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Podcast transcript:

Note: There was distortion on this call and at points it dropped out, so there are some gaps in the transcript.

Kyra: Thank you for tuning in to the Pedagogies for Social Justice podcast, brought to you by a student-staff partnership at the University of Westminster. This is a platform for students and educators to exchange knowledge and encourage discussion about the current challenges facing higher education. I’m your host, Kyra, and, for this episode, I’ll be in conversation with Raidat Sulman, a recent graduate of Sociology at Westminster. In this interview, we delve into Raidat’s dissertation on racial stereotypes, critical race theory, and how we might begin to decolonise Sociology as a discipline.

Kyra: Hi Raidat. Thank you so much for joining me on this episode of the podcast. It is so good to have you here today.

Raidat: Thank you. Hi, Kyra. It’s lovely to be here.

Kyra: So, I like to start off the podcast with the guests telling us a little bit more about themselves, so where are you from?

Raidat: I’m from London.

Kyra: And whereabouts are your parents from, like originally?

Raidat: My parents are from [Zanzibar], so Tanzania in East Africa.

Kyra: Nice. So, you actually studied Sociology with me, so how does it feel to have like this chapter in your academic career...not over, I guess, like, you know, once a sociologist, always a sociologist, but to pass your kind of undergrad with just like flying colours, like how do you feel?

Raidat: Eh, it’s been [laughing]...it’s been a like highlight. I think it’s like one of those things where it’s like you actually did it, especially given the last year or so. It’s been quite hectic. So, having, like you said, passing with flying colours is a real achievement that I’m still like coming to terms with now as well. It’s been amazing. I think it’s because we’ve like specialised in our field, so to speak, and, like you said, once a sociologist, always a



sociologist. We'll always have those sociological skills and imagination there, so I think it's been incredible, and it's weird that it's coming to an end, so to speak, but we can utilise those skills in other fields, like I'll be hopefully studying a Master's in September in Social Work, so I can use like concepts of such as intersectionality and anti-racist practice within that field, so it's applicable to anything really, so it's really good.

Kyra: No, absolutely, I totally agree with you. So, what would you say has been like the kind of highlight of your university experience, just overall?

Raidat: I would say the highlight overall would be my dissertation, the independent projects, the big finale, so to speak, and especially doing it in these circumstances, it's been a real eyeopener about how like confident we are in terms of our knowledge and studies [...] our perseverance during this, like we managed to do a dissertation, every interview, secondary data, and I think that's incredible that we were able to do that, like I was able to study several...and like interview people that I know about a topic [I know they're] interested in as well, which was really good.

Kyra: No, absolutely, and I'm actually so happy you said that the highlight was your dissertation because I think – we're going to revisit Sociology in a bit because I wanted to take this opportunity to actually discuss your dissertation and your topic of study. So, you named your dissertation "'It's a Constant Fight to Prove them Wrong" – The Narratives of Young Black Women in London dealing with Stereotypes'. What was the process of you kind of choosing this topic of research?

Raidat: Well, a lot of mind-maps [...], a lot of planning, [...] emails [laughing], like plan away, let's go, because it was really hard at first because like there's so many topics we could dive into, like ageism and so on, but I wanted to stick with stereotypes because it's a common phenomena that we all deal with, especially as ethnic minorities as we are. So, I had to narrow it down because I was first going to look at [India] and stereotypes in an area that's too broad, and then I had to narrow it down to stereotypes [...]. So, it was really nice to sort of study that and understand how stereotypes can play a huge role, not only in mental health and wellbeing but like the daily experience because stereotypes and [...] are both part of the daily experiences of racism that we kind of neglect because we're just seeing, oh, covert racism and blatant racism, where we deal with like the...overt and covert. So the covert was what I wanted to look into, and not only that, it's because I realised during Black Lives Matter last year, a lot of my Black friends, particularly my female friends, felt kind of isolated from this arena, so to speak, because they felt that they weren't being heard, especially by their white peers, because they might not understand what it's really like because they just think, "Oh, racism doesn't exist" or [...], so they felt really invalidated. So, [as a result and the way I feel about it myself], I really wanted to dive into those topics. I'm also interested in equality, anti-racist practice, and just decolonising the curriculum, so to speak, as well. So, it was really interesting to kind of study that and [...] about those issues as well.



Kyra: No, absolutely. And I think it was...it's just such an interesting topic in general, and I think, you know, you said that you used semi-structured interviews for your methodology, and I can only imagine how challenging it must have been trying to conduct those during a pandemic.

Raidat: Yeah, it was very stressful [laughing]!

Kyra: How did you kind of find managing that like element of your dissertation?

Raidat: Oh gosh [laughing], good question! I think it was just hard because you don't get that connection that you really need on camera than in person because you weren't able to always pick up on the social cues if [someone's distracted], so I [...] during the interview recording, making sure was everything okay, are they able to talk about this, because, as I mentioned earlier, I wanted to provide a safe platform to be able to discuss these issues and not for the participants to feel judged because it's their experiences and their stories I really wanted to lay out on the table, so to speak. And I think it was difficult because, as I was doing the interviews, I was reflecting at the same time on my own experiences. I was like, wow, okay, I feel really validated by this, because this happens and it's just seen as something miniscule. As I mentioned earlier, microaggressions, they play a huge role but we just don't know enough about them because (a) it's a recent phenomenon and (b) we just think, oh, that's not racism, you know, that didn't happen, because you're still processing "Was that racism? Was that racist or was it just a minor thing?" and they have a huge impact on people all the time, and I think the more we speak about these issues, the more we bring awareness to it, instead of being silent about it, and especially, as you mentioned, in terms of microaggressions in the classroom, for example, is a huge thing, that I didn't dive into, but it would be interesting if I did that as a follow-up study, microaggressions in the classroom, something like that.

Kyra: Yeah, absolutely. And just coming off what you've said there, obviously, being a young Black woman from London, like I can imagine you're able to relate with a lot of, if not all of, your interviewees in some of their experiences, which I think is definitely a good thing, but obviously, there's this kind of risk of, you know, sharing your own kind of lived and learned experiences with them, and then that affecting how they feel or kind of understand a situation, which then will go on to affect kind of your data and just your overall kind of study. So, my question is: do you feel like, because of your positionality, you had to be extra-cautious in the kind of interview stage and when you were writing up your questions, so you weren't kind of putting your own emotions and thoughts onto your kind of participants?

Raidat: [Audio interference], yeah, I had to be 100% cautious because, as you mentioned, my positionality could affect the data, so I had to like remind myself I'm a researcher at the moment, I can't bring my emotions in, but I was...during those interviews, I was nodding my head, I was like saying, "Mm, I understand that must have been shocking" and I was like,



wow, and these expressions, and I was really picking up on the participants' emotions, given the fact that it was all based online as well. So, I think it's very risky on any research that we do, whether it's secondary or primary data, that our own experiences don't jeopardise the data. I think it's quite a muddy area to be in. But I did my best in terms of that. I was very reflective. I reflected throughout the entire process [...].

Kyra: So, on the flipside of things, I guess, do you feel like you were able to kind of like identify concepts like right off the bat during the interview process like perhaps like a white researcher or even like a Black male researcher might have missed?

Raidat: Yeah. Actually, that is my reflection on my dissertation overall and during the interview process. A lot of misogynoir and other elements of racism that's not commonly spoken about. Misogynoir was a key thing that I noticed in terms of one of my participants saying, oh, at her workplace, she was, you know, [I'm a] Black woman status, and that was what was given to her and her sister who worked at the same shop, for example, and it just goes to show that it's not just about the nuances of racism. It's such a bigger area to dive into. So, I think, yeah, in terms of male, particular Black male researchers, they may not really understand misogynoir or just say, "Oh, it's just gender", where intersectionality is a huge part of my dissertation and my research because it wasn't just about race and gender in terms – something I didn't actually speak about much in my dissertation but I noticed whilst reading my transcripts over and over again was, oh, [...] one of my participants who was the evil stepmother in her Cinderella play at primary school and she spoke about [intersectionality] in terms of her size and being Black. That is something that we don't take into account often as well. So, it was really nice to see those different perspectives, that it's not just about race and gender, it can be about race and size, it can be race and disability, and so on and so forth, and that can have a huge role and impact on a person's day-to-day life. So, I think intersectionality is at the heart of my dissertation as well.

Kyra: Mm, absolutely. I like that you actually picked up on that because it wasn't even something that I would even consider like to think about kind of like size and kind of like the privilege that maybe like somebody with...that is slimmer than another might experience, you know.

Raidat: Yeah.

Kyra: And you discuss a bit about, kind of quite a bit actually, about the angry Black woman stereotype, and before reading your analysis, like even I was thinking about like where this like stems from, and I feel like it has to do with race in the sense that, because we're Black, like we immediately are associated with this kind of stereotype of like Black hypermasculinity, therefore making us kind of like predisposed to having like this aggressive nature, and then, to tie that into being a woman, who are stereotypically like these overly emotional beings that, you know, can't think logically, and I just feel like Black women, like we're really [caught] at the short end of the stick.



Raidat: 100%, honestly!

Kyra: And you've obviously looked more deeply into the literature surrounding this, and its kind of origin, so would you like to kind of like shed some light on that?

Raidat: Sure. So, Jule 1993 and Collins 2000 have mentioned that the reason why there's the angry Black woman stereotype has stemmed from the media. So, a lot of the literature that I read was American, so I obviously mentioned that in the end of my literature review, that a lot of the literature out there is American, so needed more insight into the British experience, [which I dive into briefly], as you've seen. I think a lot of it is to do with the media, especially as from the research side because America is a huge part of the race relations discussion, because of slavery and so on, so like the [nanny], who is typically depicted as like the maid, as we see in certain films, like [...] slave or the help, [...] who is a maid. So, the [nanny] is basically the person who takes care of the white, rich family's children, for example, and that can put us as a dismissive sort of subcategory, and then there's the [jezebel], yeah, the [jezebel], who is like sultry and seductive, so she's like toying with men's emotions and she's vindictive, and that also puts us in a negative way too. And then the angry Black woman is a by-product of the [jezebel] and other stereotypes, like you said, that [we're/were] seen as aggressive, and, as we've seen with the likes of Naomi Osaka, because, recently, she...recently, she sort of early retired out of the...one of the tennis tournaments because of mental health, she was seen as very dismissive, whereas like her mental health mattered. We've seen the caricatures of Selena Williams, who is a tennis icon, and we see that just play out. Even Michelle Obama, she's seen as an angry Black woman, but she's educated – she has a degree in Sociology, like we do. So, like you said, even with one of my participants, she mentioned that Black women can't be gentle, soft or kind, and it's like you mentioned earlier, that we're just seen as aggressive – there's nothing more to us than our aggression. She even mentioned that, oh, [we can't be] passive aggressive because [that's just] full-blown aggression, so we can't be anything on – either pigeonholed or put into boxes that, you know, Black women are angry, that's all we do! And for me, personally, I'm very quiet and reserved and shy. I'm not loud unless I'm with friends, [and/when] I'm confident. So, there's that juxtaposition where Black women can't be anything but aggressive and angry and [unruly], and I've been seen quite often [...] quite quiet [but I'm just] minding my own business, keeping to myself, I don't want to bring like attention or awareness to myself because I'm at risk, and I think, a lot of the time, people don't really understand the risks that Black women have with... We have what one of the sociologists calls "double jeopardy", so, you know, we're not only just a woman but we're Black, and that comes with [blocks/a box], emotional [box/blocks] in terms of [emotional labour]. So, I think these stereotypes such as the angry Black woman are so detrimental because we just even end up internalising that and just seen as angry and...you know, it really [harbours] our low self-esteem and negativity about oneself, and it's really hard to overcome that given the world that we live in.



Kyra: Yeah. No, absolutely. And I also feel, like just thinking in terms of, you know, going off what you've just said, how we can't kind of express our emotions and, you know, even when we feel like we've been hard done by, and like we're always...I feel anyways that we're always constantly kind of in competition with like white women, and I think this even kind of relates to – I'm not sure if you're familiar with this concept of like white women tears...

Raidat: Yes, I've been reading up on that lately, yeah [laughing].

Kyra: And how like they use like strategic tears to like silence women of colour or like brand us as bullies, which literally like reinforces this kind of angry Black woman stereotype, you know, and it's like we're put in these positions where it's like now I definitely can't express how I feel because the white woman next to me is crying, and like don't get me wrong, like I'm not a cold-hearted person and I definitely cry just as much as the next person, but, for me, it's like why are my feelings invalidated because a white person gets to openly, and let's be honest, like overly express theirs, you know, like-

[Talking at once]

Raidat: Yeah, it reminds me of a tweet that I saw the other day that Black women have to hardened themselves or turn themselves into [steel], and this is exactly what we're talking about now, where we can't be emotional, and I find that ridiculous, and it's also so detrimental because it spikes up anxiety and depression because we just feel so conscious about our emotions that we don't want to rock other people's boats, but our boats have been constantly rocked all the time and like we're still...strong still and we have our armour ready to go, but then...when can we let go of that armour, where we can just cry in peace? And I think I've seen...the [Tiktok trend] on the whole white women's tears, and it was really scary to see that [...] cold, [tired] face, and I was thinking...and a lot of the ethnic minority Tiktok-ers were mentioning this is so dangerous to us, because there have been times, I think last year, or the year – last year actually, there was a video about this Black man who had a white woman threatening him, and she started the whole white women's tears analogy, so to speak, and he got in so much trouble, but everyone kind of [...] she just did that and put him at risk of getting arrested. The charges were dropped after that because she [said], "Oh, he attacked me!" and this was just walking by in the park and this was in America. And I think people don't understand how detrimental it is because it's not only our safety is at risk, our whole dignity – and we're just seen as sub-human, as you've seen, the stereotypes in the media, everywhere really, has this huge impact. So, I was glad that I was able to study in depth about stereotypes because they're detrimental.

Kyra: Absolutely. Absolutely. And I think...every time I think of like just this concept of white women's tears, like I always just think of the story of [Emmet Hill] and just that whole...like just that tragedy, and this is literally what I tie it back to every single time. But I liked that you raised the point of saying how we're made to feel like we need to be just cold all the time because I think...obviously, yeah, that is kind of what...it's almost like a self-fulfilling



prophesy, and then, in that same instant, it's like we're seen as like beings that are like unattractive and like unlovable because we're so cold and that we're so...like we're incapable of expressing our emotions, but it's literally just because we've been made to feel like we can't.

Raidat: 100%.

Kyra: Yeah. But why do you feel like individuals kind of internalise their stereotypes rather than prove them wrong?

Raidat: That's a great question. It's rather complex really because [?]'s research concluded that internalisation was inevitable, and [Chow] 2010, has mentioned in her research that the stereotyping is inevitable, there's no escape from it, because even if you'd like...even with [...], that was from [a participant's] experience. She said, "No matter how hard I tried, [it was] impossible to prove him wrong." I'm paraphrasing here. That's the thing. It's like...its exhaustion from trying to constantly prove others wrong, and even my...all my interviewees mentioned that there's this...they tried so hard, yet they're stuck, and they have to be this cold, supposedly vindictive person, when, in reality, they're just trying to live their life, get an education, but it's...they've been put on a pedestal where they have to be strong, and that's so draining. In terms of strong Black women trope, all my participants said to me, "Oh, I [used to be] a strong Black woman" or "I am a strong Black women" because, if I don't, I can't deal with this, in terms of racism. She's carrying the heavy weight of racism on her shoulders constantly and she has to be strong, and it's like you mentioned, that we have to be cold in order to survive, where it's like we should just be able to exist. So, I think it's difficult because, although we try our hardest not to internalise it, but when other people, like you mentioned, [about validation], that was a key aspect in my dissertation as well, the constant validation will make you just accept it as it is, I am like this, but we're not. It's really...I think it's a very complicated thing that has to be [unpicked] and analysed properly.

Kyra: No, absolutely. And I think even just this kind of concept of like colourism and kind of the different experiences of Black women who are of lighter skin, like myself, like I know that I have a privilege just being like lighter, and I know that, you know, I'm probably allowed to be more expressive, and I definitely kind of understand my privilege in that sense, and I think that also needs to be taken into account in like analysis because, you know, at the end of the day, the closer you are to whiteness, even though I'm not white, the closer I am to whiteness, like the more privilege I obviously can obtain, and I think that is definitely something to kind of consider.

Raidat: Yeah, I agree. I think a lot more research probably should include colourism. I did briefly touch upon that in my research, and I did mention in my conclusion that it needs to be spoken up about more in research by taking that into account. It was really interesting to see because, when I was talking to my supervisor, she mentioned it and I was like, yeah, I didn't...I saw it but I didn't know where to put it, but then, at the end, it made perfect sense



because the darker participants were, the more intense experiences of racism and stereotypes were, and like you said, we do have that privilege – and I don't blame you, this all on you, it's just the fact that you've been able to acknowledge that I have this in order to do something about it, because I think, quite often, colourism is [...] is the race talk again, this is so annoying, right? It's like it affects everyone, whether you like it or not. You can't just be silent about issues like this because it's just perpetuating that racism, that discriminatory behaviour that continues to thrive so...

Kyra: I think that this kind of ties into my next topic that I kind of wanted to discuss, and I think, given everything that is going on at the moment in terms of, you know, the recent government attacks on critical race theory, them condemning the England team for taking the knee, and like recent reports that have tried to kind of talk on that as a race, I think we are living in such like a crazy time and I feel like...like we were in this moment where we were literally pulling teeth for the government and these institutions to like acknowledge race and inequality, and now, it's kind of like...they're all talking about it, but they're trying to kind of almost re-frame it and re-define it so it can benefit them. And I just wanted to dedicate some time to talking about this with you. Do you feel like attacks on critical race theory detracts from the efforts of kind of anti-racist movements?

Raidat: I think so. I think all of it is a smoke-screen, to be honest. I think it's just, like you mentioned, diverting the responsibility and accountability the government has, as a government, [who are] supposedly democratic, yet there is no democratic – as I wrote in my performative essay about Black Lives Matter. Although Boris Johnson said, "Oh, we support Black Lives Matter", he then said [it's acts of thuggery], and a lot of people do think BLM is a political agenda, where, originally, that wasn't the case. Originally, [it was to do with] race, and it always will be about race, but a lot of people I think, like I said, in the past couple of months, have disregarded BLM as like it's politics and that's it, we don't want to talk about it. And I think it ties into Kemi Badenoch's speech on [Critical Race Theory], and she said it's a political agenda and it aims to segregate society, but I think I'm going to debunk that, that's not the case, because society has been segregated for so long. Even recently, with South Africa, in the last couple of hours, there's been riots because [...] harassed. So, although she says the curriculum doesn't need decolonising, I think it does, because, as we did in our video about decolonised Sociology, decolonising expands to every aspect in education, and to debunk that myth of a meritocracy, like what Bowles and Gintis discuss. And although Kemi says it misguides judgement, I think it's crucial in the sense that we don't...we use it as a tool. We don't obviously indoctrinate but we use it as a tool to understand others' experiences in a proactive way, rather than in a performative way, by announcing like we support Black Lives Matter, we support Saka and [Rashford], where we see in the past probably 24 or 48 hours rioting, and I just saw this morning about how a Black person has been thrown into the train tracks today and one person has been thrown into the River Thames. So, it's really important to understand how race plays out in all aspects of life, not just in school or at home, but everywhere. And the way she says Black Lives Matter, Black lives do matter, is very [performative], although she's a Black person,



she's still being [performative], and that's just undermining the anti-racist effort, and she describes it, as I watched her speech, as not wholesome. Racism isn't wholesome [laughing], you know, it's brutal and it's cruel. So, I feel like it's not only that. As a Black woman, a middle-class Black woman, she sounds very classist as well, from that speech. She sounds very like "I have privilege – although I'm a Black woman, I have privilege, I'm literally in Parliament." So, it sounds also like she's being out of touch as well, and no wonder a lot of ethnic minorities don't agree with her. She even that that spat with one of the journalists, and that caused a lot of controversy for her I think, and I do think it's harmful because intersectionality is a crucial part of CTR and it has to be taught in schools and in...and in white places because it's a daily...racism is a daily experience, so activism is needed, but proactive activism that isn't criminal but like evidence-based proactive, yeah, evidence-based proactivism [laughing].

Kyra: No, absolutely, I completely agree with you, and I think just thinking about kind of what this message sends and kind of the implications that it has on just like the educational system in general, I mean, recently, like the Education Committee released a report about kind of the white working class and how they've been kind of let down, and they've used this word like "forgotten", which we can talk about later, but they're basically saying and blaming critical race theory, em, for concepts like white privilege for the under-performers of white working class pupils, and it's saying that the system has been kind of too focused on BAME students and the attainment gap, so now we have this kind of forgotten white under-class. What is kind of your...what is your opinion of that, just like off the bat?

Raidat: I think, like I mentioned earlier, I think it's a smoke-screen, again, to divert the situation and blame BAME students, where if education was so equal, it should include everyone – white students, BAME students, disabled students – because education is supposedly, so to speak, [or...well, we know that's not the case]. We know the disparities between both white and BAME students. So, there's also an interesting – they don't actually discuss Black working class students at all in their statement, in their report that I read, and apparently discussion of white privilege is negative, is divisive, it marginalises [white working class], and I think education [...] serving and supporting all students, and it focused mainly on class, and they should look into [maternal] deprivation, what's causing these disparities, and just take it into account as a whole, not saying "forgotten", because, although I do think a lot of... It mentioned how like a lot of white students, I think it was like 25% or so, are on free school meals, and that's a detriment to them. I think it needs to be taken into account of [...], the geographical location, their living conditions, their social capital, and economic capital, because, although we can say the working class has been forgotten about, [they are] a key part of the educational strategy, so to speak, because they may not have access to go to museums constantly, and I think it's also [due] to some budget cuts in the last couple of years. We used to have vulnerable youth centres, Sure Start centres – they've all been eradicated, so where is that support needed for students as well?



Kyra: No, 100%. This is even what I mean when I say like they're almost changing how race has been kind of defined and understood, like just to even try to diminish like the concept of white privilege. Like we're not saying that white working class pupils can't be disadvantaged, like I assure you they can, but at the end of the day, that disadvantage will never be because of their race. Like the issue at hand here, like you said, is budgeting, like the system is just under-funded, you know, and the attainment gap, it still exists. Black Afro-Caribbean boys are still more likely to be permanently excluded. You know, since I've started studying Sociology at GCSE, like the statistics have stayed the same – like we haven't seen any change on our half either so...

Raidat: Yeah. I studied it at A Level. The statistics, like you said, have stayed the same, and there's no change because of budget cuts, the whole narrative of we're forgetting the working class, and I'm like you need to include [Black] working class students, you need to include Asian working class students – it's not just about white working class students. If you [really want to be] inclusive, include all working class students. It is about budget cuts and the fact that teachers' unconscious biases and racist abuse perhaps, because we all have unconscious bias, [...] of educating others about others' experiences. There could be issues at home. You don't know the full picture. Like you said, it seems to be [...] dilution of the race talk, because the race talk is so negative, and like attacking Black, like Dawn Butler, for example, and other Black MPs, isn't going to solve this issue. It's just going to cause this rift. Although they said, oh, white privilege and other concepts are divisive, [when you're] arguing and not accepting people's opinions about those things, it just upholds that, the white privilege aspect of things, that they have the privilege – they're able to go to museums and be able to have tutors, where [white] working class students may not be able to have that, they might have to have [...] after school and so on, they may have to look after siblings – there's so many factors there that we don't know why there's that disparity in the first place. It's not just about looking into race. I think there needs to be an in-depth analysis of other aspects, such as maternal deprivation [...].

Kyra: No, absolutely. Absolutely, I completely agree with you, and I think, just thinking about the kind of...on the kind of grand scheme of things, I think that this is definitely a part of like an agenda to almost kind of pit like a race war in like the working class, you know, and this just...just the word of like...just using this word like "forgotten", you know, for the white working class to see themselves as forgotten, it makes it seem as though they are supposed to be in the spotlight above everyone else. You know, for you to be forgotten, you wouldn't... you would have had to have been in a position where you were the priority because, otherwise, you wouldn't know any different, right? And I think, for me, it's kind of...not only is it this kind of narrative of you've been forgotten, but it's also this narrative of you've been replaced by people of colour, you know, and this is by your government, in a white man's country. It's almost too easy and so obvious that you'd think like people would be like...do they think like we're stupid, like we're just...like we're just going to read into this, but at the end of the day, like, you know, they're telling like this disadvantaged group of people what they want to hear. You know, they're giving them a scapegoat for their problems and they're



saying, you know, like working class people of colour is the issue, and, you know, why would they question it when it's literally being given to them on a silver platter?

Raidat: Yeah, [I think so].

Kyra: But do you think that concepts like white privilege need to be taught in school, and if so, kind of...like from what age do you feel like is the right time?

Raidat: I think it's important that it's taught, but probably like secondary school age rather than primary school. I think primary schools should definitely, in their PSHE lessons, talk about race, racism and gender and those issues from an earlier stage because one of the participants that I interviewed mentioned that it's important that young students understand racism from an early age because they may have come from a home that's racist, so it's important because many – I've had many cases of friends being called the N-word at a young age. Personally, my sister has been called the N-word at a young age, like in Year 5. So, it's really important to understand that [primary socialisation] takes...is detrimental in the sense that, if it's negative, then, if the right education isn't being taught at home, how are they going to be upstanding global citizens, so to speak, if they're going to be racist? I think that those concepts are important. Racism needs to be more focused at all educational stages, from Key Stage...probably Key Stage 2 onwards. As I mentioned, PSHE lessons are crucial and should be compulsory I think. The children do need [...] of racism because a lot of my participants mentioned awareness is key, either through social media, [for like a] teenager, through parents, through reading books about racism, and other children's experiences, because we know, quite often, history is whitewashed, so it's important that there's that diversity from reading books at a young age, and this applies at primary school, so having not just... I think I recall, growing up, ['Hannah's Fruit Basket'] was a book that we read as kids, so like introducing books like that, books about Egypt and other histories, are really crucial I think for change as well.

Kyra: So, going back to talking about Sociology and kind of thinking in terms of decolonisation, in what ways do you feel like Sociology is still a kind of colonial discipline?

Raidat: I think it is still a colonial discipline because we still hear white people, white researchers' voices, and particularly the Western voice, and it's quite often diluting other races' research and other...like Eastern voice, as we know about Orientalism, the history of Asian culture is very Oriental in the sense that it's exotic – the whole topic of exoticism is a key aspect that I think Sociology needs to study a bit more into, and as it's part... Obviously, it stemmed from...it stemmed from like imperialism and colonialism and the revolutions and so on. It's really important that we eventually end up having a global [economy] of knowledge that is diverse, as Bhabra mentions. I think it's important that decolonising, as we mentioned, isn't just about diversifying a curriculum by adding books in. It's about really taking into account other people's research. And it isn't about forgetting the founding father. Their research is crucial for Sociology. But also being critical about the voices and the history.



As we know, with [D?], he studied tribes, and the way he studied it was very...would be very controversial today. So, it's important that we understand [...] history in order to [project] Sociology as a critical...a continuous critical subject that continues to challenge these concepts to build a better society I think as well.

Kyra: Absolutely. And I think, coming off that, like it's about definitely like decolonising kind of the curriculum and decolonising kind of the...reading list that we come to kind of study, and then incorporating different voices and different research. And I think it's even about decolonising like the spaces that we create in Sociology, you know. Obviously, we've had, from the shift to online learning, like things have changed a lot, but I think, in terms of like creating like a decolonial space, like microaggressions take place online, offline, you know, like it's not...they still exist.

Raidat: Mm, yeah.

Kyra: How do you feel that we can kind of dismantle the microaggressions that still occur in classrooms, especially considering like your dissertation topic as well?

Raidat: I think it's just acknowledgement of what microaggressions are, bringing awareness of what they are. As I mentioned, this is kind of a recent phenomena so not many people understand what it is. Microaggressions are also subcategorised as micro-insults and micro-invalidations. So, micro-invalidation says, "Oh wow, you're really good at Maths!" or "I'm surprised you're not good at Maths because you're Asian" for example, and those have a really knock-on effect on the individual themselves because microaggressions, as I found out when I wrote the dissertation, they're not always intentional. So, an example is that one participant's accent was seen as exotic, so her uni friends said, "Oh, I didn't like British accents, but I like your accent because it's exotic and fun." So, it doesn't mean that the impact isn't detrimental or the blow to the system isn't hard – it is, but it's quite difficult to process because microaggressions can be seen as a compliment, when in fact they're not. They're very insulting, they're very degrading. Whereas, stereotypes, which I found as I studied the relationship between the two, stereotypes are typically deliberate and intentional, but it doesn't mean the severity of the stereotypes and microaggressions should be under-stated. So, in terms of – coming back to microaggressions, as I mentioned earlier, it's linked to everyday racism. It's not a singular occurrence. So, there has to be a healthy discussion about it. So, common microaggressions in the classroom can be mispronunciation in names – and personally I've experienced many microaggressions in the past. A lot of my friends have even told teachers, "You're saying her name wrong!" It gets really tiring having to say my name over and over again. It's like, "Why [...]?" [laughing].

Kyra: Oh my gosh, I can so relate to this!

Raidat: It's just like...it is so frustrating because I know they mean well but it's, at the same time, [also] invalidating me, and I feel uncomfortable, and it's like my name is like [...]. I don't



want to shorten it to Rai because it's like...that constant – because I've even seen, in America, that people had to anglicise their names, Asian names have been anglicised to like Victoria, and other names, because [he] just couldn't pronounce it, and people were laughing about it. What makes it worse, I think when people laugh about ethnic minorities' names being mispronounced, that's also microaggression. I think it's very insulting because I try my best to pronounce people's names, and if I get it wrong, I say I'm sorry and then I try again. But then [it's just like I constantly] have to say it to someone, constantly, and it's like what's the point, you might as well just call me by the wrong name as well. So, it's important that I think everywhere, not just in the class, in the workplace, that microaggressions [can be] seen. They're not jokes. They're real things. But, quite often, I do think people just don't understand it.

And I think other microaggressions, like I mentioned, is ability, "Oh, girls are good at Maths. I'm shocked. How can [she] be good at Maths?" or "Oh, I'm surprised you want to study this subject" or "You're so articulate..." which is one that I quite often get and it's like...you don't know my story or how...what I've come to get here. You can't really say stuff like that. Because, quite often, I get people telling me I sound posh. Yes, I was born and raised in London [laughing], but I spoke – so my accent could be a number of different things. I also had speech and language therapy until Year 7 and Year 8, so of course I've been taught how to enunciate better and pronounce different words, so my accent, you know, is different, so to speak, and it's that weird sort of...where do I fit in, [this weird...like we just stick out like a sore thumb], and just trying to [just learn]. And I think invalidation, micro-invalidation, is a problem [even worse] because it's like invalidating someone's experience, their ability, and so on, and it's important that we understand it and like have healthy discussions about it in the classroom, and also lecturers and teachers understand, okay, maybe I've just [done] microaggression – how does that student feel? Or if someone in the classroom has said it, it would be nice if, once teachers and lecturers have an awareness, to...not necessarily [...] tell them what you said was a microaggression, that wasn't nice and [like talk about it]. I think we need that healthy discussion in classrooms in order to really understand and dismantle microaggressions as well.

Kyra: Yeah, no, I absolutely agree with you. You've touched on so many things and I'm just like...that have resonated with me, but 100% I feel like healthy discussion needs to be had, and I feel like, as soon as people stop looking at having conversations as race as being like uncomfortable – like we need to get comfortable with being uncomfortable, at the end of the day, otherwise we're never going to be able to kind of like make change. And, at the end of the day, like if race is going to be an uncomfortable discussion to have, like usually it's probably on our part – like I feel like me having conversations with white people about race, like I always feel like...just very like antsy, and I feel like...

Raidat: I get what you mean.

Kyra: You know? And I think, yeah...



Raidat: You're at risk of being like verbally abused, so it's always a risk talking about it.

Kyra: 100%.

Raidat: And I think it's just like I mentioned earlier, we end up not rocking other people's boats, but they rock our boats, and I find it ironic that you said it makes them uncomfortable – like imagine how [heavy and] uncomfortable this is for us all the time, and, for example, that being denied to us, "Oh, that didn't happen", [makes ?] 10 times worse because it's like we want to have healthy discussions – I'm always up for healthy discussions, like I'm up for it, and [if you] need to learn, just ask me. If you can't pronounce my name, just ask me kindly and stuff like that. Like in terms...in terms of your own experiences, like what sort of microaggressions like have you like witnessed or have experienced in terms of the past because you mentioned like how, you know, resonating with what I was saying?

Kyra: Well, for me, like one that I experience is probably like the name thing, like I'm always being called like Kyra, and it's just like...it's honestly happened for like years, so it's just kind of like – even now, like I just literally respond to that name, and it's just like I'm so tired of saying, you know, "Like that's not my name!" And I also just feel uncomfortable as well because it's usually met with like a "Oh no, sorry about that!" like, you know, and it's just like, you know, it's totally fine, and then they go back to saying it and it's just like, oh, okay, I'm just not going to...I'm just not going to put myself on the kind of like line anymore, because I think that's what it is, literally – like having conversations about race [or] people of colour, it's always on our part where we need to be like vulnerable, like we're the ones that have to be vulnerable, we're the ones that have to put ourselves on the line, we're the ones that are literally kind of bringing our own like kind of trauma to the table, you know, and it's like it's not...it's not uncomfortable for a white person, you know, you just literally have to sit there and listen, but it's me that's the person that's like, you know, giving my all to you. And I feel like that is another thing where, you know, we don't always necessarily like to talk about microaggressions and kind of what we experience because it's just tiring.

Raidat: It really is exhausting.

Kyra: Yeah, honestly. But I do feel like...as much as it is tiring, like the conversations, they do need to be had, and I think I am trying to be better at kind of just saying, you know what, that is not my name, this is how you pronounce it, and I've even started, like on like my social media, I've started putting like the breakdown of how to pronounce my name [laughing], like in my bio...

Raidat: Yeah [laughing].

Kyra: So, now, like if you don't pronounce it right, it's definitely a "you" problem.



Raidat: Yeah. Going off what you said, like I'm just remembering that I've [...], which is why the angry Black woman stereotype has emerged in the first place – she's seen as sassy and aggressive. So, in terms of tying that up, as I mentioned earlier, Black women aren't allowed to be soft or any other emotion than angry, so when we do get angry about our names being mispronounced, it's just like, "Oh, she's the angry Black woman," and it's like, "No, my name has a lot of meaning – you know, like my Dad chose my name..."

Kyra: Exactly.

Raidat: It's like my Dad chose my name, it's part of my heritage, like it's an Arabic name, so it's... Like I feel like when [...] names have been called out. It's like this sense of dread in the classroom – you can feel this atmospheric kind of like impending doom, either like I've seen people's names being skipped because like teachers literally hold their breath and are like, "Oh God, how do I pronounce this?" Like the last time I think I was in English, yeah, it was [...], and it was like beginning of Year 10 and 11, so my teacher [could never] pronounce my name, and I ended up saying, "It's Raidat!" really loudly, like I was so [...], because she said my name wrong so many times and it wasn't my fault, and I didn't [yell], like I'm very [calm] person. It was because everyone else was like, "You're saying her name wrong!" Like you mentioned earlier, it's that [uncomfortability], [like I feel uncomfortable], I don't want to do this, [...] how people pronounce my name, and it's still being pronounced wrong, even by ethnic minorities themselves, and it's just like [sighs], like do I shorten my name, do I just accept it, like you said, people called you Keera instead of Kyra, and just like, over time, it's like this is normal, where it shouldn't have been the case because I feel like there's so many different wonderful people, with such unique names, and such beautiful meanings behind them, and symbolism, and yet the names get butchered, and then I feel like I don't deserve this name.

Kyra: Yeah, absolutely.

Raidat: So, I agree with you in terms of like [bringing] validation [and how detrimental that] can be to one's self-esteem and mental health.

Kyra: Yeah, 100%, and even just thinking about what you said, like your Dad chose your name, and there's so much history behind it, like just thinking about it like that, like for you to not pronounce my name right, you're not only like denying me kind of my ability to kind of exist, but you're just like denying me of like the history of like my heritage and everything that goes behind my name and like of who I am, and I feel like it's just so important and, yeah, I'm definitely...I'm definitely making more kind of effort to be like...I'm drawing the line here and, you know...

Raidat: Mm.



Kyra: But tying back into decolonising Sociology, how do you feel like lecturers can begin to kind of actively decolonise their pedagogy or teach kind of like decolonial content?

Raidat: I think it's about awareness of like the unconscious biases in terms of teaching because, as we know, teaching is a crucial part of education and learning, and being aware of like I am a lecturer, I have [unconscious bias and views] and making sure that doesn't paint a negative picture of the experiences. And as we mentioned and emphasised, it's not just about the diversification of Sociology. It's about I think lecturers really taking into account others' stories, as the fantastic work of yourself and other students with our updated reading list, and reading lists about decolonising Sociology, about anti-racist practice and racism, I think that was a fantastic thing the University did, and I haven't really heard much or seen much from [what other universities are] doing. So, I know LSE is doing some stuff about racism and decolonising, but it needs to be a widespread thing where it's like open and healthy discussions, as we mentioned, as well.

Kyra: Unfortunately, we are coming to the end of this episode, but as a question I like to end on, what is something you'd like to see happen or see develop within higher education in the next 10 years?

Raidat: I think it just stems from what we just said, in terms of like I'd like to see higher education to be more involved and have a genuine, honest [and practical] way of providing inclusion and equality in the education system, in particular higher education, because one of my...well, two of my participants mentioned that they experience racism at university. So, one of the participants said she was followed around on her way to campus by a police officer, and she just said [was normal], and [that was really disheartening] and heart-breaking to hear because it [shouldn't have been], just because, that day, she decided to wear a hoodie, she was basically stereotyped and categorised as criminal, when she was just...it was just a really kind of chilly morning, as you know, in England, we quite often have to change our clothes to fit the weather. So, I do think that, in terms of – I would love to see decolonisation, like [you] mentioned, being a network, like a solid network that is proactive, and is [honest], that we have these healthy discussions like we are having today, that it shouldn't be [...], because I feel, quite often in the past year or so, I've seen a lot of [performativity] and it's just counter-productive, and it just doesn't help the cause at all. It's just like, oh, there's no evidence base proactivity, there's no evidence-based action, there's no action, just speaking. So, thinking back to Black Lives Matter, for example, like a lot of universities had these statements that [...], but where is the action? What have you done in the past year? It can't just be about writing this really beautiful, elaborate statement when there's nothing that's been done. Like we've seen [it with the] attainment gap, like you mentioned, it's not going away. Although [our university has said that they've been] working to bridge it, more work needs to be done across higher education institutions.

Kyra: Thank you so much, Raidat, for joining me on this episode of the podcast. Honestly, it's been so nice to have this conversation with you and just like getting to know you a bit more



and obviously talk about your dissertation, which is amazing, and thank you for trusting me to read it.

Raidat: No worries! It's been a pleasure.

Kyra: But, yeah, I hope that we can have more conversations like this.

Raidat: Yeah, that would be great.

Kyra: Thank you so much.

Raidat: No worries.

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