degrees of intensity. Additionally, the "cultural patterns of oppression are not only interrelated but are bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of society" (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality is thus "a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It's not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LGBTQ problem there. Many times, that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all these things" (Crenshaw, 1989). While Crenshaw indeed coined the term, it is rooted in the work of other Black American Feminist scholars such as Davis (1983), Lorde (1984, 2017) and Hooks (1981). It places an emphasis on the interaction of categories of difference (Zander et al., 2010) as they apply to populations with intersecting marginalized identities (Dhamoon, 2011).

D&I is rooted in political ideologies and movements that were historically connected to rights-based approaches. Currently, D&I has become a highly researched thematic topic as well as a key practice that is incorporated within human resource recruitment, organizational value systems, and individual engagements. On a conceptual level, one can observe an evolution towards the following iterations that place an emphasis on different themes

and topics such as belonging, justice, access etc: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI); Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (DIB); Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI); and Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Access (DEI&A).

Finding belonging

The purpose of this article is to explore the concept of D&I, while also introducing 'belonging' as a useful framework for analysis (Yuval-Davis, 2006). It is increasingly being considered an important measure of D&I initiatives and known as Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (DIB). D&I practitioners argue that you might have a diverse staff or student body who have equitable access to opportunities. However, it is also relevant that they are included and invited into spaces in a way that they feel a sense of belonging and acceptance. While this is rather difficult to measure or quantify, belonging is increasingly being seen as a key element in D&I approaches.

There is a risk when one engages in discussions about race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, nationality, and ableism of individuals in academic environments. Essentializing these categories according to a 'single story' (Adichie, 2006) tends to rely on limited assumptions, stereotypes, and classifications of people. However, if we ignore these aspects of a person's self-identification altogether such as race by claiming to be colour blind or not see colour, then we fail to acknowledge the important, relevant, and reflective framing that is necessary to understand how such social categorizations have an impact on people's access to opportunities such as education, employment, and professional networks (Apfelbaum et al., 2012).

This article explicitly and purposefully centres the voices of the two authors, not only through the usual normative expectation of academic training, theory, and methodology. Rather, this contribution centres the positionalities of the authors and their own particular intersectional (Crenshaw, 1995) experiences, challenges and engagement in DIB. We challenge epistemological traditions that tend to argue that knowledge and academia are rational, neutral, and void of identity (Kessi et al., 2020). Instead, we consciously choose to write this article in the first person (I/we) as scholars who both self-identify as Black Indigenous People of Colour (BIPOC) and have spent parts of their lives in the Global North and the Global South. In addition to scholarly research, we carried out interviews with one another in order to use auto-ethnographic analysis (Ellis et al., 2011) that reflects on our experiences with DIB in higher education to make sense of how scholars of colour are confronted with patterns of both exclusion and inclusion practices and our stories of 'belonging'. Autoethnography is an approach to "systematically analyze (*graphy)* personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience *(ethno)* […] that challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others" (Ellis, 2004; Spry, 2001 in Ellis et al., 2011, pp. 1-2). Through analyzing each other's stories and narratives, we also use the third person (she/he) to explore each other's voice and experience.

We use the notion of belonging by Yuval-Davis (2006) in order to help explore both of our positionalities through three analytical lenses: social and economic locations; identifications and emotional attachment; and ethical and political values. We will first present ourselves based on what Yuval-Davis terms our "social and economic locations," which includes identity markers such as gender, race, class, nation, age-group, kinship group or certain profession (pp. 199-200).

Henri-Michel Yéré is a cis-gendered heteronormative Black man of African descent, who was born in Côte d'Ivoire from parents from two ethnicities – Godié and Malinké (Dioula). His father is a Christian, and his mother is a Muslim. He speaks French (first

language), English, and German. In this context, we prefer the term *first language* to *mother tongue* as we were both raised with a colonial language and not with the ancestral tongues or languages of our parents. He spent parts of his childhood in The United States and studied in France and South Africa, and he holds a BA in History from the University of Cape Town, and an MA in African Studies and PhD in History from the University of Basel. He worked for seven years as a D&I project manager at a large pharmaceutical company and is currently a post-doctoral researcher in the Sociology Department at the University of Basel, Switzerland. He currently holds dual citizenship from Côte d'Ivoire and Switzerland. He considers himself to be middle class – with the proviso that reference to socio-economic class is challenging to pinpoint as it is culturally and geographically relative. Moreover, as a concept it is connected to income, but also to level of education and professional status. What might be considered middle to upper class in some contexts in the Global South are more like middle class in the Global North.

Rina Malagayo Alluri is a cis-gendered heteronormative Brown woman of mixed heritage born in Mumbai, India to a Roman Catholic Filipina Mother (Ilocano ethnicity) and a Hindu South Indian Father (Telugu ethnicity). She spent her childhood in Ibadan, Nigeria until her family migrated to Vancouver, BC, Canada, where he has current citizenship. She speaks English (first language), French, and German. She holds a BA in Political Science from the University of British Columbia, Canada, an MA in Development Studies from the Institute for Social Studies, the Netherlands, and a PhD in Political Science from the University of Basel, Switzerland. She carried out her post-doctoral research at the Human Geography Department of the University of Zurich, Switzerland. She is currently Assistant Professor and Head of the Unit for Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Innsbruck, Austria. She considers herself to be middle class.

Writing these biographical positionality statements is exhausting. We both hold diverse ancestries, upbringings, and migration journeys, and therefore it is often difficult to summarize it neatly into a few short sentences. There is almost a feeling of shame that we are putting the reader through a tough time to have to get through our social locations and histories in one long breath. Throughout our higher education and careers, people have responded to our bios with, "Wow, you are so diverse!" and "You really are a global citizen of the world". While these may be said with all of the good intentions of a peer or colleague, it is only another reminder to us that we are different—that is, we are an "other". And while we may appreciate this difference, we are aware that this diversity is not always appreciated by everyone. We have also had responses such as "Oh, you're really complicated", or "But then where do you actually feel at home?" It is thus rather difficult to feel a true sense of 'home' or 'belonging' *to just one place.* We will continue to explore the other two layers of belonging in the following sections.

Identifications and Emotional Attachments

This article reflects on how "identities are narratives, stories people tell themselves and others about who they are (and who they are not)" (Martin, 1995, pp. 5-16, in Yuval-Davis 2006, p. 202). In this way, we, the two authors, wondered about what we tell people about who we are, and where such stories have come from. Henri-Michel Yéré reflects on his identitiy narratives related to some of the origin stories of his ancestors.

> *The background from my mother's side is a traditional Griot family. Griots tell stories in the shape of song; they acted as advisors to kings; yet they could also be seen as people that talked and got lost in their own words. That identity is a doubled edged sword—it has qualities*

and less interesting sides. My mother, by way of warning, would say we must beware of not talking too much. But when I think about the fact that I am a historian by training, but also a poet, a literary person, it is actually quite telling. The fact that I speak the way I speak is an attribute of a poet.

[…] I grew up in the USA until I was about six years old. When we returned to Côte d'Ivoire, people used to introduce me to their other friends as someone who grew up in the USA. I think it played a role in feeling kind of special around other kids, but also it created jealousy on the side of some children as well. We got into real fights with other kids picking on me and my siblings [for being seen as different].

It's your responsibility to complicate your story. You have to complicate your story. Whilst working in the pharmaceutical industry, a lot of what I did was facilitating workshops and seeing a lot of people that I did not know. I used to complicate my story. At some point, I decided that I had to explain it to my colleagues: "I work in D&I, you may assume I am doing this job because of the colour of the skin. It is actually that I am a historian, I have a PhD in contemporary history, I don't think like you [natural scientists/pharmacologists]. I think differently." Then they were intrigued. I was not so confrontational, but it was enough to invite them to see past the colour of my skin. If they cannot see past this, that is their problem. Complicating the story, that was extremely useful. It was a form of liberation for me. The work started to flow, people would come to me and say, you guys at D&I, you bring some humanity to this place. That was a wonderful comment. If a person tells you, you make me feel like a person, what more do you want? For a lot of people I used to work with, it was the only place they could have the space to hear such ideas. They didn't get it from home, from their friends, their colleagues. You bring your own life experience to bear, and not just your qualifications. I bring my life experience with me. Complexity is good.

This demonstrates a narrative of someone who has pursued a profession and higher education that suits his ancestral talents of story-telling. It also supports a narrative of someone who was always seen, perceived and spoken about to be different. In his professional work in D&I, he was not only diverse in his social location identities, but also when it came to his educational background and professional experience. In this way, the politics of difference have become an identity marker itself. Rina Malagayo Alluri reflects on the gender aspect and how it has been linked to narratives on the importance of education:

Particularly the side of my Father has always emphasized the need to be educated, even if you are a woman who will end up to be a full-time mother or caregiver. In the context of culture, caste and class from my Father's family, obtaining a higher education is also intricately connected to one's marital eligibility for both genders. Education is perceived as something that all have the chance to obtain, with adequate resources, but particular through hard work. Therefore, my family members have told me narratives that my own educational advancement isreliant on a certain affordability of education, and one's abilities to work hard, sacrifice and be meticulous in learning spaces. I believe that I got here through hard work, just as my ancestors worked hard for other things.

This tends to support the narrative of a minority – the marginalized who were not given anything but rather had to work for it. While this may be true to some regard, it does fail to acknowledge the privileges that Rina has been rewarded in her life: she is someone from a middle to upper class family with educated parents who met at an international agricultural research institute. A similar statement can be made of Henri-Michel Yéré's case, as his parents met while studying together at university, a rare privilege at the time during which they were students in 1970s Côte d'Ivoire.

Ethical and Political Values

The third analytical layer of Yuval-Davis (2006) is that of ethical and political values which include “specific attitudes and ideologies concerning where and how identity and categorical boundaries are being/should be drawn in more or less exclusionary ways, in more or less permeable ways” (p. 203). When asked about his ethical and political values, Henri-Michel Yéré responded:

> *I guess a preoccupation with a certain sense of human dignity. I think that related to the fact that I come from the Côte d'Ivoire, I very much have a heightened consciousness that the citizenship and origin is one that has had to affirm itself in the world. We used to be a French colony, at least formally, until 1960. You say where you're from, some people don't think it's relevant because you're assimilated to the African continent.*
>
> *I am also quite attached to the notion of individual autonomy. I am attached to the notion that an individual has a center, a center that makes him or her understand that their standing is inseparable from others. Their center is connected to solidarity at a wider level, without it implying compromises, being friendly and showing it to others that you are a nice guy. Maybe I'm talking about something that doesn't exist, but you're asking me about my ideals. I believe in that.*

When asked about how her values are connected to her current profession, Rina Malagayo Alluri responded:

> *I believe that I ended up pursuing higher education in the social sciences – in areas that look at issues that affect the Global South such as development, migration, fragility and conflict – because these are issues I was exposed to my whole life, and which I was curious to understand better. In this way, my ethical and political values have been influenced by my own preoccupations to understand the contradictions between the Global North and Global South, the unequal perceptions and treatment of certain humans as superior and others as inferior, and the aspiration to find forms of internal and external peace in the face of internal and external conflicts.*

These responses illustrate how both authors' academic research interests have been informed by their social locations and their identifications and emotional attachments. What is perhaps missing from Yuval-Davis' definition of belonging is a connection, a proximity to certain geographical locations that may not necessarily be tied to kinship or citizenship, but to education, exposure and settlement in some ways. For example, while Rina did formerly have Filipino citizenship and holds both Filipino and Indian ancestry, she has never lived in either country for longer periods of time. However, she lived in Nigeria for over ten years in her formative years but does not hold any blood ancestry to Nigeria or anywhere else on the African continent. And yet, she has pursued an education and professional opportunities that take her back to research inquiry in South Asia, East Asia, and Africa.

Politics of Belonging and a Case in Higher Education

In this section, we use Yuval-Davis's exploration of the ‘politics of belonging’ and how it is connected to the boundaries of the political community of belonging, the boundaries that separate the world population into ‘us’ and ‘them’. In this way, we use the case study of the

NCCR North-South, a 12-year higher education global programme that existed between 2001-2014. We participated in this program between 2007-2014. While the programme was hosted and funded in Switzerland, it included 350 researchers based in more than 40 countries worldwide. It was based on the principle that Global North institutions join the programme together with Global South partners on the basis of shared research projects and interests in relation to sustainable development studies. It was implemented with principles of interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity with geographical and scientific diversity that included both natural and social scientists. Key themes of the programme included: institutions, livelihoods, conflicts; health services, planning; and natural resources, economy, governance (NCCR North-South, ND). We have selected this case study as it faced particular challenges while attempting to uphold D&I principles in specific areas of its functioning that it had set out to turn upside down. The programme addressed the following issues:

- The power relations within the programme itself
- Power imbalance between Global North and Global South institutions
- Financing and decision making in the Global North
- Project ideation and authorship policy
- The compulsory use of the English language
- Challenging working relationships between supervisors and supervisees in the Global North and Global South

In this way, we use the NCCR North-South as a case study in higher education which created a sort of "imagined community" (Anderson, 1983, p. 5) of scholars. Although D&I was not an explicit aim of the programme, it did address D&I in particular ways. For example, each research project usually consisted of one Global North partner (predominantly located in Switzerland), which employed a project leader and a PhD student, and one Global South partner with a corresponding project leader and PhD student (NCCR North-South, ND). When asked to share his views on how the programme was inadvertently connected to D&I, Henri-Michel Yéré responded:

> *I think the entire project was predicated on the idea of equal partnerships as far as contributing to the creative projects of research institutions between Swiss institutions and the Global South institutions. Now as to whether this was realistically implemented, is open for debate. I have a sense of where that debate would go. I also think the sheer idea of bringing together all these different places and institutions on specific themes and looking at them from differentiated perspectives to generate solutions in a transdisciplinary way has a D&I aspect to it. Take a problem in society and use the full force of a multidisciplinary approach to solve that problem. Consider cases such as Costa Rica, Nepal, Kenya, and Côte d'Ivoire – they're all looking at various sanitation issues. That has a D&I aspect to it. I think one can see that within that particular declared purpose, there was definitely a D&I desire to at least develop an approach to problems that take into account a multiplicity of perspectives, knowing that it wouldn't make it easier, but richer. Diversity and inclusion of thinking styles are very important. I mean to say, looking at problems with different ways of thinking may yield unexpected results compared to classical methods.*

In particular, we both participated in this international program through different lenses. Despite the program being international and aiming to cross traditional borders of north and south, aspects of politics of belonging emerged in different contexts. Yuval-Davis argues that "The different situated imaginations that construct these national imagined com-

munities with different boundaries depend on people's social locations, people's experiences and definitions of self, but probably more importantly on their values" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 204). Within the context of the programme, we experienced the contextualization of these differentiated value systems.

Conducting research in his own country of origin presented Henri Michel Yéré with a complex situation. He was an Ivorian man, researching a topic related to Côte d'Ivoire, located in the Global South, whilst being based at a Swiss university, located in the Global North. When he was asked to discussed this issue, this is what he shared as reflections:

> *At the very beginning of my PhD, I had been invited to a regional meeting taking place at a research centre in Abidjan, where candidates within my international PhD program were presenting their PhD work. When my turn came to present, I opened my mouth and spoke in near native English for ten minutes to much of the surprise of the other students. The way I speak English is a topic in my life. People don't identify me with an English-speaking country, but this changes when they hear me speak. To make it more complex, I was working on a topic that focused on citizenship in Ivorian history where I problematized the already socially contentious question, who is, in fact, an Ivorian? To me, it was a research question – one of research inquiry. But to people in Côte d'Ivoire, it was a position that could be attributed to one of the political camps in the country. When I finished speaking, there was silence and the room was dead. People were like, what just happened. In the questions that followed, I very quickly realized there was hostility, a deep questioning. They had misunderstood what I meant, and they had misunderstood who I was. Was I one of those 'brothers' who had been 'turned' by White people? There was a very strong current in the room and I had to stand my ground. Which I think I sort of did. I didn't flinch and I didn't apologize. I maintained that these were the research questions I was asking, that I was not speaking on behalf of any camp. However, the tone and line of questioning made it clear that the other students who were mostly Ivorian felt as if I was being used by non-Ivorians and non-Africans to support a Eurocentric perspective that Africa is decidedly a place of darkness which served to confirm historical stereotypes. That was quite violent. While the broader question had been handed over to me through the research project I was part of, what I did with the question was entirely my own doing. It says something about the expectation from my peers that as an Ivorian man, I was not meant to be asking certain types of questions. At the same time, I received some validation from one White professor that day who commended me for having been put under a lot of pressure and not yielding. That was a day of reckoning on many dimensions and led me to steer my research in a particular historical direction and seek out archival evidence in order to eventually show through my research that the history of citizenship in Côte d'Ivoire is not limited to an identity tied to the creation of a nation state.*

This episode reveals what it may take in order to reach a point where scholars feel that D&I is being addressed consciously and purposefully, in a way that considers not only their social and economic locations, but also their identifications, emotional attachments, and ethical and political values. In the above example from Henri, despite sharing the same citizenship as his peers, his upbringing, language, educational field, and research interests were so different from theirs that his ability to be their peer came into question. Besides, the workshop space had not catered to this dimension to ensured that all the scholars had the chance to present their research in a way where they would not be turned against each other.

Another dimension that appeared diverse but was often problematic was indeed the interdisciplinarity of the programme. In the case of Henri, he was a rare historian and social scientist amongst natural scientists and health specialists who forced him to defend

the historical method and approach, almost as if he needed to justify the use of methods that were not those of the natural and healthcare sciences, which were more prevalent in this vast interdisciplinary programme. There was in effect an unspoken concern with a natural science specificity that validated your study as being relevant (or irrelevant). This raised questions on who decides what you research and if you are considered an expert or specialist. Can a Black man researching his own country be a historian? Or is this a profession that has been historically reserved for White men to the point out that even his fellow citizens become suspicious of his enquiry? In their article on "Decolonizing African Studies", Kessi and colleagues (2020) argued that this takes place at the structural, epistemic, personal, and relational levels. They reflect on how academic dependency has historically perpetuated the interrelationship between structural and epistemic coloniality. Houtondji (1990) argued that academia has created a "division of labour that tends to make scientific innovation a monopoly of the north" (Kessi et al., 2020, p. 274). Spivak (1998) used the term epistemic violence to reflect on how "general, nonspecialists" are silenced and ignored (Kessi et al., 2020, p. 274). This allows us to look at Henri-Michel Yéré and reflect on who is considered to be worthy of the title of "historian".

> *Here, while the programme claimed interdisciplinarity, it still fell into the trap that emphasized a primacy of the natural scientists and a dominant framework of analysis linked to a particular region of the world. In this way, we fell into the trap of specializations of other disciplines, but we still needed to fit in within the lens of the programme. This makes us ask the following questions: Who is a historian? A White man? A Black man from that country? I was not only questioned by my Ivorian peers. I can narrate many stories where White scholars contested what I would say as they wanted to establish their own truth to the topic. Very often, they would justify it through the narrative of science, sources, and methodology.*

This questions plurality in historical narratives. Achebe (2009) argues that "the telling of the story of black people in our time, and for a considerable period before, has been the self-appointed responsibility of white people, and they have mostly done it to suit a white purpose, naturally" (p. 61). He encourages black people to recover and tell the stories that belong to them themselves. In this way, DIB becomes more than a tick the box exercise, but it has the chance to become the pages of a story.

For Rina Malagayo Alluri, she had the experience of constantly having to defend her choice of focusing her research on Sri Lanka, a place where she did not have ancestral heritage:

> *During my PhD, numerous scholars questioned my choice of topic and country. Why was I doing research on Sri Lanka, and not India or the Philippines – where I was originally from? Meanwhile other White PhD students studying Sri Lanka were never questioned for researching a country that was not their own. Instead, they were rather praised for choosing and travelling to field contexts that were often seen as 'exotic' or even 'dangerous.' In this sense, my longing to belong to communities of scholars working on Sri Lanka was not always rewarded. I was not one of the 'local' Sri Lankan scholars, nor was I a White scholar who was often praised as a 'Western expert'. I was always something in between.*

The term White in this context refers not just to the biological phenotype, but also to the power that accompanies persons who are perceived to be 'Western' or 'European' and thus benefit from proximity to power and privilege that accompanies the 'whiteness' of authorship (Sartwell in Yancy, 2005, pp. 215-216). What Rina's experiences demonstrate is that it is not enough to just "look diverse" or demonstrate a "repertoire of an image of

diversity" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 52) in order to achieve DIB. Simply providing a higher education platform where cross-cultural contact and interdisciplinary collaboration within the same research project that may share a regional area of focus does not lead to intercultural learning and DIB. Despite wanting to challenge hard divisions of Global North and Global South, still the NCCR North South often fall into dichotomies. For example, students from and based in the Global North were predominantly White and European going abroad to research *other contexts,* and those from the Global South were considered local persons researching *their own contexts*. Rina was, however, someone who had origins in the Global South and South Asia, but due to her Canadian citizenship and living in Switzerland at the time while pursuing her PhD, she was classified as someone from the Global North. But she is neither White nor European. This often problematized her relationship both with the White European students and the South Asian Sri Lankan students, as they had difficulty placing her accordingly and often questioned her positionality. This demonstrates that the divisions between Global North and South—aspects which include social locations such as race, ethnicity, gender, class, language, identity, emotional attachments, and ethical and political values—tend to determine the difference.

Conclusions

While the NCCR North South aimed to bridge some of the gaps between the Global North and South through the creation of global research projects, its experience showed the paradox of research on the tensions between citizenship rights and access to resources versus the ongoing unequal practice of resource sharing within the programme at large. In essence, the programme still did not attend to the dimensions of enabling scientists to develop and examine the programme's own problematic structures of power. In this way, a re-politicized understanding of D&I, one that focuses on the politics of belonging, could have been a useful frame and praxis for the programme to integrate as a value in its system. Although socially constructed identities were part and parcel of the project formation processes, they were never analytically considered as content relevant when it came to D&I issues. A re-politicization of these concepts and a more deliberate integration of such principles in the management philosophy might have helped modify the ways in which resources (symbolic, human, and material) were allocated and shared within the programme at large.

Through this article, we have reflected on what D&I means to us and used Yuval-Davis' framework of *belonging* to expand our understanding. She brings us back to a complex understanding of D&I, which includes a questioning of the politics of belonging that refers to citizenship, membership rights, and responsibilities. If we see higher education as the "imagine community" (Anderson, 1983, p. 5) in which we seek out belonging, we can ask Yuval-Davis' central question: "What is required from a specific person for him/her to be entitled to belong, to be considered as belonging to the collectivity" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 209). In what ways do institutions of higher education continue to demand a certain conformity towards social locations that include common racial and ethnic descent, gender, and nationality, or the narrative of common identities of culture, religion or language? How do institutions expect common ethical and political values that may advocate for aspects such as democracy or human rights? This article does not provide any clear answers. Instead, it raises questions on what D&I in higher education means to two BIPOC scholars who have been educated both in the Global North and Global South. It calls for a re-politicization of D&I to include concepts of belonging, citizenship, and rights to the academic institutions and programmes themselves. It invites other academics to reflect on

the hierarchy of inclusion and how we can explicitly use DIB as a research framework for change and inquisitive storytelling rather than a catch-all phrase that leads to a tick-the-box exercise.

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