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STAFF AND STUDENT RACIAL MICROAGGRESSIONS IN BROWN BRITAIN

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Abstract: There has long been a refusal to regard race as a legitimate category of analysis in higher education, whether from a scholarship or policy perspective. The recognition of the role that universities have played in (re)producing racial injustice is one that is being gradually taken up by scholars who challenge this ignorance by drawing attention to racialised cultures and practices. As a British Asian early career researcher who has found herself at various points in her working life at these charged junctures, it is my firm and absolute belief that these conversations are overdue. Though higher education (HE) is generally regarded as a liberal and progressive space, I offer a counter-narrative in locating myself in this environment in which racial microaggressions (Pierce, 1970) are the norm in order to "keep those at the racial margins in their place" (Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2015). This article seeks to briefly illustrate some of the ways in which race is experienced through working in HEI with a specific focus on South Asian descent academics. There is a limited understanding of the diversity of British Asians as an ethnic category which is often conflated with an even further limited understanding of Muslimness. This manifests not only in HEI but in the cultural industries and the shaping of the British curriculum, both key sites of knowledge production which circulate discourses about 'the other' and in which South Asian communities are either stereotyped or silenced.

Keywords: British Asian; Brownface; Culture; Decolonising curriculum; Higher Education; Microaggressions; Orientalism; South Asian

MICROAGRESSÕES RACIAIS DE FUNCIONÁRIOS E ESTUDANTES BRITÂNICOS NO REINO UNIDO

Resumo: Há muito tempo se recusa a considerar a raça como uma categoria legítima de análise no ensino superior, seja sob uma perspectiva de bolsa de estudos ou política. O reconhecimento do papel que as universidades desempenharam na (re) produção de injustiça racial é gradualmente assumido por estudiosos que desafiam essa ignorância, chamando a atenção para as culturas e práticas racializadas. Como pesquisadora asiática britânica no início da carreira, que se encontrou em vários momentos de sua vida profissional nessas ocasiões, é minha convicção firme e absoluta que essas conversas

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estão atrasadas. Embora o ensino superior (ES) seja geralmente considerado como um espaço liberal e progressista, ofereço uma contra-narrativa para me localizar nesse ambiente em que as micro-agressões raciais (Pierce, 1970) são a norma para "manter aqueles à margem da raça" em seu lugar "(Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2015). Este artigo procura ilustrar brevemente algumas das maneiras pelas quais a raça é vivida através do trabalho na IES, com um foco específico nos acadêmicos de descendência do sul da Ásia. Existe um entendimento limitado da diversidade de asiáticos britânicos como uma categoria étnica que muitas vezes se confunde com uma compreensão ainda mais limitada do muçulmano. Isso se manifesta não apenas nas instituições de ensino superior, mas também nas indústrias culturais e na formação do currículo britânico, os dois principais locais de produção de conhecimento que circulam discursos sobre 'o outro' e nos quais as comunidades do sul da Ásia são estereotipadas ou silenciadas.

Palavras-chave: asiático britânico; rosto pardo; cultura; currículo de descolonização; Ensino superior; microagressões; orientalismo; sul asiático

MICROAGRESIONES RACIALES DE PERSONAL Y ESTUDIANTES EN BRETAÑA MARRÓN

Resumen: Durante mucho tiempo ha habido una negativa a considerar la raza como una categoría legítima de análisis en la educación superior, ya sea desde una perspectiva académica o política. El reconocimiento del papel que han desempeñado las universidades en la (re) producción de injusticia racial es uno que gradualmente asumen los académicos que desafían esta ignorancia al llamar la atención sobre las culturas y prácticas racializadas. Como investigadora de la carrera profesional británica asiática que se ha encontrado en varios momentos de su vida laboral en estas coyunturas cargadas, creo firmemente que estas conversaciones están atrasadas. Aunque la educación superior (ES) es generalmente considerada como un espacio liberal y progresivo, ofrezco una contra-narrativa para ubicarme en este entorno en el que las microagresiones raciales (Pierce, 1970) son la norma para "mantener a los marginados raciales". en su lugar "(Pérez Huber y Solórzano, 2015). Este artículo busca ilustrar brevemente algunas de las formas en que se experimenta la raza trabajando en HEI con un enfoque específico en académicos de ascendencia del sur de Asia. Hay una comprensión limitada de la diversidad de los asiáticos británicos como una categoría étnica que a menudo se combina con una comprensión aún más limitada de la musulmanidad. Esto se manifiesta no solo en las IES sino también en las industrias culturales y en la configuración del plan de estudios británico, ambos sitios clave de producción de conocimiento que circulan discursos sobre "el otro" y en los que las comunidades del sur de Asia son estereotipadas o silenciadas.

Palabras-clave: asiático británico; cara morena; cultura; currículum descolonizante; educación superior; microagresiones; orientalismo; Asia Meridional

MICROAGRESSIONS RACIALES DU PERSONNEL ET DES ETUDIANTS EN BRETAGNE BRUNE

Resumé : Il y a longtemps eu un refus de considérer la race comme une catégorie d'analyse légitime dans l'enseignement supérieur, que ce soit du point de vue des bourses d'études ou des politiques. La reconnaissance du rôle joué par les universités

dans la (re) production de l'injustice raciale est progressivement reprise par les chercheurs qui remettent en question cette ignorance en attirant l'attention sur les cultures et pratiques racialisées. En tant que chercheuse en début de carrière britannique et asiatique qui s'est retrouvée à divers moments de sa vie professionnelle à ces moments difficiles, je suis fermement convaincue que ces conversations sont en retard. Si l'enseignement supérieur (HE) est généralement considéré comme un espace libéral et progressiste, je propose un contre-récit en me situant dans cet environnement où les microagressions raciales (Pierce, 1970) sont la norme afin de «maintenir ceux qui se trouvent à la marge raciale à leur place »(Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2015). Cet article cherche à illustrer brièvement certaines des façons dont la race est vécue en travaillant dans des établissements d'enseignement supérieur avec un accent particulier sur les universitaires d'origine sud-asiatique. Il y a une compréhension limitée de la diversité des Asiatiques britanniques en tant que catégorie ethnique qui est souvent confondue avec une compréhension encore plus limitée de la musulmane. Cela se manifeste non seulement dans les établissements d'enseignement supérieur, mais dans les industries culturelles et dans la formation du programme britannique, deux sites clés de production de connaissances qui font circuler des discours sur «l'autre» et dans lesquels les communautés sud-asiatiques sont soit stéréotypées, soit réduites au silence.

Mots clés: britannique asiatique; visage brun; Culture; Programme de décolonisation; L'enseignement supérieur; Microagressions; Orientalisme; Sud-asiatique

INTRODUCTION

As an Indian descent and minoritized woman working within an academic system where diversity, in its ideological sense signals conformity to whiteness, I elaborate some of the diffuse ways in which I have experienced race and anti-Asian racism through teaching and working. These experiences are located in a broader socio-political context in which discourses on the doing of diversity and decolonization are becoming increasingly charged in the public sphere. Further, this article will explore the dilemmas of defining ‘British Asian’ and how racial representational regimes (Valluvan, 2019) of this ethnic category in the media and the school curriculum has played a role in producing and perpetuating racial and gendered microaggressions. It will conclude by emphasising the continued importance of decolonising the curriculum through the embedding of racial literacy and dismantling damaging representations in digital spaces, especially at a time where political discussions on identity, race and ‘British’ values are increasingly fractured and nationalist anxiety has gained purchase.

BREAKING BROWN- A BRIEF HISTORY OF ASIAN STRUGGLE IN BRITAIN

The post-World War 11 journey of South Asians to Britain began in the 1950s with an influx of economic migrants coming from the subcontinent, Africa and Caribbean to fill labour shortages (NASTA, 2013). It could quite easily be stated that their contributions to social movements such as the Asian Youth Movement (RAMAMURTHY, 2013), Indian Workers' Association (AHMED AND MUKHERJEE, 2012) and activism such as the Grunwick strike (WILSON, 2018) have largely been erased, for when the general public speak about British Asians, they lean into food, fashion and music- specifically curry, saris and Bollywood/Bhangra.

The South Asian presence in British history textbooks is notable by its absence. This largely also holds true for British African-Caribbean peoples. The task of rethinking national stories and histories which have traditionally rendered the lives of Asian and Black Britons irrelevant- through a decolonial lens has not been widely taken on by the British education establishment. However, if one were to dig a little deeper, there are testimonies which signal a much longer history of connection between Asian communities/ individuals and the UK. In 1890, Cornelia Sorabji made history by becoming the first female to study law at Oxford University and though unable to openly practice law in India because of conservative patriarchal norms, she is revered for fighting for women's rights in a system where the obstacles were stacked against her (SOMMERLAD, 2017). Princess Sophia Duleep Singh, a suffragette and a member of the Women's Social and Political Union, frequently campaigned for the women's vote (ANAND, 2015) and yet she is largely absent from educational materials on the Suffragette movement in the UK beyond a passing reference in history textbooks. In the 1970s Jayaben Desai walked out of the Grunwick factory where she worked and unwittingly began one of the largest workers' protests in British history. Protesting the poor working conditions in which Black and Asian people worked the lowest-paid jobs and typically earned less than their White colleagues, she came to lead what the press at the time called the "strikers in saris" (WILSON, 2018). Though they conceded defeat after fighting for two years in court, "Grunwick is remembered for the way in which thousands of workers, black and white, men and women, united to defend the rights of migrant women workers. Grunwick also challenged the stereotype of South Asian women as passive." (ANITHA & PARMAR, 2017: WWW). To date, this is a story that does not feature heavily in the wider discourses of feminist movements as documented

in history textbooks where there is still a focus on only White Western feminists. The erasure of minoritized women and relegation to the corners of the British curriculum as a footnote in feminist history is one that should urgently be addressed as part of the efforts to decolonise the curriculum.

The conceptual framework that has largely dominated sociocultural analyses of South Asians in Britain, and to an extent still permeates it, is that of diaspora. A diasporic framing would unequivocally apply to first- and second-generation South Asians who upon their migration and settlement in Britain encountered hostility, an overtly racist climate, changing cultural attitudes and a divisive discourse of home and belonging (PANAYI, 2010). However, looking to later generations of South Asians (popularly described as millennials and generation Z), the diasporic 'torn between two' trope that has continually characterised British Asians, can be regarded as losing its meaning if it ever really had one for the individuals being written about. It would, perhaps, be more viable to follow Paul Gilroy's (1991) argument that 'it ain't where you're from, it's where you're at' which disavows the preoccupation in ethnic and racial studies with the 'homeland'. Or one could be more inclined to follow Avtar Brah's (1996) concept of diaspora space, which refers to how people move from one space to another through specific historical moments. "Diaspora space is the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural, and psychic processes" (BRAH, 1996: 208).

Stereotypical notions of Asianness as insular and or as incompatible with British values abound. For example, for Vini Lander (2018:3)

> teachers and students rely on nostalgic imperialist constructions of Britishness, thus re-inscribing not only the whiteness associated with this national identity but as subjects of neoliberal policy they have been metaphorically painted into a corner in which they lack the theoretical and pedagogical frameworks to teach about social and cultural difference.

Broadly speaking, as a specific ethnic category, there are limitations to the term 'British Asian'. The UK census first included this as a category in 1991 with only 'Indian', 'Pakistani' and 'Bangladeshi' as tick-boxes and expanded this in 2011 to include 'Chinese' and 'Any other Asian background' (ONS, 2012). However, at the level of popular parlance the focus tends to be on the big three with other South Asian descent communities from, to list a few examples, the Caribbean, Africa, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Fiji

and Mauritius, positioned on the periphery. These communities do not share the same heritage or attachment to a 'motherland' in the same way as the three countries listed above. South Asian migration has traversed many waves from the period of Indian indentureship[2] (BAHADUR, 2013) , Mauritian settlement in the UK which came about in the post-independence era of the 1960s for economic reasons (CAREY, 2018), to the double migrancy of Indians from East Africa to the UK in the 1970s, forcibly expelled under the dictatorship of Idi Amin (PARMAR, 2019). Yet, the diversity of Asianness becomes subsumed under a homogenous perception of Brownness which simultaneously becomes othered to Whiteness as the cultural logic of Britishness.

THE FALLOUT- PERPETUATING ORIENTALISM AND BROWNFACE

This homogeneity of Brownness found expression in the racial epithets meted out to me over the course of my schooling life which veered back and forth between the racist slur 'paki' from White communities and the supposedly well-intentioned 'light' and at times 'mixed' from other minoritised communities.

In attempting to racialise and locate an individual in a particular category, the common thread across all these interactions was a race-based value judgement made on the basis of the conspicuous marker of skin colour. Ethnicity may be the politically expedient concept under which this is categorised but arguably colour and race, as mutually constituted, play a part in a person's being and becoming in a context where the universal experience is Whiteness. When people ask me where I am from, and I respond with London, there are two reactions that usually follow. One is a blank stare that warrants a follow up anecdote of my ethnic background, or the direct "but where are your parents from?" The most recent example was an invitation to have a drink only for it to be immediately revoked with the reason being "oh you probably don't drink." Two microaggressions took place in one short sentence. One, was the assumption that based on my skin colour or perceived heritage, that I was Muslim; and secondly, it assumed a one-dimensional notion of Muslimness in which all members of this faith do not drink or participate in 'British' social life which we know to be patently untrue.

[2] After the abolition of slavery in the 1830s, the British government in India implemented the indenture system in which millions of Indian indentured labourers over the course of eight decades were recruited and ferried overseas to work on colonial sugar plantations worldwide. These were the first group of Indians abroad in any significant numbers, the vanguard of a larger, broader diaspora that India presently views with pride, courts and cultivates, but who were denigrated at the time. (Bahadur, 2013: xx)

This particular notion, which is rooted in Islamophobia and has been rising since 9/11 especially in media representations. As Chris Allen (2016: 99) says, "…if Muslims continued to be represented as an ineluctable Other, then it might be difficult for both Muslims and non-Muslims alike to see how Islam and Muslims can ever be or fit into that which is deemed to be 'British' or take an equal participatory role in that which might be seen as 'our' way of life." Herein lies the question. What is the 'British way of life' as we go into the second decade of the 21st century? And how does one's British identification correlate with one's ethnic identity?

To date, I am never entirely sure what box to tick in the ethnicity questionnaires as someone who does not have a boundaried or even fixed sense of place or home. Also, given the multiple inflections of Asianness, it becomes a difficult task to discern the criteria that determine this category. For example, a BBC (2018) study revealed that when asked what the most important factor was in defining identity, 36% of British Asians selected religion as the primary factor and this did not figure at all in the list of factors for the general population. They also chose nationality (33%) which was the primary defining factor for the general population at 36%, and ethnicity at 22%. The term Asian is not without its definitional dilemmas, but increasingly we are also seeing how Britishness is itself becoming a contested identity, which was thrown into sharp relief in the emerging rhetoric surrounding Brexit (HUTCHINSON, 2018). What we now need is an expanded definition of Asianness which up to the present has been limiting, and arguably the mainstream media has played a large role in the perpetuation of a homogenised British Asian representation.

The role of the media in the shaping of public perception is one that should not be underestimated particularly in an era where social and traditional media as well as new digital technologies have enabled mass access to a variety of content in our society. The media's depiction of minoritized groups informs not only the public's view of them, but also informs the minoritized view of themselves. It is important to have narratives that do not revert to stereotype and that expand the dimensions of what we usually see. Herein lies the issue as in recent times, there has been a stagnation in British Asian representation which has become subject to a colour barrier relying on two worn out tropes: the casting of Brown actors as Islamic terrorists or in which their race has to explained and the deployment of brownvoice, that is the "the act of speaking in an accented English associated with Indian American nationals and

immigrants" (DAVÉ, 2013: 44). This can also be "understood as a cultural performative practice of manipulating meaning and creating a cultural difference." (DAVÉ, 2013: 45). To give an example, perhaps the most famous brownvoice is the character of convenience store owner Apu Nahasapeemapetilon from the long-running animated television series *The Simpsons* and the famous Youtuber Lilly Singh's skits 'My Parents React' which deploys this tactic and rakes in millions of views. The perpetuation of brownvoice stereotypes functions as a commercially viable option which is evident in the reception of these racializing performances but simultaneously reinforces homogenous ideas of ethnicity (KAY, 2018).

Shilpa Davé (2013: 13) posits that the "persistent use of Orientalism to present the Asian immigrants as foreigners continue to position Asian Americans in opposition to whiteness and at the same time denies them a place in America, where the most recognizable racial hierarchies are black and white". Valluvan (2019: 51) links this process to a racial representational regime going as far back as the colonial era in which "assertions of civilisational purpose and distinction [formalised] Orientalising, as in a culture-clash framework where those racialised as non-white are said to be bearers of cultures of unreason irreconcilable with the West." It is important to note that South Asian Americans also occupy a different location societally than British Asians in terms of class. Koshy (2002) discusses the model minority prototype and how claims of Whiteness was deployed as a middle-class strategy to move away from positionings marked by race. Racialised meaning-making pivots to British cultural arenas in which South Asians navigate binary understandings of racial categories in an increasingly populist and Islamophobic political climate and traverse limited understandings of Muslimness which permeate all levels of society. Intersectional representation becomes ever more pressing and yet, despite incursions of South Asian creators into different media spaces, whiteness and white privilege is maintained in a process of perpetual racial othering. The other cultural arena where this othering process becomes visible is that of racial microaggressions in higher education (BHOPAL, 2011; MIRZA, 2018).

RACIAL MICROAGGRESSIONS IN UK HIGHER EDUCATION

As an avenue to upward social mobility and career progression, universities have traditionally been regarded as bastions of liberal and progressive thinking that

challenge inequalities (SIAN, 2019: 2). However, the Universities UK and National Union of Students (NUS) (2019) report on degree outcomes breaks down the BAME attainment gap and calls for universities to accelerate efforts to close this gap through five recommendations, most of which underline the importance of having open conversations about racism (SELLGREN, 2019). The reality remains that there is a reluctance to name whiteness and white privilege as exacerbating inequalities, let alone talking about these as barriers.

Whiteness, as a hegemonic form of social stratification (OMI & WINANT, 1994) is defined in this context as a racial discourse, "whereas the category 'white people' represents a socially constructed identity, usually based on skin color....Whiteness is not a culture but a social concept." (LEONARDO, 2009: 169). It could be further posited that colour blindness is an overlapping component of Whiteness when deployed to "negate the ethnic identity of the Other, and at other times, it is used to make the ethnic "Other" hyper visible in an attempt to "normalise" whiteness' (LANDER & SANTORO, 2017: 1012). Colour-blindness is used to deny any complicity in racism, whether it is at a structural or individual level. The whiteness of academia, and the racial power dynamics that are reproduced, is a deeply entrenched convention. Academia remains coded to mainstream culture as mainly white and middle-class. The surprise on some students' faces when I walk into a lecture hall, the verbal reaction from one undergraduate student I was supervising who stated in her first dissertation supervision meeting that she was surprised I "knew about this stuff" signified that I did not meet the prescribed expectations of an academic. The question that emerges from this encounter is whose field of vision defines whose body is visible? As Puwar (2004:1) suggests, "what happens when women and racialised minorities take up 'privileged' positions which have not been 'reserved' for them, for which, they are not, in short the somatic norm?" Puwar (2004: 8) frames these encounters as those of "space invaders" […] in accordance with how bodies and spaces are imagined they are circumscribed as being 'out of place'".

Over the course of my life in academia, as a PhD student and as a lecturer, the interrogation around my place in certain spaces has intermittently emerged from colleagues resisting any kind of engagement with conversations on race inequalities but rather shifting these to gender-based inequalities. In most of my seminar sessions, gender is generally regarded as the safer bet out of all the inequalities and in my

experience, most of my students and staff members tend to default to this whenever any mention of a racial inequality is up for discussion. Many occurrences marked me as racialized 'other' for example, through interrogating my career choice because it did not follow the 'traditional' paths of medicine, law or finance. At the time, I did not see these as racist because of the *subtlety* of the racist slights. The 'subtle, stunning, often automatic... exchanges which are "put-downs"' (PIERCE, 1978: 66), whether committed by close friends or complete strangers, are a fact of life for all communities of colour.

Microaggressions was first coined by psychiatrist Chester Pierce in the 1970s to theorise the seemingly muted and minor but offensive racist behaviours meted out to African Americans. In the decades since, this concept began to gain traction in the academic mainstream and more recently the extension of this concept from a Black-White focus to other minoritized groups, women and LGBTQI+ individuals. Microaggressions permeate everyday interpersonal interactions. Perez Huber and Solórzano (2015) argue that microaggressions are guided by and the product of contemporary White supremacist ideologies. They are difficult to deal with, not because of their frequency, but the discomfort when we recognise them as racist. If I had challenged the students' racial microaggressions, this invariably would have led to discomfort and when I highlighted one instance to a line manager, this was immediately dismissed as an issue of female rivalry. Through this act of dismissing microaggressions as lacking malice, there was no acknowledgement of the fact that racism comes from privilege. The reticence to engage with White privilege means that color blindness (BONILLA-SILVA, 2010) becomes the default position, a replacement for any meaningful conversations on racial inequality.

Tate and Page (2015: 5) extend this further in framing unconscious bias as a way of "maintaining whiteliness through ignorance" and as a "racialized governmentality which keeps the status quo of whiteliness in place within the libidinal economy of racism" which is "all the more pernicious because whiteliness continues to be enabled within universities which claim to be 'post-racial'". (Un)conscious bias can be read as a manifestation of racism and privilege as located within the neoliberal economic structure. Whiteness perpetually disadvantages people of colour in different ways and this racial dynamic is maintained through the lens afforded us by the Racial Contract

and epistemologies of ignorance (MILLS, 1997) which enable white supremacy and its racial entitlements to remain unseen by those racialized as white:

> Both globally and within particular nations, then, white people, Europeans and their descendants, continue to benefit from the Racial Contract, which creates a world in their cultural image, political states differentially favouring their interests, an economy structured around the racial exploitation of others, and a moral psychology (not just in whites, sometimes in nonwhites also) skewed consciously and unconsciously toward privileging them, taking the status quo of differential racial entitlement as normatively legitimate, and not to be investigated further" (MILLS, 1997:40).

This argument not only applies to cultural and economic spheres, but also that of Higher Education where white privilege is a given but equally absent in discussions on diversity, equality and inclusion.

There has been an emerging body of research which takes an intersectional approach in the exploration of BAME academic careers in higher education. For example, the Universities and Colleges Employers' Association (UCEA, 2018) report which revealed the "pay penalties" for BAME performing the same jobs as their White counterparts with the gap widening further between BAME and White women. (Hopkins and Salvestrini, 2018). A BBC Freedom of Information (FOI) request to 22 Russell Group universities also revealed a pronounced gender/ethnicity pay gap which positioned BAME women at a lower academic pay band compared to their White colleagues (Croxford, 2018). Intersectionality became an important hermeneutic to investigate discriminatory processes both as a theory and as a methodology. The term was first coined in 1989 by Black feminist Kimberlé Crenshaw to critique US antidiscrimination law's failure to acknowledge Black women's experiences of racism and sexism as inseparable. Intersectionality plays out in higher education, for example, through the case of pay penalties, the low numbers of Black professors, misogynoir[3] and anti-Asian racism reflected in the employment statistics. From a policy perspective, there has been some movement, for example, the Race Equality Charter (REC) introduced in 2016, which flags racial inequalities in higher education that remain to be addressed, including at the curriculum level.

[3] Coined by Moya Bailey (2010) blending sexism and racism to express a particular hatred of Black women.

The Equality Challenge Unit's REC states "Minority ethnic staff and students are not a homogenous group. People from different ethnic backgrounds have different experiences of and outcomes from/within higher education, and that complexity needs to be considered in analysing data and developing actions". If that is the case, then why is the heterogeneity of British Asians and the multiplicity of Asianness not acknowledged in any meaningful way? Indeed, religious, regional and socio-economic differences constitute key parts of South Asian identification but these do not consistently feature in scholarly analyses or representational practices. More recently, there has been a similar discussion in the critique of the umbrella term BAME (Joseph, 2020) and though historically this characterised collaborative anti-racist organising across different ethnic communities, the homogenising nature and insufficiency of this categorisation to define and describe the experiences of those who do identify as White in Britain has been contested as centering whiteness in its language and "turning the experiences of disparate groups into a monolith…"(JOSEPH, 2020).

It is then imperative that the media and education critically reflect on their processes and representational practices which have long-lasting effects. There is a propagation of one-dimensional representations of minoritized communities through the formal curriculum and (un)conscious bias (TATE AND PAGE, 2015), meaning 'post-racial' Britain (GOLDBERG, 2015) is not a reality. The teaching of a romanticised British colonial history is another example of this problem. The atrocities that were committed by the British Raj in South Asia is glossed over. However, "if British schoolchildren can learn how those dreams of the English turned out to be nightmares for their subject peoples, true atonement - of the purely moral kind - involving a serious consideration of historical responsibility rather than mere admission of guilt - might be achieved." (THAROOR, 2017: xxvii). Some historians and imperial nostalgists argue that India, and former colonies in general, benefitted from the presence of the British Empire economically, materially and culturally (GILLEY, 2017). These sentiments are likewise shared by 59% of the British public (DAHLGREEN, 2014) and reflected in films such as *The Viceroy's House* (2017). This is a sentiment that also recalls Edward Said's (2003:103) view that Orientalism emerged because "The European, whose sensibility tours the Orient, is a watcher, never involved, always detached."

The whitewashing of Britain's past relationship to concentration camps, massacres, famine, torture, slavery and partition has, over the past few years, come to the fore in mainstream and academic discussions. Particularly so, through the calls to decolonise universities across the global North for example the “Why is my Curriculum White?” and #LiberateMyDegree campaigns run by the UK’s National Union of Students (NUS) since 2015. Though the calls for a more honest education on colonialism have gained traction, there is yet to be any significant transformation. That our school national curriculum completely erases slavery and indentureship, for example, is a grievance that has not only been raised for a long time, but reinforces the systemic white supremacy of the Government which dictates the curriculum. The romanticisation of Empire and ongoing systemic racism goes unchallenged in classrooms in universities and schools. This leads to a problematic worldview that we are seeing play out on the global stage today, particularly through the intellectually lazy and wrongly used slogan ‘All Lives Matter’, deployed to counter conversations and protests on anti-Black racism.

The Partition of India in 1947 was the largest mass migration of humans in history. More than 15 million people were uprooted, resulting in sectarian violence between Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims and the loss of up to 2 million lives (PURI, 2019). Many South Asian immigrants came to the UK because of the parting gift, 'divide and rule' *fait accompli*, that Britain left for its former territory in the form of a partition, that is, the creation of two independent states of India and Pakistan, which fomented destructive Hindu-Muslim antagonism, so that descendants still live with the traumatic repercussions as seen in the BBC series *My Family, Partition and Me* (2018). The human cost of this seismic event which constitutes a part of South Asian history as much as British history is rarely taught in the national curriculum in schools. A campaign was launched in 2018 for an annual day to commemorate Partition to address lack of awareness of the British mainstream and British South Asians. This would broaden an understanding of Asianness and potentially play some part in healing underlying tensions between the Partition generation and their descendants of different South Asian religious backgrounds, who still live with the aftermath and memories of this traumatic episode. In trying to portray an image of a post-racial liberal society, the exclusion of partition (PURI, 2019), slavery (OLUSOGA, 2016) and indentureship (VERTOVEC, 1993), all significant episodes of British history, from a Eurocentric

university curriculum serves to exacerbate Whiteness and should be read as an act of racism. When these historical episodes do feature, it is from a white perspective which often disregards epistemologies of the global South (DE SOUSA SANTOS & MENESES, 2019; CONNELL, 2007; MIGNOLO & WALSH, 2018). If this remains unchallenged inside the classroom, how can we expect it to be challenged outside of it? One could quite easily make a correlation between the whiteness of the classroom and the whiteness of higher education, despite having staff and students of colour inhabiting these spaces and this pervasive whiteness gives rise to racial microaggressions.

An intervention is to decolonise the university, "a site of imperial whiteness" (TATE AND BAGGULEY, 2017: 296) that critically interrogates its boundaries. Indeed, "if 'race' does not matter only class, then why is there still a blinding whiteness in terms of what counts as knowledge, in terms of what has become the canon, what gets taken up, and what remains erased? What we now need is a necessary re-reading of 'post-race' which sees it as pointing only to the construction of a present and future time and space in which whiteness as 'race' power and privilege is erased, in which the anti-Black/People of Color/Indigenous racism it generates ceases to exist." (TATE AND BAGGULEY, 2017: 297). The media, traditional and digital, and educational institutions play an integral role in shaping racialisation processes which consequently increase overt racism and simultaneously, subtle racism emerges in the form of microaggressions. The reluctance to recognise and address anything to do with race in the corridors of the liberal academy is a process I, and academics of colour have encountered, many times. The framing of an incident as a rivalry or clash of working styles rather than racism or racial microaggressions actively perpetuates the whiteness of institutions, which ironically sits in stark opposition to the mantle of the 'post-race' (GOLDBERG, 2015) status that HE institutions claim. As we find ourselves in the mid-21st century, intersectional racial equality (TATE AND BAGGULEY, 2017: 118) is an important way through which this can be done. For example, through provisions of safe spaces of storytelling which encourages listening and understanding.

Batsleer (2008: 19) describes this engagement as consciousness-raising conversations in which Black and Asian students enable their 'voice' which may usually be silenced. This is particularly important for British Asians who are continually narrated as a culturally static and homogenous group and/or as facing a "culture clash" (ALEXANDER, 2000; BRAH, 1996: 41). By engaging in an educational

decolonisation process through open conversations, British Asian students learn how gendered and raced master scripts have been internalised and can develop skills to counter and call out these beliefs. It is also critical that British Asians and people of colour locate themselves as authors of their own lives in the systems of education and the media, and not be merely party to their representations. While the ongoing diversity debates signal the necessity of radical changes, the proposed solutions must also be intersectional, sustainable and ones that marry lived experiences as grounded within historical narratives. This is where Bhambra et al's (2018:2) definition of decolonising as theory and praxis, is important as:

> Decolonising involves a multitude of definitions, interpretations, aims and strategies. To broadly situate its political and methodological coordinates, 'decolonising' has two key referents. First, it is a way of thinking about the world which takes colonialism, empire and racism as its empirical and discursive objects of study; it re-situates these phenomena as key shaping forces of the contemporary world in a context where their role has been systematically effaced from view. Second, it purports to offer alternative ways of thinking about the world and alternative forms of political praxis."

CONCLUDING REMARKS

From an intersectional perspective, the category British Asian is a heterogeneous group who vary according to gender, generation, religion, socio-economic status, region and caste, to list just a few examples. With so much emphasis on clashes, wider discourses generally underplay possibilities of syncretism and fusion and a tendency to default to cultural appropriation which takes on South Asian cultural signifiers as costume rather than custom, for example, the wearing of bindis[4] by 90s pop singers and more recently at music festivals. Recent research on British Asians is framed in terms of religious identities (ALLEN, 2018; JAMES *et. al*., 2015) in light of the global social and political climate. While that is an important intervention, there needs to be a sustained, in-depth body of work that is accurately reflected in media and education. Moreover, digital media should not be underestimated as these two formal sites of learning and doing are social-media augmented. Therefore, decoloniality must challenge monolithic representations of race, intersectionally and anti-racist practice needs to be extended in all media spheres in addition to education. One cannot discount the sheer

[4] Coloured ornamental dot worn on the middle of the forehead which traditionally symbolised many aspects of Hindu culture but is currently worn as part of fashion trend

ubiquity of social media creation and consumption and the volume of HE students who use social media platforms as entry points into their areas of study. It becomes an even more critical endeavour, then, for people of colour to create content that can contribute to transformative and institutional changes through anti-racist and decolonial practice taking place online. This will, in turn, also enable a wider understanding of what identity means and how it relates to one's standing in modern-day Britain.

The effects of empire continue to have repercussions on the British Asian psyche and the failure to address the foundations of white supremacy on which colonialism was built in the curriculum and the media is one which should be corrected as part of this decolonial endeavour. The racial microaggressions that emerge as a consequence of these erasures and problematic representations are far ranging. For example, I often have to correct a range of assumptions: from the inability to make a distinction between an arranged marriage or a forced marriage; to clarifying why it is problematic when white pop singers twerked onstage and received credit for inventing the move; or, reciting "namaste" in a trendy yoga studio in Notting Hill and this is promoted as the face of yoga with virtually no acknowledgement of its South Asian roots. Cultural appropriation has become a popular framing but these microaggressions have always been around, insidious and casual in the day-to-day and percolating within white supremacy. It falls to activists, academics , public figures and the public to shoulder some of the responsibilities in addressing these erasures and gaps in the media spheres which plays a prominent role in mediating how we learn and what we learn.

In a similar vein, higher education is a key site but some of the problems that are prevalent in this context are the lack of representation and access to senior roles for BAME academics (ECU, 2018); the teaching of a Eurocentric curriculum; and, problematic approaches to equality and diversity (AHMED, 2012). It is necessary to create spaces in which open conversations can be had which would illuminate next steps and to also increase visibility of staff and students of colour at all levels. For the most part, my racial identity has served as a positive attribute because when throughout my interactions with students of colour, they have recounted how seeing ethnic minority lecturers has been inspirational as positive role models and making them aware that this was a possible career path. Progression and retention however, are different issues but overall, there have been some affirming and optimistic encounters with students who have engaged critically with tenets of decolonial teaching in encouraging ways.

The calls to decolonise universities and conversations on cultural appropriation can be read as a challenge to the assumption that the cultural industries and universities are progressive safe spaces in which racism does not exist because despite persistent evidence to the contrary, racism is virtually always dismissed as anecdotal, subjective or subsumed under sexism. In a world in which there are presumptions of post-raciality (GOLDBERG, 2015) race remains central in how judgements are made and value is assigned to who is worthy/unworthy; who belongs and who does not. Workshops, conferences, journals and monographs that tackle these issues are of critical importance today in highlighting how Higher Education can respond to racial microaggressions and overt acts of racism, which are dealt with either reactively or dismissively. One of our goals as academics of colour should be to continue working towards widening well-rounded understandings of ethnicity, racism, Whiteness; pathways to expand research agendas to include racial literacy; and increase racial literacy in our teaching practice in spite of inevitable challenges we must make universities more open places in which to work, study and learn, in which staff and students of colour are not simply co-opted, but incorporated.

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