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Impact
on Urban
Health

Dissemination
Of Knowledge:
Empirical
Expansions

A literature review

Contents

About the author

Dr. Abdul Haqq Baker is the founder and Managing Director of the 2009 award winning youth initiative, Strategy To Reach Empower & Educate Teenagers (STREET) UK, a former Lecturer in Terrorism Studies at the Centre of Studies in Terrorism and Political Violence (CSTPV) in the University of St Andrews and Research Fellow for the University of Exeter's European Muslim Research Centre. He was also chairman of Brixton Mosque, London between 1994 and 2009 where he successfully countered external extremist threats to the local Muslim community and successfully challenged the destructive propaganda that accompanied it.

His strategic focus involves intervention frameworks that enable strategic community based and statutory collaborations/partnerships to address the multifaceted challenges faced by violent extremism and environments at risk of developing them. His STREET programme was subsequently cited by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and British think- tank DEMOS, among others, as a model case study. Its effective approach towards youth engagement and intervention led to it winning the Preventing Violent Extremism Innovation award (17th February 2009) for the most innovative youth programme in 2008.

Abdul Haqq's insight, experiences and expertise in successfully challenging violent radicalisation has led to him being widely acknowledged as an authority on violent extremism and counter-radicalisation in the UK as well as an expert in the field of youth intervention projects. He has acted in the capacity of adviser and on occasion, expert witness regarding international terrorism cases.

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Prologue: A history

It is important to commence this review by summarising the Black Experience within a discernible and historically western paradigm in order to acknowledge it being borne out of resistance and struggle resulting from the suppression and subsequent obliteration of knowledge. From the African shores of enslavement, where deception formed the initial basis of enticement, to the landscaped plantations of corporal punishment on slaves acquiring core literacy and numeracy skills, institutionlised inequity continues to affect the black diaspora today.

However, as opposed to assuming a mantle of inherited passivity, contemporary societies have witnessed resurgent black voices emanating amongst urban locales; from Malcolm X and the Black Panther Party during the 1960s to the Black Lives Matter movement, the latter galvanising the masses following the murder of George Floyd, in 2020.

In the UK, black reaction towards systemic subjugation and inequality was channeled, in its most raw form, via the civil discord of the 1980s (Brixton, Toxteth and Broadwater Farm riots). As civil rights activist and leader, Martin Luther King alluded; '...a riot is the language of the unheard.'

The ability to articulate the Black Experience in a language considered palatable, albeit undiluted, today has increasingly become the purview of 2nd and 3rd generations of the black diaspora who, while learning from their forebears' histories, are also intrinsic constituents of today's diverse cultural mosaic. Their ability to identify, process and subsequently disseminate relatable knowledge seamlessly, transferring it across socio cultural, economic and political spheres is a skill acquired from previous generations. Examples of this are provided in this review, among them my own.

The Context

Research into COVID-19 and medical scepticism conducted by Centric and TSIP in South London in 2021, supported by Impact on Urban Health, revealed limited trust in healthcare institutions.

For some communities, resentment and cynicism is linked to health outcomes and widening disparities which are based on ethnicity. A huge swathe of people have therefore become cynical and pessimistic of public health guidelines and thus distrust medical institutions, biomedical health systems and mainstream narratives around public health.

Our research has also indicated that the pandemic unearthed the existence of both scepticism and a crisis of epistemic trust held by many across communities in South London. Further to this, the issue of patient data being sold during the pandemic was raised by several participants in reference to the sharing of NHS data to private organisations and third parties for a small fee. The prevalent scepticism and mistrust among communities should not come as a surprise in view of these findings. These, coupled with historic discoveries of medical exploitation, have served to further embed such negative perceptions into the psyche of such communities:

> Knowingly inflicting severe harm on human beings for the purpose of research is one of the most serious human rights abuses possible. Cases of exploitation in research have been used to illustrate unacceptable practices since the mid-20th century. Medical students all over the world have learned how not to conduct research by discussing the horrendous Nazi experiments and the more recent US Tuskegee trials.
>
> In both cases, highly vulnerable populations were exploited within the same country; German medical doctors undertook their experiments on concentration camp detainees, while US medical doctors exploited Black US citizens by studying the natural progression of syphilis without providing available cures. (1)

1 THE CONVERSATION: "ETHICS DUMPING' – THE DARK SIDE OF INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH,' 12TH DECEMBER 2017: HTTPS://THECONVERSATION.COM/ETHICS-DUMPING-THE-DARK-SIDE-OF-INTERNATIONAL-RESEARCH- 88675

Do Or Die?

Success or failure have often hinged on the access, dissemination and galvanisation of knowledge.

Knowledge is indeed power and one only has to review the annals of history to recount the successful or, conversely, devastating effects it can wield whether disseminated judiciously or carelessly. Institutionalised obstructions of knowledge once contributed to the prolonging of transatlantic slavery, whereby it enslaved Africans who were prohibited from education.

Reading and writing resulted in capital punishment or dismemberment. Today we continue to witness what resembles a type of socio-psychological enslavement through barriers erected to prevent various minority communities across particular demographics from accessing and comprehending knowledge that has been attuned to their sociocultural needs and progress.

In fact, these communities continue to be the targeted focus of various academic and medical research, often state sanctioned, to further legislative and/or policy driven objectives:

> Marginalised communities are those excluded from mainstream social, economic, educational, and/or cultural life. Examples of marginalised populations include, but are not limited to, groups excluded due to race, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, physical ability, language, and/or immigration status.
>
> Marginalisation occurs due to unequal power relationships between social groups. Conducting research in partnership with marginalised groups has inherent challenges. Traditional academic research can reenact and reinforce stigma and power imbalances, even if inadvertently, and marginalisation itself can limit the ability of certain groups to participate meaningfully in research. (2)

2 SEVELIUS, J.M ET AL: 'RESEARCH WITH MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES: CHALLENGES TO CONTINUITY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC,' NATURE PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY COLLECTION, PUBLISHED ONLINE 16TH MAY 2020: HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.1007%2FS10461-020-02920-3 & HTTPS://WWW.NCBI.NLM.NIH.GOV/PMC/ARTICLES/PMC7228861/

The Construct:
The Revolution will not be televised

Knowledge is analogous to water; its flow cannot be prevented indefinitely and will find alternative avenues. Remaining with the examples of enslavement, we observe the innovative methods in which hairstyles – braid and plait designs specifically – were used to provide maps and messages to fellow slaves. (3)

When Public Enemy exploded onto the music scene with anthems like "Yo! Bum Rush the Show", they were announcing a subculture's legitimate right to access and utilise knowledge as a means of empowerment from the suffocating societal paradigms imposed upon them.

Across the transatlantic, rap groups echoed similar sentiments of empowerment, with south London born IQT of Strength Within Strength (S.W.S.) articulating:

> Empirical Expansions,
> Hyped Dimensions,
> Reaching for heights, grabbing delinquents' attention... (4)

While music legend, James Brown, addressed escapism as a means of distraction from societally institutionalised apparatus affecting social development, IQT would demonstrate that '...**the term schizophrenia is a Black redemption**...' (5) highlighting the challenges of mental health among marginalised communities.

Knowledge is power

> The production of knowledge, much of which represents invaluable intellectual capital, lies at the heart of modern organisations. However, the value of any knowledge product hangs on its effective dissemination to – present and future – audiences... (6)

The above citation highlights the rationale for organisational dissemination of knowledge insofar as it relates to present and future trajectories. However, ensuing questions, when attempting to transfer this concept on a macro socioeconomic scale, targeting particular sociocultural strata are:
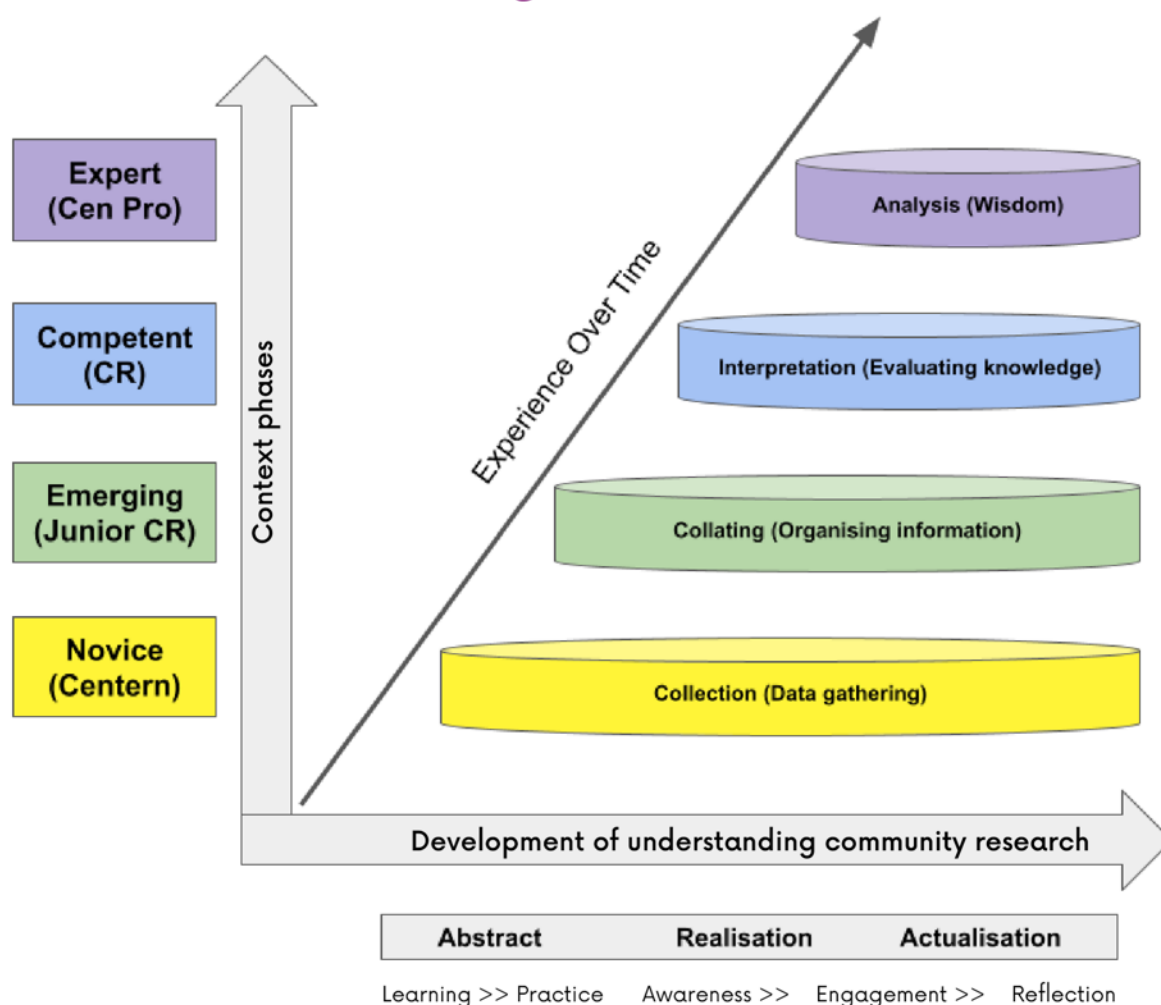
1. What was the foundation and process of such knowledge acquisition; and
2. How is the subsequent intellectual capital evaluated – and by who?

The recent COVID-19 pandemic opened a Pandora's box of mistrust and fear surrounding medical transparency. Existing inertia erupted into widespread fury, galvanising movements that challenged the efficacy of hastily manufactured vaccines, imposed on the masses in an attempt to resuscitate the global economy. Within this context, the above questions are even more pertinent.

The following framework (figure 1); Adaptation of Baker's Cognitive Development & Cleveland's Continuum of Understanding model illustrates an incremental process towards knowledge acquisition and its subsequent development, proceeding from abstract to actualised understandings. It can be argued that effective dissemination of knowledge only occurs at the latter stages of actualisation following both data and collation stages of development.

Figure 1:

Adaptation of Baker's Cognitive Development & Cleveland's Continuum Of Understanding Model

● Data comes about through research, creation, gathering and discovery.

● Information has context. Data is turned into information by organizing it so that we can easily draw conclusions. Data is also turned into information by "presenting" it, such as making it visual or auditory.

● Knowledge has the complexity of experience, which comes about by seeing it from different perspectives. This is why training and education is difficult – one cannot count on one person's knowledge transferring to another. Knowledge is built from scratch by learning through experience. Information is static, but knowledge is dynamic as it lives within us.

● Wisdom is the ultimate level of understanding. As with knowledge, wisdom operates within us. We can share our experiences that create the building blocks for wisdom, however, it needs to be communicated with even more understanding of the personal contexts of our audience than with wisdom, we start dealing with the future as we are now able to vision and design for what will be, rather than for what is or was.

3 BOAYKE, B: HOW CORNROWS WERE USED AS AN ESCAPE MAP FROM SLAVERY ACROSS SOUTH AMERICA', FACE2FACE AFRICA, 5TH JUNE 2018: HTTPS://FACE2FACEAFRICA.COM/ARTICLE/HOW-CORNROWS-WERE-USED- AS-AN-ESCAPE-MAP-FROM-SLAVERY-ACROSS-SOUTH-AMERICA

4 SWS: 'EMPIRICAL EXPANSIONS', 1990 CUE RECORDS: HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=I1HHAKBYWWU

So, why is this relevant?

The dissemination of knowledge is a key strategic instrument for raising awareness and understanding among cohorts, target audiences or communities before introducing policies to implement operational objectives. (8)

However, remaining with the above mentioned example of COVID-19, psychological and social barriers were erected to obfuscate and, in many scenarios, prevent transparent dissemination of knowledge leading to a plethora of conspiracy theories which only exacerbated existing fears:

> **A vacuum of knowledge about the origins of the new coronavirus ravaging the world has provided fertile ground for all manner of theories – from the fantastic, to the dubious to the believable... (9)**

Furthermore:

> **The world seems to have gone mad. This is particularly stressful for people for whom it sometimes seems less than inviting anyway. There are currently 450 million people who suffer from mental health conditions worldwide... Psychiatrists, psychotherapists and crisis services are now faced with the task of coping with the increased vulnerability of mentally ill people in what is virtually a parallel mental pandemic. (10)**

Medical services and academic institutions are now facing the unenviable task of convincing the very communities they have previously accessed for various research initiatives only to find the type of resistance alluded to earlier. Community-focused, as opposed to community-targeted research requires grassroots interaction and engagement from within, unlike the latter approach, which involves external entities parachuting in to formerly invisible communities, extracting research before disappearing, leaving members violated and exposed. The resultant apathy should not come as a surprise since indeed, the history of racialised pain and medical exploitation among minority communities is well documented:

> **There is no healing for a broken people while the system that breaks us is left intact. (11)**

Unsurprisingly, urban communities continue to revert to pathways of knowledge integral to their sociocultural mosaics, such as music, fashion and faith due to the access to knowledge transmitted via familiar avenues and borne out of similar sociological perspectives. Gil Scott Heron's 1970's spoken word encapsulates a dissemination of knowledge that continues to resonate with particular sociocultural and political target audiences, more than 50 years later, due to its almost timeless societal relevance and context:

> **A rat done bit my sister Nell.
> (with Whitey on the moon)
> Her face and arms began to swell. (and Whitey's on the moon)
> I can't pay no doctor bill.
> (but Whitey's on the moon)
> Ten years from now I'll be payin' still.
> (while Whitey's on the moon)... (12)**

5 IBID

6 ORDOÑEZ, M AND SERRAT, O: 'DISSEMINATING KNOWLEDGE SOLUTIONS,' KNOWLEDGE SOLUTIONS, APRIL 2009 | 43

Harnessing latent grassroots experience

The most viable alternative to the traditional top-down approach towards researching communities is to establish collaborative links with existing entities that are already embedded and trusted among target audiences due to their ability to act as effective conduits between academic and medical institutions. In addition to this, such entities continue to identify and tap into an invaluable human resource of existing and potential community researchers with unique insider perspectives with access to primary/empirical data.

An example of this approach was evident in 2011 at a Google Summit, hosted by the CEO, Eric Schmidt. When questioned regarding particular flaws in YouTube algorithms that failed to identify gang violence perpetrated via online videos, his response was decisive albeit reactionary:

> ...Google also came in for criticism at the summit yesterday for failing to take some violent videos off its Youtube website. Dr Abdul Haqq Baker, a former chairman of the Brixton mosque in London, told more than 200 delegates attending the summit that Youtube videos were being used by gangs in south London to organise "gang hits".
>
> He [CEO Eric Schmidt) said the team of Google reviewers, who scrutinise video content after it is uploaded on to the website, often did not have the appropriate local knowledge to remove dangerous content. (13)

Schmidt arranged for his Senior Leadership Team to liaise and subsequently arrange training with award winning Strategy To Reach, Empower & Educate Teenagers (STREET), whose director posed the initial question. The absence of local knowledge and recognition of grassroots expertise were the decisive factors:

> ...As we discussed at the Summit, there are ways of monitoring and tackling the array of videos posted on You Tube. Organisations with staff that possess expertise, experience and familiarity with the various forms of extremism...as well as the language and terminology can become part [of] regional hubs that focus on these particular areas. Their roles could range from flagging up such videos to posting effective counter narratives that deconstruct their extreme messages. The STREET team already addresses extremist propaganda on the net (not only YouTube) via its Deconstruct programme... (14)

7 BAKER, 'EXTREMISTS IN OUR MIDST: CONFRONTING TERROR, PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2011 & 2015; CLEVELAND H "INFORMATION AS RESOURCE", THE FUTURIST, DECEMBER 1982 P. 34-39 & CLARK D. DIKW2 (2004) HTTP://WWW.NWLINK.COM/~DONCLARK/PERFORMANCE/UNDERSTANDING.HTML

8 ORDOÑEZ, M AND SERRAT, O: 'DISSEMINATING KNOWLEDGE SOLUTIONS,' KNOWLEDGE SOLUTIONS, APRIL 2009 | 43

9 ROBERTS, J: 'TELEGRAPH JOURNALIST SAYS CORONAVIRUS 'CULL' OF ELDERLY COULD BENEFIT ECONOMY', 11TH MARCH 2020: HTTPS://METRO.CO.UK/2020/03/11/TELEGRAPH-JOURNALIST-SAYSCORONAVIRUS-CULL-ELDERLY-BENEFIT-ECONOMY-12383907/

10 CARTHAUS, A: 'CORONAVIRUS AND MENTAL HEALTH: 'WE ARE NOT MADE FOR SOCIAL ISOLATION', DW, 1ST APRIL 2020: HTTPS://WWW.DW.COM/EN/CORONAVIRUS-AND-MENTAL-HEALTH-WE-ARENOT-MADE-FOR-SOCIAL-ISOLATION/A-52971173

11 ANDREWS, K: 'BACK TO BLACK: RETELLING BLACK RADICALISM FOR THE 21STCENTURY', ZED BOOKS LTD. 2018, P.201

12 HERON, G.S: 'WHITEY ON THE MOON,' 1970: HTTPS://WWW.AZLYRICS.COM/LYRICS/GILSCOTTHERON/WHITEYONTHEMOON.HTML

13 SMYTHE, J: 'STATE CENSORSHIP OF INTERNET TO INCREASE, GOOGLE CHIEF WARNS,' THE IRISH TIMES, 28 JUNE 2011

14 EMAIL TO VICTORIA GRAND, SENIOR DIRECTOR OF POLICY AND STRATEGY AT GOOGLE, 4TH JULY 2011.

Minding the Gap:
Community Knowledge Dissemination & Research Hub

This is a viable concept that will enable academic and medical research groups to interface at grassroots levels facilitated by collaborative arrangements via a community hub that ensures the production of research from trained community researchers.

An additional function of the hub would be to deconstruct narratives that serve to counter identified policy driven and/or academic research, much in the same way as leading grassroots initiatives function within a similar community context:

> The deconstruction attempts to isolate the various media components that have been utilised to construct the media text in question...[It] will identify the various messages being encoded within the text and the subtleties at play that are deliberately put together for effect and impact upon the viewer. (15)

Why a deconstruct hub is necessary

The hub will provide a much needed analytical assessment of proposed academic and medical research while conversely, delivering counter narratives to propaganda that seeks to isolate communities from participating in medical research and developments beneficial to them.

The need for a central & consolidated approach

A central hub consisting of grassroots expertise in the field of researching, deconstructing and countering divisive medical propaganda is a practical approach within the current and continuing climate of apathy. Such an entity will be available to various medical agencies and academic institutions, enabling them to access the type of expertise and research data to progress their respective remits.

What methods of dissemination will be applied by the hub?

Academic approaches to research will incorporate traditional methods, underscored by action research in view of the fluidity required to maintain momentum regarding emerging trends/cases, informed by science. This will include:

     i. qualititiave data;
     ii. quantitative data;
     iii. empirical data where necessary; and
     iv. triangulation and case study methodologies.

To reiterate, although these are considered conventional academic methods, they enable detailed analyses and dissemination that could be applied interchangeably, adding new methodologies according to research requirements.

Conclusion

Community-focused research on the basis of this review is likely to yield results on an unprecedented scale due to its primary objective to involve and empower target audience members as stakeholders that are professionally developed to embark upon research among their own communities, while possessing unique insider perspectives.

The potential to directly disseminate authentic knowledge while simultaneously accessing empirical data at grassroots will be advantageous for all parties in this field of medical research. It is high time for knowledge, formerly the purview of academic and political elitism, to be accessible to the very communities that were often the subject of research and in some cases, experimentation.

Repositories, like those established at Brown University Library, are evidence of an emerging trend to open doors to the public while disseminating the knowledge available:

> **The Opening of the Archives Dominican Republic Project makes U.S. government documents available about the Dominican Republic during the Cold War years of the 1960's and 1970's. Student researchers, under the leadership of Professor James N. Green and René Cordero, have scanned and indexed thousands of records from archives, including the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library and the National Archives II in College Park, Maryland to make them available to the public.**
> **The project is also designed to encourage Dominicans to have fuller access to information on the history of their country and its relationship to the United States.**
> **(16)**

The increasing number of British institutions, like The Guardian Newspaper (17) and aristocratic families, such as the Trevelyans, (18) uniting behind petitions for reparative justice after researching their respective historic involvement in slave trade, is yet another example where the dissemination of knowledge has come to the forefront of the cause.

The concept of a dissemination of knowledge and deconstruct hub provides a solution that addresses existing challenges of disconnect, medical scepticism and apathy among communities that continue to be invisible unless and until they fall under the external spotlight of academic and medical research.

Franz Fanon became increasingly aware of challenges faced by communities insofar as they related to health, and the availability alongside access to the requisite knowledge to address communal wellbeing. His research focused on the role of wider culture in individual illness, and the importance of family and community in treatment. (19) His research, together with our own, provides a continuum of urban community-centric focus. This connectivity fosters a platform of support whereby we provide a discernible context within which medical constructs can be disseminated. The resulting accessibility and transparency of knowledge will reinforce avenues of delivering care and more importantly, developing trust among hesitant communities.

16 BROWN DIGITAL REPOSITORY: 'OPENING THE ARCHIVES DOMINICAN REPUBLIC PROJECT,' BROWN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY: HTTPS://REPOSITORY.LIBRARY.BROWN.EDU/STUDIO/COLLECTIONS/ID_822/ ACCESSED 1ST APRIL 2023

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14 Email to Victoria Grand, Senior Director of Policy and Strategy at Google, 4th July 2011.

15 STREET: 'Rationale for an Extremism Deconstruct Programme & Counter Narrative Hub', February 2011

16 Brown Digital Repository: 'Opening the Archives Dominican Republic Project,' Brown University Library: https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/collections/id_822/ accessed 1st April 2023

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