

What Feels Right to Us: A Black history month statement from **Still Hear**

This is not idle fantasy, but the true meaning of "it feels right to me." We can train ourselves to respect our feelings, and to discipline (transpose) them into a language that matches those feelings so they can be shared. And where that language does not yet exist, it is our poetry which helps to fashion it.

Audre Lorde. Poetry is not a luxury.

What Feels Right to Us

This statement may be seen as being late, and at the same time **it feels right to us** that we publish it now at the end of October – this brief period that we have come to know as Black History Month.

It feels right to us to focus attention on what does not end here and what cannot be left to begin again this time next year.

It feels right to us to use this opportunity to share information about Still Hear – a group currently running within Metanoia – and say something about its' beginnings and its' ongoing-ness.

We were invited to produce this statement from within Metanoia as part of an acknowledgement that there is work to be done, and that the institution is open to challenge and willing to change. We appreciate this invitation. **It feels right to us** to respond.

We have asked that this statement be kept live and remain visible beyond Black History Month and throughout the year. This **feels right to us**.

Beginnings

The need for a facilitated group space for students who identified as black/brown/of colour was raised by students and tutors at Metanoia in 2020. Certainly, the need had existed prior to this point and it seems likely that additional momentum from the global BLM protests of 2020 provided a catalyst to address this need with specific action. Metanoia was one of many institutions and service providers called to be more proactive in addressing systemic oppression and racial trauma as consequences of white supremacy. This address will not be achieved by any single strategy and requires interventions at multiple levels. A particularly pressing need – articulated by students – was for a group space in which they might be able to explore racial trauma as lived experience and resource themselves to navigate this within their learning environments. Senior leadership at Metanoia agreed resources for a facilitated group. Some initial meetings took place in October and November 2020. The findings and learnings from these meetings were collated in a collective narrative document which made up part of a report shared with the senior leadership team earlier this year (the collective narrative document is shared below). Out of these meetings, a format for the group now known as **Still Hear** was established.

Why '**Still Hear**'?

The group rejected the term BAME and agreed on the name **still hear** because:

We recognise that, with all the struggles for civil rights, and drives for social justice and anti-oppressive practice, *racism is **still here***.

Despite being raced, racially marginalised, oppressed and discriminated against, and despite the ongoing trauma of racism that we live and embody, *we are **still here***.

We recognise that, even when our experience and knowledge bases are not acknowledged or explicitly valued, our influence remains strong. *We are **still here***.

*We are **still here*** in ways that have influenced and continue to influence change in the spaces we inhabit and in the wider world.

*When we can be **still and hear*** ourselves, we are more able to learn and become more effective as students and practitioners.

What We Do

The group meets every 3 weeks during the academic term and is co-facilitated by two Metanoia tutors, Denise Lyttle and Foluke Taylor. It is a space in which individual and collective processes, including the pervasiveness of racial trauma, can be experienced and held – where the psychosocial (e.g. Fanon's sociogeny) and the ways that we story ourselves (e.g. Sylvia Wynter's *homo narrans*) can be felt, thought, and shared.

"...my journeys through the western academic corridors of learning have been fraught, painful, and lonely and Metanoia has not been different. Until now! In the group, I came to realise that I am not alone, but there are others, and they are willing to listening to me, to help me heal and discover a way to progress."

A member of Still Hear, June 2021

Ongoing-ness

Given the success of the group, it feels right to us to extend this provision so that more students – ideally all Metanoia students who identify as black, brown or of colour – can have access to these spaces if they feel this will be of benefit to them. As a way of developing sustainably we have proposed a model of facilitation grounded in what has worked so far and an emergent strategy that draws on the resources of the groups as they develop. Group members who have facilitation experience, or who are in the process of completing their studies at Metanoia may choose to take up opportunities to co-facilitate future groups.

*Does this **feel right to you**?* If yes, and you would like to express an interest in joining a group, please contact Denise denise.lyttle@metanoia.ac.uk or Foluke foluketaylor@metanoia.ac.uk

And if not, you might still be curious to read the narrative document below and be curious about what it raises for you. What resonates? What stirs reaction? What might you add?

Collective Narrative Document...

In the summer we experienced black space
as soon as we felt it, we knew it had been missing
wanted more
wanted to make it through our courses *because of*
not in spite of
not to be exhausted

intentional
we intended to meet again
intended to create intentional black space
intended to create a space to rest
(from the sufferation)
and reflect on
(lived experience)
we intended to be together

feeling
feeling lonely, isolated, invisible
feeling the lack of community
feeling exhausted
feeling the wear and tear
of being black in white spaces

noticing
noticing high drop-out rates
noticing the lack of representation
noticing the bias (conscious/unconscious?)
noticing the absence of black tutors
noticing the scarcity of black supervisors
noticing the no discussion of race

seeking recognition
recognition of the hours invested
hours spent getting support elsewhere
hours spent caring
recognition of what it takes
to find that elsewhere love
recognition that survival cannot
be taken for granted
recognition of the exhaustion
of making that happen
recognition of anti-blackness
the many ways in which it is practiced and perpetuated
recognition of the lack of recognition

questioning
if tutors do not understand the questions that we live
how can they help us find answers?

if supervisors have no feeling or understanding of the lived experience
of the communities to which we feel ourselves accountable
how can they guide?
if tutors and supervisors are not resourced with relevant knowledge, understanding and skills
how can they resource us?
what part might this group play in beginning to address this resource gap?

needing
needing to name/define ourselves
(the unbreathability of the term BAME)
needing to be taught, supervised, supported, and guided
needing not always to have to educate and guide
(those whose responsibility it is to guide and teach)
needing tutors who can discuss (theorise) race
needing the always present-ness of race to be acknowledged
and reflected in the curriculum
needing anti-blackness to be
recognised / articulated / understood / addressed
needing spaces to process lived experience
needing spaces to bring
questions emerging from our experience
(‘this feels wrong, but why?’)
needing more than a single space because
the *one-one* strategy is not enough
one day is not enough
one weekend is not enough
one person is not enough
one group is not enough

we need to be resourced
who is the right person/people to talk to?
who has the power to effect change?
who will be accountable?