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CONFRONTING WHITENESS IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION THROUGH RACIALIZED STUDENT ACTIVISM

Ifeyinwa Mbakogu, Patrina Duhaney, Ilyan Ferrer et Edward Ou Jin Lee

La suprématie de la blancheur en travail social. S'affirmer sans s'effacer
The Supremacy of Whiteness in Social Work. Raced; not erased

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Résumé de l'article

En 2010, un groupe d'étudiants racisés, aux études doctorales dans une université canadienne, s'est mobilisé collectivement contre le racisme institutionnel au sein de leur école de travail social. Ces étudiants ont insisté pour que leur école confronte les façons dont la suprématie blanche s'ancrait dans diverses politiques et pratiques. Ces premières initiatives ont conduit à la création du *Racialized Students' Network* (RSN). Bien que le RSN n'existe plus, il a donné naissance à une nouvelle génération de chercheurs qui continuent de s'interroger sur la blancheur et la suprématie blanche. Il a également offert des feuilles de route grâce auxquelles les nouvelles générations de chercheurs en travail social racisés peuvent faire progresser les perspectives féministes, antiracistes et décoloniales au sein des programmes de travail social dans les établissements postsecondaires au Canada. Dans cet article, les auteurs, qui sont maintenant professeurs titulaires ou permanents dans des universités canadiennes, démontrent comment les activismes antiracistes des étudiantes et étudiants sont une avenue centrale pour confronter la suprématie blanche et le racisme institutionnel. Grâce à une méthodologie autoethnographique collaborative, cet article s'inspire des expériences personnelles des auteurs au sein du RSN, des documents sources du groupe et de leur analyse collective sur la façon dont le RSN a influencé leur activisme actuel. Ils discutent de la manière dont leurs expériences quotidiennes s'alignent sur les luttes et les mouvements antiracistes actuels pour façonner leurs actions et leurs réponses dans le milieu universitaire. Afin de démontrer les processus collectifs entrepris par les activistes étudiants pour refléter et utiliser leurs identités entrecroisées afin de soutenir les étudiantes et étudiants racisés et confronter le racisme systémique, le modèle d'activisme des étudiantes et étudiantes racisés du RSN est présenté.

CONFRONTING WHITENESS IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION THROUGH RACIALIZED STUDENT ACTIVISM

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Abstract: In 2010, a group of racialized doctoral students at an elite university in Canada collectively mobilized against institutional racism within their school of social work. They insisted that their school confront the ways in which White supremacy was embedded within various policies and practices. These early initiatives led to the creation of the Racialized Students' Network (RSN). Although the RSN has ended, it has produced a new generation of scholars who continue to interrogate Whiteness and White supremacy. It has also offered roadmaps through which newer generations of racialized social work scholars can advance anti-racist and decolonial feminist perspectives within postsecondary social work institutions in Canada. In this article, the authors, who are now tenure-track or tenured professors at Canadian universities, demonstrate the ways in which graduate student anti-racist activisms are a central avenue for confronting Whiteness and institutional racism. Through a collaborative autoethnographic methodology, this article draws from the authors' personal experiences within the RSN, the group's source documents, and their collective analysis on how the RSN has informed their ongoing activism. They discuss how their everyday experiences align with current anti-racist struggles and movements to shape their actions and responses in academe. The RSN Model of Racialized Students' Activism is presented to demonstrate the collective processes the student activists explored to reflect and apply their intersecting identities to support racialized students and address systemic racism.

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Abrégé: En 2010, un groupe d'étudiants racisés, aux études doctorales dans une université canadienne, s'est mobilisé collectivement contre le racisme institutionnel au sein de leur école de travail social. Ces étudiants ont insisté pour que leur école confronte les façons dont la suprématie blanche s'ancrait dans diverses politiques et pratiques. Ces premières initiatives ont conduit à la création du *Racialized Students' Network* (RSN). Bien que le RSN n'existe plus, il a donné naissance à une nouvelle génération de chercheurs qui continuent de s'interroger sur la blancheur et la suprématie blanche. Il a également offert des feuilles de route grâce auxquelles les nouvelles générations de chercheurs en travail social racisés peuvent faire progresser les perspectives féministes, antiracistes et décoloniales au sein des programmes de travail social dans les établissements postsecondaires au Canada. Dans cet article, les auteurs, qui sont maintenant professeurs titulaires ou permanents dans des universités canadiennes, démontrent comment les activismes antiracistes des étudiantes et étudiants sont une avenue centrale pour confronter la suprématie blanche et le racisme institutionnel. Grâce à une méthodologie autoethnographique collaborative, cet article s'inspire des expériences personnelles des auteurs au sein du RSN, des documents sources du groupe et de leur analyse collective sur la façon dont le RSN a influencé leur activisme actuel. Ils discutent de la manière dont leurs expériences quotidiennes s'alignent sur les luttes et les mouvements antiracistes actuels pour façonner leurs actions et leurs réponses dans le milieu universitaire. Afin de démontrer les processus collectifs entrepris par les activistes étudiants pour refléter et utiliser leurs identités entrecroisées afin de soutenir les étudiantes et étudiants racisés et confronter le racisme systémique, le modèle d'activisme des étudiantes et étudiantes racisés du RSN est présenté.

Mots-clés: activisme d'étudiants racisés, formation en travail social, blancheur, antiracisme, soutien mutuel, racisme institutionnel

WITHIN THE CONTEMPORARY ERA, IN CANADA and across the globe, social work is often presented as an academic discipline and an applied

profession that explicitly promotes social justice for oppressed peoples (CASWE-ACFTS, 2014; International Federation of Social Workers, 2014). The Canadian Association for Social Work Education-Association Canadienne pour la formation en travail social's (CASWE-ACFTS) (2014) Accreditation Standards have guiding principles that inform the curricula and pedagogical approaches of social work programs. These standards promote social and economic justice by acknowledging the need to eradicate structural inequities that "infringe human and civil rights" (p. 3). These standards also require social work programs to address Francophone, Anglophone, and newcomer realities, as well as the ways that Canada's colonial history has shaped current challenges facing Indigenous Peoples.

Although anti-oppressive practice is recognized in CASWE-ACFTS's Accreditation Standards, anti-racist and intersectional approaches to social work are noticeably absent. Thus, the role of race, racialization, and Whiteness continues to be erased and de-prioritized within Canadian social work education. However, many social work scholars promote the usefulness and relevance of these approaches to social work education and practice (Baines, 2017; Dominelli, 1996; Duhaney, 2010; Dumbrill & Yee, 2019; Este, 2004). Indeed, scholars have critiqued the current state of social work education and practice for not recognizing the extent to which White settler colonial, White supremacist, Islamophobic, anti-Black, and anti-Asian logics have shaped social work as a profession and discipline (Khan, 2019; Lee & Ferrer, 2014). Eurocentric worldviews and experiences of White social work educators and practitioners have been universalized through a practice of "Whiteout" (Yee & Dumbrill, 2003), thus maintaining a White-dominant social work profession and discipline (Duhaney & El-Lahib, 2021). According to Duhaney (2010) and Lee and Ferrer (2014), Canadian social work education reproduces the normative power of Whiteness, as White people are constructed as raceless and yet are afforded power and privilege, resulting in racial hierarchies and the subjugation of racialized groups, and in particular, Black students.

Although social work professional and educational bodies have begun to engage with the calls to action outlined by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015), social work continues to reckon with the ways in which White settler colonial logics and anti-Indigenous racism are embedded within Canadian institutions. In advocating for the adoption of Joyce's Principle, the family of Joyce Echaquan and the Atikamekw Nation continue to fight for the recognition of systemic anti-Indigenous racism within the Quebec health care system that resulted in Joyce's death (Conseil de la Nation Atikamekw, 2020; Kestler-D'Amours, 2020). Various First Nations also continue to locate thousands of unmarked graves of Indigenous children at former residential schools—graves that are shedding more light on the scale of destruction and devastation brought on by genocidal colonial practices (Blackstock & Palmater, 2021).

Although this article focuses on the experiences of racialized people who are not Indigenous to Turtle Island, it is important to recognize the ways in which White settler colonial logics promoted by the Canadian social work profession, which targeted Indigenous Peoples, informed how racialized communities were (and continue to be) subjected to a myriad of oppressive colonial policies and practices (Lee & Ferrer, 2014). More recently, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has amplified socioeconomic and racial disparities in education, housing, employment, and health, with particular impacts on racialized communities (Cross & Gonzalez Benson, 2020). There are rising targeted racist attacks against Asian communities in Canada and the United States, with some communities scapegoated for what former US President Donald Trump repeatedly called the "China virus" (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Meanwhile, other groups such as Asian women and sex workers (Goodman & Wun, 2021), as well as religious minorities such as Muslims (Gillis & Boutilier, 2021) and Sikhs (Taylor, 2021), are being targeted by White supremacists. In May 2020, a social movement erupted in response to the murder of George Floyd by police in the United States. Leaders of the Black Lives Matter movement inspired global protests against police brutality and abolitionist calls to "disarm and defund the police" (CBC, 2020). This further amplified activism addressing anti-Black racism in Canada through not only racial profiling, but also systemic racism within public institutions, educational sites, and workplaces.

Social work must confront these ongoing disparities and injustices, which necessitates radical shifts in the profession. During the pandemic, racialized social work students and educators pushed for social work to engage in anti-racism in the context of COVID-19, resulting in the approved declaration by the CASWE-ACFTS board of directors titled "Statement of anti-Asian racism amid the COVID-19 pandemic" (CASWE-ACFTS, 2020a). In June 2020, a motion by CASWE-ACFTS members titled "Addressing anti-Black racism in social work" was also approved (CASWE-ACFTS, 2020b). However, the social work profession in Canada has not yet addressed the mandate of the Working Group on People of African Descent (United Nations Human Rights, n.d.). Moreover, while these statements are examples of how racialized people and allies have successfully pushed for Canadian social work education to explicitly engage in anti-racism, there is a longer, often undocumented history of anti-racist and intersectional activisms within Canadian schools of social work.

This article shares a case study of how we, a group of racialized doctoral students at McGill University, confronted Whiteness and promoted anti-racism within our program by developing a Racialized Students' Network (RSN). The RSN provided mutual support and mentorship for racialized social work students to collectively address the forms of Whiteness and systemic racism that were negatively impacting them.[1] Through a critical and collective autoethnographical knowledge-building

process, four of the co-founders of the RSN—who are now tenure-track or tenured professors at Canadian universities—will share the origins and framework for the RSN. Using this methodology, we critically reflect on how these experiences have informed our current anti-racist decolonial scholarship and activism, which includes contributing to equity, diversity and inclusion[2](EDI) initiatives within our current schools. This article explores the role of graduate student anti-racist activisms as a central avenue for confronting Whiteness in social work education.[3]

Student-Led Anti-Racist Activism within Canadian Higher Education Institutions

Following the 2020 police killings of Black and Indigenous people, including George Floyd and Breonna Taylor in the United States as well as Regis Korchinski-Paquet and Chantel Moore in Canada, there has been a resurgence of student-led anti-racist activisms within Canadian universities. Students across Canada have actively engaged in organizing demonstrations and protests centered around universities' lack of response and action against colonialism and anti-Black racism (Holt, 2020). Certainly, these mobilizations have been shaped by a longer history of anti-racist activism in higher education, including the 1969 uprisings against the various forms of institutional racism and racial discrimination experienced by Black students at Sir George Williams University (now called Concordia University) in Montreal, Quebec (Greenridge & Gahman, 2019). Although outside the scope of this article, we would like to acknowledge and honour the ways in which many Indigenous and racialized scholars have documented their experiences of racism in the Canadian academy, as well as how various forms of anti-colonial and anti-racist activisms in higher education have been taken up. For this article, we aim to highlight key issues related to student-led anti-racist activism within Canadian higher education institutions, particularly within the social work educational context.

Student protests have garnered significant media attention, creating increased pressure for university administrators to engage in intentional dialogue with students and develop mechanisms to address students' concerns. Institutional responses to student protests have ranged from a mere nod and collegial engagement to the vilification of students. For instance, in December 2020, students at the University of Ottawa held a sit-in outside President Jacques Fremont's office to protest the university's response to anti-Black racism (Kester, 2020). Although representatives met with students to hear their concerns, students believed the university had been slow in acknowledging the extent of racism on campus and implementing recommendations by student groups (Kester, 2020).

Some universities have denounced tactics used by students and have executed a number of mechanisms and disciplinary sanctions to

silence, suppress or exert control over student protests, even though "by nature, institutions of higher education are places where information, open discussion, and thought should flow freely" (Shaw Bonds, 2012, p. 17). For example, in 2004, York University student activist Daniel Freeman-Maloy was expelled for three years for using a megaphone while participating in two pro-Palestine demonstrations (Brown, 2007). Freeman-Maloy took the matter to court, accusing then York University president Lorna Marsden of not providing him a hearing with the University Discipline Tribunal. The Supreme Court of Canada "upheld his right to sue a university president for 'misfeasance in public office'" (Brown, 2007, n.p.). Freeman-Maloy and the university reached an out-of-court settlement (Brown, 2007; Canadian Association of University Teachers, 2007). While Freeman-Maloy returned to the university to complete his studies, York University administrators revised its Temporary Use of University Space policy for activities by student groups, limiting their organizing efforts (YUFA, 2005, as cited by Brulé, 2015). According to Brulé (2015), university corporatization plays a pivotal role in the university's response to student activism; indeed, restrictive policies that surveil, regulate, and curtail student activism result in a "hyper-politicized environment" (p. 172).

While many student protests are intended to increase dialogue, advocate for change, and create awareness of campus-related issues, student activists assume significant risk as they "engage in direct action strategies to forge campus and broader societal change" (Rhoads, 2016, p. 199). In particular, racialized students pursuing activism within the university are at an increased vulnerability due to their already precarious positionalities and underrepresentation on campus, which may impact the extent to which they express their dissatisfaction with inequities or unfair institutional bureaucratic processes that they experience or witness (Hampton, 2020; Nazemi, 2011).

Student-Led Anti-Racist Activism within Universities in Quebec

In addition to the student-led uprisings against racism experienced by Black students at Concordia University, students in Quebec have been protesting against tuition hikes since the 1960s (Bégin-Caouette & Jones, 2014). These mobilizations extended beyond the university grounds to pressure various government bodies to respond to their demands. During the spring of 2012, students mobilized to protest a 75% increase in tuition fees proposed by Jean Charest's Liberal government. Popularly known as the *printemps érable* or Maple Spring Protests, student unions across Quebec who had voted for an unlimited general strike engaged in a variety of tactics, including classroom pickets, night marches, casseroles or pots and pans demonstrations, and acts of civil disobedience (Collectif Dix Novembre, 2017).

On May 22, 2012, over 400,000 people marched in downtown Montreal, as protests had broadened to critiques of neoliberalism and privatization of public resources (i.e., housing, education, health and social services, etc.), and calls for environmental, racial, and social justice (Ferrer et al., 2014). One of the groups to emerge was Students of Colour Montreal (SoCM), a network of racialized students who organized and mobilized to challenge racism within the Quebec student movement, and to highlight the role of institutional racism within Quebec universities. SoCM also spoke of the tensions and experiences of hyper-(in)visibility racialized students faced as they navigated the strike and sought linkages between student struggles, the interconnections of neoliberal austerity, and the "role of colonial capital in expropriating Indigenous land and displacing racialized migrants" (Palacios et al., 2013, p. 9). For instance, racialized students expressed desires to connect the student strike to broader issues of migrant justice, racial profiling, and anti-capitalism (Ferrer et al., 2014). Although the planned tuition hike was eventually cancelled by Pauline Marois and the newly elected minority Parti Québécois government (Michael, 2013), they also eventually cut funding for postsecondary education. Nonetheless, the Quebec protests "led to a destabilization and disruption of the traditional power relationships associated with the Quebec higher education policy community, especially within the university sector" (Bégin-Caouette & Jones, 2014, p. 422).

Racialized Student Experiences and Activisms within Social Work Education

As mentioned previously, social work programs in Canada have explicit mandates to advance social justice, but often lack explicit anti-racist mandates. Factors influencing the nature and focus of racialized students' activism include assessment and interrogation of power and privilege, quality and quantity of education received, interaction with unions on campus, and exposure to marginalization and oppression of self and others in multiple interactions (e.g., agencies, recreation, field placements, employment, educational institutions, and classrooms). Racialized social work students continue to navigate inequitable training in field placement (Fletcher et al., 2013)—training that fails to respond to the specific needs of those with membership in equity-seeking groups (Asakura et al., 2018) who are assigned to poorly equipped and underserved agencies (Srikanthan, 2019) and, with limited field placement options, are forced to remain in unsafe organizations that lack proper anti-racism training (Zuchowski, 2013). Moreover, there are few racialized mentors to support or advance the careers of racialized students. Instead, the university climate too often promotes and rewards White supremacy and privilege through everyday actions that normalize the subordination of racialized students as people who are supposedly

privileged to be offered spots in top universities, for which tuition fees are assumed to be paid. The degrees offered are also soaked in Western and particularly American dominant curriculum and interventions that intentionally make it difficult or impossible to disrupt current norms, systems and, as Lorde (1984) suggests, dismantle the master's house using the defective tools provided by the master. Racialized students' activism could also be the result of ideological shifts (Curnow et al., 2019) favouring the majority—which universalize and normalize White knowledge while race and difference are considered inconsequential— or the experiences students have with assigned, imposed, or acquired mentors.

Theorizing Racialized Student Experiences Through Critical Race Theory

Our use of the term "Whiteness" is in line with critical race theory (CRT), a discipline that has shifted and disrupted discussions on race towards structures of dominance and neoliberalism. Drawing from a diverse set of theoretical traditions such as Afrocentric philosophy, feminist theory, Marxist social thought, and postmodernism, CRT—in particular, critical race feminism— focuses on and criticizes the foundations of liberal order, enlightenment, rationalism, and the so-called "neutral principles" of institutional law (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Edwards et al., 2006). Specifically, CRT devotes significant attention to analyzing "White supremacy," which refers to the "political, economic and cultural system in which [white people] overwhelmingly control power and material resources" (Ansley, 1989, p. 1024). The concept of White supremacy is distinct from *White privilege*, which is often represented by the invisible assets and provisions made available to White people (McIntosh, 1990). According to Lipsitz (1998), conscious and unconscious ideas of White superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of White dominance and non-White subordination are re-enacted daily across a broad array of institutions and social settings. Citing basic tenets of CRT, Gillborn (2006) suggests that White supremacy is "conceived as a comprehensive condition whereby the interests and perceptions of white subjects are continually placed center stage and assumed as 'normal'" (p. 318).

Collaborative Autoethnography and the Importance of Archives

As co-founders of the Racialized Students' Network (RSN) at the School of Social Work at McGill University in 2010, we drew from collaborative autoethnography (Caron et al., 2020; Ngunjiri et al., 2010) to critically reflect on our individual and collective experiences of student activism. According to Ngunjiri et al. (2010), collaborative ethnography can deploy various ways to collaborate as the individuals involved become

"participant-researchers," and their interactions result in a "richer perspective than that emanating from a solo researcher autoethnography" (p. 6). As a reflexive knowledge-building approach, this methodology allowed us to interlace our social locations and experiences within a particular site and socio-historical context. The data used to construct this article drew from three main sources: (1) personal reflections of each of our experiences within the RSN, (2) the reconstruction of previous RSN documentation, and (3) the co-development of a critical collective analysis through ongoing discussions via Zoom and email. Our collaborative autoethnographic process enabled us to revisit the RSN archives and synthesize our past experiences, allowing for "critical collective knowledge building" (Caron et al., 2020). The RSN archives consist of various documents including, from 2010 to 2014, the official description of our mandate, documentation of various RSN activities and events, meeting minutes, and working documents.

The first step of our collaborative autoethnography included initial email exchanges and Zoom meetings. We subsequently gathered RSN documentation and engaged in both individual reflection and collective dialogue related to these documents. The individual narratives that are shared in this article emerged from this iterative process as we drew from our personal reflections and reconstructed RSN documentation. This process allowed us to engage in individual and collective meaning-making (Ngunjiri et al., 2020), thus advancing our critical collective analysis.

We are struck by the erasure of previous histories of anti-racist activism within McGill University and its School of Social Work. During our involvement with the RSN, we connected with alumni who described previous waves of anti-racist activism within our school dating back to the 1970s. Our archival process allowed us to locate additional literature about student-led anti-racist activism within McGill (Hampton, 2020; Nazemi, 2011), including the creation of student groups such as the Black Students' Network (Tessono, 2020). Tessono's (2020) archival research indicates that the first Black student group at McGill was the British West Indian Society, which was created in 1940 and "organized engaging events such as soccer games, and addressed topics of current historic or socio-political realities affecting Caribbean countries" (p. 78). In order to counteract the erasure of racialized and Indigenous histories within White-dominant queer and trans activist archives in Toronto, Ware (2017) suggests that the public archiving of Black trans activism directly confronts Whiteness and ensures that Blackness is not forgotten. This article serves as a type of public archive of our experiences and the RSN model for student-led anti-racist activism. It also aims to archive the RSN to "re-remember that we are here, that we will continue to exist, continue to fight, to struggle for change, and to win" (Ware, 2017, p. 170, citing Assata Shakur, 1987).

We present the origins of the RSN and each author's social location and personal reflections on our experience of the RSN below. Subsequently, the RSN model for student-led anti-racist activism will be shared through the identification of student needs, identity formation, the sharing of experiences of exclusion and belonging, the identification of commonalities and goals, networking, involvement in governance, mutual support, skill-building, and the transformation of the institution. This section concludes with a collective analysis on how the RSN has informed our current involvements in anti-racist activism as professors.

Introduction to the RSN

Activism by racialized students in predominantly White universities is grounded in resisting inhibiting structural imbalances, which are amplified by White supremacy to diminish the knowledge, experiences and needs of the "Other." The collectives that rise in response aim to demolish oppressive institutional structures, providing a space where our counter knowledge, views, and voices are promoted, projected, listened to, and heard. The RSN was created in October 2010 by social work students in the doctoral program at McGill University. Though there was awareness of growing resentment among racialized students about racist and imbalanced structures that informed their learning within social work classrooms, McGill University's School of Social Work (like several predominantly White schools in Canada) was not committed to promoting EDI in recruitment policies, curriculum content, student engagement, or school governance and administration. Building on our own experiences of supportive resistance and healing, we saw an urgent need to draw and direct institutional attention to the plight of racialized social work students who represent diverse racialized identities, including international, out-of-province, local, and immigrant students enrolled at McGill University.

Personal Reflections of the RSN

Ifeyinwa's Reflections: I arrived as an international student, the only student of African Descent in my cohort and the School's doctoral program. I had to function within a postcolonial model, drenched in imperialist educational tools with no preparation for the world outside the classroom. I transformed from doctoral student to doctoral candidate while accommodating diverse realities:

1. I had no mentors to guide me from doctoral studies to professional goals. I became my own teacher, mentor, and guide.

2. There was an unwritten awareness that virtually all jobs, teaching assistantships, research assistantships, and sessional teaching jobs were not accessible to international students; those available were passed on each year to the same White students.

3. Racialized international students were considered inadequate, and there were institutional actions buttressing this inadequacy. It appeared that these students were only there to fill the numbers and advance the university's ranking, and were to stay hidden thereafter.

4. Instructors could expose me to limited anti-racist and anti-colonial theories, and yet, when these theories were applied as the framework guiding my research and dissertation, it was and is viewed as radical, with diverse repercussions.

5. As a racialized doctoral student of African Descent, I would most likely complete my doctoral program without funding, after switching among three or more supervisors and without the Graduate School or the School of Social Work offering support to cushion the weight of adjustment. I learned that recruitment numbers counted for racialized international students and withdrawal numbers were inconsequential and overlooked.

6. When deliberations to address the concerns of doctoral students were made, agendas were skewed to address the concerns of White students in their familiar and comfortable town halls, which are considered unproductive sites for exhibition of privilege and were avoided by racialized students like me.

Fortunately, I learned that survival had a different definition and required new forms of strength. It required that I align with others who have similar experiences of marginalization to stand firm and successfully exit the program. I found shared ideals with two racialized students in my cohort and conceived the RSN to offer support, career advancement, and healing for other racialized students in the school. Through the RSN, I realized that racialized student activism gained momentum when linked to other associations within the School of Social Work and McGill University. Now, as a faculty member in the School of Social Work at Dalhousie University charged with enforcing EDI initiatives through the school's Diversity and Equity Committee, the programs and strategies I favour in addressing students' concerns are guided by their expressed needs and my commitment to their career advancement.

Patrina's Reflections: When I started the PhD program in 2011, I was one of only a few Black students in the PhD program. I recall feeling isolated as I navigated my new surroundings. However, the friendships I established with three other racialized PhD students highlighted the importance of student activism. They took me under their wing and introduced me to the RSN. In the following year, I became active in various student-led activities initiated by the RSN. I was elected as the

PhD representative and served in that role for two years. During my time at McGill, I assisted in organizing the Annual General Meetings and both Black History Month and social events.

As the PhD representative, I was responsible for designing, distributing, and evaluating the yearly student experience survey. When I presented the findings of the survey at our annual town hall meeting, some people were not receptive to feedback. A professor questioned the validity of the findings and inferred that they created a divide between faculty and students. I continued to liaise with students to discuss their concerns, informed the faculty advisory group of students' concerns, and helped facilitate suitable resolutions. Despite the imminent backlash of engaging in these activities, I continued my work with the RSN and other student groups until my departure. These early experiences have informed my approaches to social justice issues.

I am currently the co-chair of the Anti-Black Racism Task Force in my department at the University of Calgary. I am also a member of the Dimensions Steering Committee, which is tasked with advancing EDI initiatives across the university to foster transformational change. I continue to collaborate with the friends I met at McGill, who are also co-authors of this article.

Ilyan'sReflections: I started graduate school at around the same time I started to organize with members of the Filipino/a/x communities in Montreal through Kabataang Montreal and the National Alliance of Philippine Women in Canada. While learning about social work theory and practice at McGill, I was also sharing spaces and conversations with Filipino/a/x youth who were navigating their processes of settlement into Canadian society. I heard stories related to the traumas of family separation and reunification (through the Live-in Caregiver Program), police surveillance, racist teachers and guidance counsellors who encouraged Filipino/x boys to pursue technical trade schools instead of universities because certificates were "better career fits," and the concerning emerging trend of Filipino/a/x youth being most at risk of dropping out of high school in Quebec and Canada. However, I also heard and shared stories of resistance and resilience. The Filipino/a/x youth I organized with created and developed their own stories through community radio broadcasting, art-for-change workshops, and conferences that centered their stories and their demands for change. I will forever remember how Filipino/a/x youth purposely demonstrated during a municipal council meeting, demanding the reinstallation of local basketball nets—a popular youth hang-out spot—after the city removed them without consultation (Solyom, 2009). I developed my sense of critical thinking and relational accountability with Filipino/a/x youth and organizers. I felt community.

I felt the opposite while at McGill. As an elite and world-class research institution, the School of Social Work had a culture of research productivity and competition. It was a space where activism and politicized social work

were actively discouraged. I certainly understood this type of elitism when I came into the program, especially knowing how universities—and schools of social work in particular—are part of the knowledge-production regime and White settler colonial project. Nonetheless, I found myself having difficulty in reconciling my community's experiences while having to navigate the rigours of the program and the pervasive White supremacy integrated in the curriculum and school policies. Racist comments, microaggressions, and gaslighting from White faculty and fellow doctoral students felt normalized and unreprimanded at the school. It was a struggle to resist their daily gaze, in which we were competitors, problems, and members of marginalized communities whose experiences were seen as sources of data mining meant to be extracted. With the RSN, I began to feel community. The RSN was born out of a desire to resist the pervasive Whiteness at the school, and to legitimize our individual and collective identities while contesting our experiences of being the "Other" while on campus. The RSN model allowed us to uplift each other, knowing that we had strength in numbers, and effectively built a community for racialized students where there was none.

Edward's Reflections: Having completed my master's degree within the same social work program, I was aware of the varied forms of racism and intersectional barriers experienced by racialized students within our school, especially those who were low-income, queer and/or trans, and disabled. As I began my PhD, I was entrenched as an instructor for a mandatory undergraduate course on anti-oppression. As I listened to racialized students' challenges and observed faculty meetings, I gained further insight into the insidious nature of institutional racism. I began to see patterns across racialized students' experiences, especially those who were multiple marginalized, including experiences of exclusion and non-recognition in a disproportionate manner from their White peers. As a doctoral student who was also one of the few racialized and queer instructors, I had a particular vantage point regarding the impacts of institutional racism, and especially the underrepresentation of racialized faculty who were tenure-track and tenured professors. Despite having positive relationships with a small number of faculty members, I accumulated experiences of microaggressions from students and faculty. When other RSN members and I raised issues related to institutional racism to the faculty, we were often met with a dismissal of our concerns or outright denial and anger. We became those stereotypical angry people of colour.

I treasure the relationships that I built with fellow racialized doctoral students. When any of us experienced or witnessed microaggressions or forms of institutional racism, we consistently affirmed and validated each other's experiences. I see how various aspects of the RSN model— such as fostering mutual support and mentorship, and developing activities based on the needs expressed by racialized students—helped to fill the

structural gaps that racialized students were experiencing at all levels. With the support of some faculty and community organizations, we created our own mobilization activities. In collectivizing our efforts, we developed a *rapport de force* when facing the institution. This collective power gave each of us more protection, as it reduced the ability of the institution to use divide and conquer tactics and displace blame onto the failures of an individual. We recognized the structural sources of the racial inequalities that we experienced, and we fought for our collective dignity and wellbeing. In my role as a tenured faculty member at the Université de Montréal, I draw upon the experience of building the RSN model when ensuring that any EDI activities that are undertaken to address institutional racism begin with the needs and desires of racialized students and include strategies for mutual support and mentorship.

Student Activism Model for Racialized Students

Essentially, the RSN's model of activism is premised on the effect racism has on the exclusion, sense of belonging, wellbeing, and success of racialized social work students within and outside McGill University. The RSN mandate and activities brought together a diverse group of students who were not only racialized but also first-generation, low-income, queer, trans, living with disability, etc. Although McGill University's School of Social Work already had an Indigenous student support program that served an important role in integrating Indigenous social work students, the RSN activities were also open to Indigenous students, and thus, some RSN activities also included the participation of Indigenous people. During various RSN activities, especially the closed workshop and dialogue-focused sessions, there was space for participants to share their experiences as students across university and field contexts. In some cases, students shared deeply touching yet sometimes traumatic experiences of racism, and in some cases, how racism intersected with sexism, queerphobia and/or transphobia. This mutual sharing of personal narratives allowed us to connect individual experiences with broader collective impacts of institutional racism that operated in classrooms, field placements, and decision-making spaces.

The model explored by the RSN recognized and prioritized the needs, experiences, and aspirations of racialized students as a building platform for student activism that advanced EDI missions (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. *The Racialized Students' Network (RSN) Model of Racialized Students' Activism*
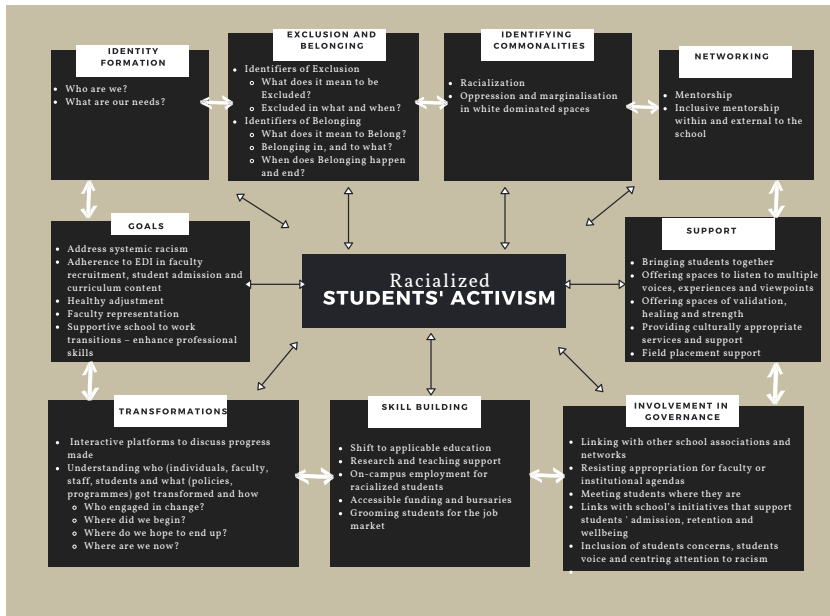
Collating/Identifying Students' Needs

The RSN sought transformative shifts to address the unequal representation of racialized students in the academy and the universalization of non-inclusive practices that restrict the presence and success of persons of colour in, for instance, Western-style town halls, research, admission, enrolment, and the coordination of field placements that disempower students of colour within supposedly empowering learning spaces. We engaged in culturally appropriate forms of awareness and sharing (e.g., informal announcements of the collective, informal meetings, email LISTSERV-sharing, sharing circles, and seasonal potlucks and events) within and outside the university that provided a sense of safety and comfort amongst racialized students.

Identity Formation

Students' needs are often intertwined with who they are, as their identity defines services that are accessible to them within academic spaces. Within its mandate, the RSN was open to all students at the School of Social Work and other departments in McGill University who self-identified as racialized, Indigenous, a person of colour, "visible minority," and/or multi-racial.

Exclusion and Belonging

Racialized students' activism is usually directed at speaking out against White supremacy and domination by identifying unsettling beneficial structures and their inhibiting effects within the academy. Therefore, the RSN prioritized understanding students' experiences and their personal interpretations to encourage inclusion and belonging.

Identifying Commonalities

The coordinators and members of the RSN recognized our commonality as racialized students who are existing in and defined by dictates of these spaces, which direct our interests, ideas, curriculum, and instructional content to fit a certain standard. Although our efforts may have been suppressed—sometimes with negative repercussions—we found it necessary to seek alternative pathways that demonstrated our ability to redefine ourselves in order to better position ourselves for future aspirations.

Goals

The expressed goals of RSN members were to work with the school towards transformations that addressed systemic racism, incorporated equity initiatives that supported the recruitment of more racialized students and faculty, enhanced professional skills that advanced the careers of racialized students, and supported healthy learning environments that ensured the retention of racialized students.

Networking

The weight of institutional engagements that afflict racialized students means that there is limited time to cope with the rigours of the academic program, understand our learning environment, build our networks or portfolio for future job markets, and hone our research or employment skills. The RSN invited racialized professional mentors internal and external to McGill University to share stories of their successes in diverse fields. For example, in April 2011, a racialized professor at the university provided a talk titled, "Building academic and community networks and negotiating job prospects for minority students."

Involvement in Governance

Racialized students are susceptible to tensions that weigh heavily on our ability to sustain our activism—especially with repercussions, such as the hostile stance of school administrators to student requests (Davenport et al., 2011) and limited progress on our academic work. There is also the tendency for school administrators to take credit for racialized students' efforts aimed at fostering inclusiveness (Gorski & Erakat, 2019). Indeed,

RSN members were concerned when the School of Social Work's 2013 accreditation documents included us as part of school governance, when we were not. While this enhanced the school's claim of fostering diversity and belonging among its student body, the RSN considered its works appropriated without consultation. To resist the erasure of our activism and labour, the RSN submitted a report to the CASWE-ACFTS during the school's accreditation process. While the report was written to accurately document and recognize our ongoing work, the school disapproved of our tactics. In a gesture of accountability and dialogue, members of the RSN attended a faculty meeting to express our disappointment in not being consulted or having our work acknowledged. While Indigenous faculty members were supportive of the RSN, the majority of White faculty dismissed and questioned the legitimacy of our concerns.

As members of the RSN, we were fully aware that, to effectively advance our activism, we had to link with and take positions in other related existing associations. These included the Social Work Association of Graduate Students (SWAGS), the International and Out-of- Province Student Committee of SWAGS, the Social Work Students' Association (SWSA), Indigenous Access McGill (IAM), and the Indigenous Student Alliance (ISA). Indeed, some RSN members also co-founded SWAGS.

Mutual Support

The RSN found that students longed for collective, culturally appropriate, and safe platforms to share their experiences, find mutual support, and foster healing. We hosted two notable events: "This is your life: Field placements workshop," in which students shared challenges and experiences from their field placement that were passed on to administration, and a workshop developed in collaboration with the Social Equity and Diversity Education (SEDE) Office, titled "Creating safer spaces in an academic environment: Racial microaggressions, oppressions and colour blindness," which offered discussion spaces for racialized and White students.

Skill Building

Without in-school funding, awards, or research and teaching assistantship positions offered to racialized students—especially international and out-of-province students—to build their professional skills, it was difficult to boost their self-confidence and preparedness for future competitive job negotiations. The RSN tried to enhance members' confidence by offering support in writing and reviewing resumes, reviewing applications for grad school, providing opportunities for students to speak or represent the collective at events, publishing a SWAGS newsletter within the school that racialized students contributed to, assisting in mock job interviews, and notifying members of on-campus and off-campus job openings.

Transformations

The RSN encouraged institutional transformation by providing spaces for conversation between racialized students, faculty, the student body, and communities. In September 2011, the RSN organized an event on racial profiling in collaboration with the Social Work Students' Association, the Graduate Collective Against Racism for Equity, and the Centre for Research Action on Race Relations. Racialized students' activism should be viewed as a call for inclusion that challenges the normalizing of White-dominated spaces.

Closing Reflections on Racialized Student and Faculty Activism in Contemporary Times

Since completing our degrees, the RSN was unfortunately never fully institutionalized nor championed by faculty, and thus was never officially recognized within the school's governance structure. However, other racialized students and newly hired faculty, including tenure-track professors, have emerged to continue to mobilize with racialized undergraduate and graduate students. As we did, these students and faculty learned of the historical context of institutional racism within the School of Social Work and McGill University and have built their own powerful initiatives to confront anti-Black, anti-Indigenous, and anti-Asian racism.

Since graduating, we have all transitioned into faculty positions at different social work schools across Canada. Determined to apply the lessons learned from our time developing the RSN, we have taken on roles as leaders and members of our departments' and faculties' EDI committees. In our roles as faculty members, we draw on our student experiences to reimagine what it means to engage in anti-racist work now that we hold relative degrees of institutional power as tenured and tenure-track racialized faculty members.

While this article chronicled our realities as racialized students, many of the experiences identified by students (i.e., loneliness, alienation, and experiences of microaggressions and everyday racism) are also commonly reported by racialized faculty members (Daniel, 2019; Hampton, 2020; Henry & Tator, 2012; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019) who actively resist colonial and neoliberal secondary institutions. Moreover, transitioning from student to faculty member often does not erase racialized faculty's experiences of inequities. Racialized people are grossly underrepresented in academia (Henry & Tator, 2012; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019): their knowledge is invalidated and delegitimized (Henry, 2015); they navigate environments characterized by resistance and hostility from students (Henry & Tator, 2012), which may also be reflected in unfair course evaluations (Wane, 2005); they are expected to engage in excessive service work (Mohamed & Beagan, 2019; Porter, 2007; Seifert & Umbach,

2008); and their labour as mentors or advisors to minority students is seldom acknowledged (Haag, 2005; Samble, 2008), which Mountz (2016) characterizes as "identity taxation." This additional labour limits the amount of time available for personal research and writing (Kelly et al., 2017) and contributes to psychological and mental stress (Segura, 2003; Turner, 2003), social isolation (Arnold et al., 2016), tokenization (Arnold et al., 2016; Settles et al., 2019), and fear of the likely negative impact on their tenure and promotion (Haag, 2005; Kelly et al., 2017). These dynamics exist against a backdrop of austerity-driven universities who actively promote streamlined, profit-driven education and research. The consequences are also detrimental for racialized faculty members who speak out about social injustices, as is evident in the case of Professor Aimé Avolonto, a Black professor at York University who faced threats of termination in response to his complaints of racism on campus (Avolonto, n.d.; Ceric, n.d.; Shahid, 2021).

The complaints that students currently bring forward based on their classroom interactions are not distant from those that we experienced as students within the RSN. The minority labour and stress that students endure is evident during EDI Committee meetings and advisory discussions with students. Students recount microaggressions based on their social identities that are evident in hostile classroom discussions and avoidance of sensitive topics in the classroom (Mbakogu, 2020), and, when these discussions occur, students from equity-seeking groups are asked to educate their classrooms based on their lived experiences of oppression. These students experience further microaggressions when White faculty members and students fail to acknowledge the role their privilege and power play in classroom encounters. White faculty could be silent, ignoring or failing to address microaggressions within their classrooms (Kang & Garran, 2018), moderating the direction of curriculum content (Davis & Mirick, 2021; Young et al., 2015) to omit several social groups, or focusing on oppression without articulating the role of race and Whiteness in maintaining the status quo. School practices and policies could also be unclear; schools could be promoting social justice and diversity in student admission while the reality is different. These invisible barriers (Fletcher et al., 2013) affect racialized students differently and could lead to class absences, poor academic performance, delays in completing their academic programs, and distrust of social work learning and its applicability to marginalized populations.

Our reflections come at a time when calls for civil rights through Black Lives Matter, for land reclamation from Indigenous Peoples, for human rights through Jordan's and Joyce's Principles, and for the dismantling of the structural and racial inequities of COVID-19 are fronting the need for the ivory tower to redress the pervasive and systemic inequities that exist for racialized communities, particularly Black and Indigenous Peoples. The 2020 Scholar Strike, for instance, drew attention to the urgency of

emancipatory, anti-racist and anti-colonial practices within postsecondary and social work settings (Duhaney & El-Lahib, 2021; Mbakogu, 2020). Resistance against the academy comes at a time when postsecondary institutions and schools and faculties of social work are increasingly structured as corporate entities whose bodies of power (i.e., their boards of governors, senate, deans, and coordinators) adhere to neoliberal logics of increased consumerism, customer satisfaction, efficiency, and streamlined education.

Moreover, Canadian universities continue to perpetuate various forms of colonialism and racism (Bailey, 2016; Hampton, 2020; Henry & Tator, 2009; Henry et al., 2017). Scholars have identified challenges and pathways for anti-racist and anti-colonial university education in Canada (Dei, 1995; Wane, 2008). In response to the current social and political climate, many Canadian universities have issued statements of solidarity and have started to develop and implement anti-racist policies and revise institutional practices. There has also been response to the pervasive calls for representation within its professorial ranks, curricula, and field settings. A number of Canadian social work schools and faculties have adopted and implemented EDI commitment statements as part of their strategic plans; they are organized and focused on increasing the diversity of and accountability to its student experiences, research and knowledge, outreach, workforce, and physical spaces (McGill University, n.d.). While such statements of solidarity and commitment towards EDI are necessary for institutions that require significant shifts to meet the representation commensurate with the racialized communities served, some established literature has already critiqued the adoption and implementation of EDI. In their article on EDI within social work education, Roberts and Smith (2002) critiqued the performativity and illusions of predominantly White schools of social work in adopting diversity initiatives in their curricula and representation. Even within community field placements, service organizations adopt a range of diversity and inclusion initiatives (Cano, 2018). However, while organizations adopt broader diversity initiatives, there was less emphasis on inclusion-focused initiatives such as mentoring to support inclusion (Cano, 2018).

The presence of racialized students on university campuses in Canada enhances inclusive classrooms. It shows that universities are embracing Canada's diverse populations and enriching classroom interactions that advance universities' and departments' world ranking. Recently, universities have progressed in promoting EDI in student admission and recruitment. Yet the question is worth asking: what is the value of EDI beyond representation? Clearly reflexivity, as recommended in social work practice and curricula, should propel us beyond the tokenized application of racialized knowledge, bodies, and values as tools of public relations.

The pivot towards EDI should be applauded. Indeed, this is a necessary first step in acknowledging experiences of marginalization, exclusion, and racism that students, faculty, and community members have long identified. However, there is the danger of engaging in performative EDI when schools are not acknowledging how neoliberalism and White supremacy continue to shape its curriculum and practices. At its very core, social work research and education are part of a colonial knowledge production regime that still commodifies and reifies the experiences of the communities that they serve. It is too soon to determine whether these initiatives will have long-term impact or contribute to sustainable change. However, until schools and faculties are able to meaningfully redress these tensions, gestures toward EDI will evolve but core issues of anti-racism will remain the same.

Prior to contemplating a paper on student activism, we reflected on how our activism within the RSN could contribute or has contributed to the nurturing of building blocks for social change in our current institutions or schools of social work. The bedrock of institutional change is moderated by faculty members that are willing to listen to diverse expressions of microaggression and inequity by racialized students and take action that is guided by the needs of the concerned students, rather than their perceived interpretation of those needs. Often, there appears a perceived disconnect between the social justice principles that are taught in social work schools and the policies that face implementation barriers because they are grounded in inequity and exclusion. Racialized students experience a constant struggle because of the shifting divide between, on the one hand, a professed commitment to social justice and reflective learning and, on the other, a failure to address microaggressions in the classroom or embrace diversity among students, as the latter intensifies fear of expression and possibly even internalized oppression. Schools of social work should create respectful spaces to hear the views and experiences of racialized faculty and students without tokenizing these spaces as simply another concession made to advance EDI.

A recognition of racialized students' activism is the movement toward collective deconstruction of the impact of White power on the functionality, safety, and wellbeing of students that is evident in the value of their scholarship within classroom, practice, and societal spaces. As we revisit the power of public archives, we acknowledge the significance of racialized students' activism. Our collaborative autoethnographic process reminded us of this critical question: which histories and events are allowed to be remembered and archived, and who allows them to be (Ware, 2017)? The act of ensuring that something is not archived can therefore reinforce Whiteness, while the act of making an archive public can also be an act of anti-racist resistance. This article thus serves as a public archive and a possible road map for student-led anti-racist

activism that will hopefully contribute to confronting and breaking apart the continued Whiteness within Canadian social work education.

NOTES

1.   The group of racialized students who conceived of the RSN are all non-Indigenous to Turtle Island and Canada. Our School of Social Work already had an Indigenous student support program due to Indigenous students' and First Nations having advocated for this program. As RSN co-founders, we wanted to respect these initiatives from Indigenous students and staff without excluding Indigenous students from activities that were addressing experiences of institutional racism. Indigenous students did indeed attend many of the RSN events and did share their experiences of racism. This article thus aims to recognize their participation in the RSN while also centering the experiences of racialized students.

2.   The term "equity, diversity, and inclusion" has recently gained attention within higher education. According to the Canada Research Coordinating Committee (CRCC) (2021), equity is defined as the "removal of systemic barriers and biases enabling all individuals to have equal opportunity to access and benefit from [a] program" (n.p.). Diversity is defined as "differences in race, colour, place of origin, religion, immigrant and newcomer status, ethnic origin, ability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and age" (CRCC, 2021, n.p.). Inclusion is seen as the "practice of ensuring that all individuals are valued and respected for their contributions and are equally supported" (CRCC, 2021, n.p.).

3.   We wish to thank doctoral candidate Monica Batac for inspiring us to come together to collectively archive our experiences.

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