

Racism in Western Culture: Selected Notes

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Author's Preface

Someone once asked me why I said that ethnic minorities get a rough deal in the UK. In British culture, certain white people seem to be under the illusion that all the BS we have to put up with is fair, normal & only right & proper. This viewpoint even has some support in ethnic minority communities. In my view, the reason some ethnic minorities don't realise or complain about the situation we are in is because British racism takes place largely by stealth: connotation, unspoken implications and contrasts. Those that believe racism doesn't exist are effectively silenced by the structures of power and are its dupes.

Racist Attacks I Have Known

a) Physical/Intimidation

1. Having stones/objects thrown at me
2. People shouting racist insults out of car windows
3. People shouting racist insults in the high street
4. Being spat upon by racists while going out for a walk in the park
5. Attempted intimidation by a group of racists at the tube station on New Year's
6. Attempted intimidation by a fellow passenger on the tube

b) Mental Games

1. White people not listening to my contributions (a big problem in work and academic life)
2. White women assuming I am a serial killer. I sometimes watch them cross the road so they don't have to walk near me
3. Rejection at interviews from the racists
4. The BS representation of British Asian men in novels, films & TV
5. Being tailed by security guards at department stores and repeatedly being searched by police

Indian man out of love in Marvel's 'Eternals'

I was standing in a noisy, barely contained line of schoolboys outside a classroom, indulging in my usual habit of stand up comedy. It was the mid-90s. My routine consisted of an imaginary scenario where the top heroines of the time pestered me with phone calls and visits at my house. Suddenly, a teacher, a bespectacled white woman with a nasal voice, figuratively pulled me by the collar into a classroom where the sixth form girls – the only female students – were vegetating. The teacher asked the several white girls if they would ever go out with me on a date. Politely, looking down at the short ethnic minority man wearing his older brother's cast off blazer, the girls declined.

The point of this bizarre ritual was to humiliate me, the ethnic minority man, to show that we were unworthy of romantic love. It was meant to destroy my confidence in myself. But the performance did not work. It failed. Even at the time, I knew that I had got the reaction from the girls because they were white. Everyone knew that white women thought we were undesirable. What do I mean by 'we'? We call ourselves British Asians in England if we hail ethnically from the subcontinent. A brief quote about a male, British Asian character from Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth* in 2000 shows that the Western presumption is that we are not attractive:

Pulchritude – beauty where you would least suspect it, hidden in a word that looked like it should signify a belch or a skin

infection. Beauty in a tall brown young man who should have been indistinguishable to Joyce from those she regularly bought milk and bread from, gave her accounts to for inspection, or passed her chequebook to from behind the thick glass of a bank till. (1)

British films like *Bend it Like Beckham* extend these conceptions when they represent sexual freedom and desire for British Asian woman as a release from coupling with British Asian men. America is hardly innocent of these characterisations. In *The Big Bang Theory*, the Indian Raj is the only one that cannot get a girlfriend, much to the amusement of the audience it would appear, who could not get enough of this running joke. In light of such racist, unspoken assumptions, the bizarre ritual that I was subjected to should not be seen as an isolated incident. As I will argue, it informs the representation of us on the screen. Ethnic minorities that have historically come from the subcontinent. Even when lip service is being paid to ideals of ‘diversity’, used as a tactic of selling movie tickets.

Kingo: The First Indian Superhero and Western ‘Diversity’

The Indian character in the Marvel *Eternals* team is Kingo (Kumail Nanjiani). This is a historical role, the first superhero from South Asia on a Western screen. In an interview, Nanjiani spoke of the grave responsibility of portraying Kingo in a representative way that accorded with ideals of diversity:

The responsibility is a real thing, because there haven't been other South Asian superheroes in the MCU, or any other Hollywood mainstream movie for that matter... I can't represent every South Asian person in the world, because we're all completely different, right? So while there is that responsibility, I want to do a good job. (2)

Eternals itself has been marketed as a positive 'diversity' film. Salma Hayek (Ajak) says, "the Eternals film is a "huge" step forward for diversity and inclusivity in the film industry", sentiments echoed by Gemma Chan (Sersi). (3) This marketing tactic has indeed influenced audience reactions. Oliver Jones of the Observer says that "one of the most impressive aspects of the Eternals is how the culturally representative team's identities play into the theme and story in powerful and essential ways". (4)

However, for all the talk, Kingo carries the racist, Western association of undesirability and failure at love. That is, Kingo is a failure in Western diversity, a continuous failure which is always represented, tragically enough, as a success. A short reflection on how Kingo is related to the other Eternals reveals that Kingo loves no one. Kingo is loved by no one. He is an Indian man completely out of love in all its variants, romantic and non-romantic.

Everyone else in the team of Eternals either loves a team mate, is loved by a team mate, or has a partner, as in the famous gay pairing between Phastos and his partner that showcases homosexual couples for the first time in a Marvel movie. Except, that is, for Kingo. Sersi and Ikaris love each other and

have even been married at one point. Makkari and Druig are falling in love. Sprite secretly loves Ikaris. Thena (Angelina Jolie) is in a relationship of love and protection with Gilgamesh. Even Ajak, who appears to be solitary and celibate, has been described as a beacon of love by writer Chloé Zao, who comments, that the role called for “a woman with the heart the size of the ocean” and represents a powerful, maternal love. (5)

So this is Western ‘diversity’. Even when we are portrayed as superheroes, we are unattractive, out of society, unable to form not only romantic relationships, but other loving relationships. In fact, as we see when his film posters are shown, Kingo conceals his immortality by reproducing asexually in his Hindi film avatars where he is his own grandfather, father and self. He is like some virus outside of normal sexual reproduction. Ironically, one poster is for a Hindi film (‘Bollywood’) entitled ‘Yuva Prem’ (Young Love), where Kingo plays a romantic lead. It is only in another non-Western cinema and space of imagination that he can be recognised as a lover.

In contrast to Kingo (and the other ethnic minority men in the movie), the white man is constantly loved romantically by women. The main character, Sersi, only falls in love with white men. There is not only a love triangle between Sersi and two white men, but also a love triangle between Sersi, Sprite and Ikaris for the white man. The white man is repetitively, irresistibly desirable, the Indian man is supposedly not. Not only this, but in the ending of the movie, the white man’s love

is the ultimate saviour of all humanity, in a reworking of the trope of the white saviour. Ikaris fails to stop Sersi's plan to rescue humans which he believes is counter to the mission of the Eternals because he still has feelings for her. To add insult to the negative and racist depiction of an Indian man and white love supremacy, Sersi and Ikaris have an Indian wedding, attired in Indian costume. Emphasising the point that, even on the Indian's own terrain, the white man is the victor in love.

Kingo is not absolutely, entirely excluded from the domain of love. In fact, he is the only one that can see the secret love that Sprite has for the white man, Ikaris. He is relegated to just looking at the field of love and not being a part of it. Like a sexually frustrated viewer who seeks solace in pornography, Kingo can only look at the love of others as an outsider. Also, Kingo dreams of being in the position of the desirable white man. While Ikaris steals Kingo's sexual and romantic identity by having an Indian wedding, Kingo can only unsuccessfully play at being the desirable Ikaris on film. Thus, Kingo is introduced via the 'Bollywood' song sequence, for a film called "Shandaar Daastan-e-Ikarus" (The Splendid Story of Ikaris). Predictably enough, the dance performance is strained and comical.

Conclusion

The bizarre ritual that was played out in my youth, 'proving' my undesirability as a South Asian is a mainstay in British and American media, although it has received little critical attention. Because it is such a solidified set of implicit

assumptions. When we were finally able to be seen as superheroes on a Western screen, all the old prejudices were added to our representation. The worst thing is that all of the female directors, authors and screenwriters that I have cited above all have something in common. Those that cast us as undesirable are mixed race or ethnic minority women themselves. Perhaps showing that racism against the self by such women is tactfully exploited by the Western system of representation.

Yet, Marvel has taken over the world and is celebrated for being 'diverse'. So this is what diversity means in the modern world? In fact, Western 'diversity' is a continual and embarrassing failure of real representation and real inclusion. The on-screen portrayals of us in the West and their bizarre, racist rituals have always and will always fail in my eyes. Because I do not hate myself. I have been given love and status as a loving being in this world. At home, my nickname is 'Sonu' ('handsome').

1 Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2000), 273

2 Anon, "Eternals actor Kumail Nanjiani's Kingo is a genuine Bollywood superstar in these retro posters, also starring his father and grandfather", November 12, 2021, *Indian Express*, <https://indianexpress.com/article/entertainment/hollywood/eternals-kumail-nanjiani-kingo-bollywood-superstar-retro-posters-see-photos-7619071/>, accessed 03.01.2022

3 Anon, “Eternals has ‘most diverse cast’ ever and is ‘huge’ step forward for film, says Salma Hayek”, Thursday 4 November 2021, <https://news.sky.com/story/eternals-has-most-diverse-cast-ever-and-is-huge-step-forward-for-film-says-salma-hayek-12459569>, accessed 03.01.2022

4 Oliver Jones, “Eternals’ Is a Refreshingly Romantic Reminder of the Power & Purpose of Event Films”, 10/24/21, <https://observer.com/2021/10/marvel-eternals-review-chloe-zhao-angelina-jolie-richard-madden-gemma-chan/>, accessed 05.01.2022

5 Tracy Brown, “Why ‘Eternals’ cast Salma Hayek as a Marvel superhero who leads with love”, NOV. 5, 2021, <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/movies/story/2021-11-05/eternals-salma-hayek-marvel-chloe-zhao-superheroes>, accessed 05.01.2022

Queen Victoria and the Romans: The Psychology of the Coloniser and the Colonised

Towards the end of her reign, Queen Victoria, who was not only the British monarch, but also the Empress of India, became captivated by her servant, Abdul Karim. She asked him to teach her the Hindustani language, among other things. In the end, Queen Victoria had fallen in love with her imperial possession and the coloniser had become, to some extent, the colonised.

India's conquest of Queen Victoria is not a unique example in the history of the relations between the coloniser and the colonised. The Roman Empire also went through the same process. When they had taken possession of Greece, the Greek culture and the Greek language also captured their hearts. Like Victoria, they had become mastered by their captive possession.

These examples demonstrate the ambiguity in the relations of master and mastered, queen and subject. Before imperial conquest, there exists the desire for that conquest and a desire to be a part of that country. Perhaps the culture of the captured country has already captured the master's or mistress's heart before he or she possesses it. And after conquest, the question remains: who or where has whose heart?

Immigrants and Money – According to the White Man

Towards the beginning of his biography of Queen Victoria, A. N. Wilson writes the following, reproducing a longstanding Western idea of the immigrant:

Victoria and Albert came out of Europe, and they can only be understood in a European context. For Victoria, although she was born in England and became the figurehead of the British Empire, England was also a place of lifelong exile. She grew up as an immigrant in London. Her mother, who had imperfect English, filled her with all the immigrant uncertainties, as well as hopes; and many of her adult characteristics are based upon the classic immigrant insecurity. For example, her cunning ability to hoard wealth is classic immigrant behaviour, replicated in so many first- and second-generation immigrant families. In America, where everyone started, at one stage or another, as an immigrant, this amassing of money is popularly described as the American Dream. Not having the security of belonging, the immigrant tries to make cash a substitute for being at home.

A. N. Wilson's unqualified and unsupported assertions regarding the immigrant and money are part and parcel of a longstanding construction of the immigrant. Were not the Jews constructed as misers and hoarders by the English in the

past? In A. N. Wilson's view, only the white man, or the English spend their money in the 'right way'. They don't scrimp and save, they spend. Here, an idea of the rational economic actor in a capitalist English state is contrasted against the irrational, hoarding instinct of those that come from an unspecified abroad (notice the importance of America in his assertions, the land of the immigrant). What gives A. N. Wilson, this man of the white majority, the authority to make his unqualified and unsupported assertions? Because he is a white man and it has always been the white man who decides what is the right way to act in this country.

Yet, from the immigrant's point of view, it is the white man who acts irrationally. The immigrant saves his money for his children's inheritance, so that they do not have to undergo the hardships that he has endured. The immigrant has come from a place where there has been no money, no security, no savings. He understands how hard it is to get money and the reasons why it should not be wasted or spent recklessly on things that we don't really need. In the end, it is the immigrant that understands the web of maya, not the white man of the white majority.

The Jewish New Year at the Park: The Celebrations of the Majority and the Celebrations of the Minorities

01.01.2017

It is New Year's Eve in England. People roam freely in the middle of the night. They don't fear any attack. Women feel safe. The people drink freely. Many people are intoxicated. They believe that drinking will not raise safety concerns. They are safe in the knowledge that no one will want to hurt them on this happy occasion. There is no need for police. This is the New Year of the majority.

The scene is a few weeks ago. It is the Jewish New Year in England. I notice the congregation of Jewish people at the side of the stream in my local park. The police are everywhere. It is the police that first draw my notice to the gathering. The Jews don't roam freely in the middle of the day, in broad sunlight. They do not feel safe. They fear an attack. The exercise of their religion in an open space raises safety concerns. They do not feel safe. They know that people will want to hurt them on this happy occasion. There is a need for the police. They do not feel safe. The police don't just protect. The police supervise the Jews. They are not permitted the freedom and safety of the majority. They are kept under surveillance. This is the New Year of the Minority.

The New Year of the majority. The New Year of the Minority.
This is England.

Oscars Racism and White Validation: The Case of the Musical

24.01.17

I have heard white people criticising Hindi films because they are musicals. Anna Morcom writes that “Hollywood and high cultural and Western discourses [...] see Hindi films as unrealistic, immature and inferior due to their musical format” (*Hindi Film Songs and the Cinema*, 2007, 241). In terms of Oscars, this is obvious. Very few Hindi films have been recognised and validated by the Oscars in the foreign film category.

However, when a white director makes a musical, with white people in it, suddenly every aspect of the film they are making is up for an Oscar. One can point to the case of *Moulin Rouge*, or now, with the Oscars buzz around it, *La La Land*. *Moulin Rouge* was actually nominated for best picture.

When white people are involved, something magical happens. Suddenly the musical is serious. Suddenly, it is engaged with reality. Suddenly, the actors in the film are magically talented.

The magic doesn't work when the film is about brown people and features them and is directed by them. Oh, no. Because

we are talking about white magic. The magic of being white and thinking white. A whole culture's film productions can be dismissed as being inferior musicals when the people involved are brown. Only white people are supposed to have privileged access to reality and the high space of culture.

If one points this out as a clear example of the West's racism, one is accused of being a racist. One is accused of playing the race card. One is said to support tokenism and not talent. Such is the way of the world in the west.

Yet, for my own part, I didn't watch Moulin Rouge. And I'm not going to watch La La Land. The West's Oscars are bullshit. The West's system of white validation is bullshit. I will watch my Hindi musicals. Their music is inspirational. The lyrics are amazing. They are based on poetry. The acting in the films is brilliant. The stories in the films are great. Hindi films are among the best in the world, whatever The White Man thinks.

Casual Ignorance, Censorship and Intolerance

01.12.16

You know, something that doesn't make its way into the news, textbooks and serious academic journals is our life experience and the conversations we overhear in life. I have heard horrible things coming out of the mouths of cab drivers who were driving me in a personal capacity. I have heard horrible things coming out of the mouths of colleagues and fellow students. I will write about one such incident today which seems relevant given the rise of the right wing and the intolerance reflected in the rhetoric against immigrants in our country and in other western countries.

I was at a certain location the other day where teaching occurs when I overheard a conversation behind me between my two male, white colleagues. They had spotted a Religious Education book which was marked with symbols. It had a cross for Christianity, of course, and various other such iconic symbols. For Hinduism, there was the ancient symbol of power which is the Swastika.

One of my colleagues was telling the other white man that the Swastika should be removed from the cover of the Religious Education book. He said that it was associated with the Nazis

and therefore was a bad influence on the children that it was intended for.

My other colleague, to whom he was addressing his remarks, to give him credit, argued against his position. He pointed out that it was unfair for all of the other religions to keep their own iconic symbols and for Hinduism to be singled out and censored. It wasn't the fault of the Hindus that Hitler had corrupted their symbol of power and made it bear a horrendous meaning.

The point of this little anecdote is to elaborate the ignorant position of the white, male censor. First of all, it can be pointed out that all of the symbols on the Religious Education book have negative connotations, since all of the religions have had wars conducted in their names, as well as various imperialist projects. Yet the white male censor does not raise any conscientious objections on those grounds. Secondly, it can be pointed out that the white male censor knows nothing of history before he makes his ignorant decision to censor the symbol of power of a religion. The Swastika has been a powerful symbol across the centuries in a number of different cultures, not just Hinduism. Hitler's corruption of the symbol (it is actually constructed differently to the Hindu Swastika in Nazism, as a matter of fact) is unappreciated by the ignorant white male censor in his mission to supposedly educate and protect the children in our country from adopting the wrong

course in life. Thus his position represents the splendid isolation of this country's thought and its disregard for history and world culture, particularly the cultures of the ancient world.

I just want to stress the sheer intolerance of the white male censor's position. When he ignorantly saw the symbol of a different culture that he knew nothing about, he looked at it solely from the point of view of a white Western male and assumed that his position was completely sound, even though he knew nothing about the matter and even though he was preventing another religion from having its own unique representation on the pages of the Religious Education book. What is striking about the act of censorship is also the fact that people don't learn about Hinduism in our Religious Education classes (I never learnt anything about Hinduism in my own Religious Education classes) and therefore there is an established prejudice against an ancient religion of syncretism, idolatry and differing thought from Western frameworks which the ignorant white male censor follows.

I hope this little anecdote will go to show how casual ignorance, censorship and intolerance is in our country and also demonstrate how our education in this country has failed its students. It keeps on churning out specimens of bigotry and narrow-mindedness like the white male censor that I have described and we are also at a historical situation where such

people make up the majority of those holding power. The irony is, that we were in an educational context when the remarks were made, in front of students.

Misogyny and Racism. 13.03.2022

Yesterday, I read J. K. Rowling's tweets about why 'we can't say a woman is one'. What struck me was how when someone disagreed with an other's definition of a woman, he/she was automatically called a misogynist.

The definition of MISOGYNIST appears to be: you who do not agree with what I personally call a woman.

This reminded me of how white people automatically think people of Indian descent like myself are misogynists. Misogyny is the supreme crime of a people perceived as other, as different. If you dare to think of women differently, you are a criminal. Yes, misogynists exist. Yes, it is a problem. But just because someone does not support your politics and representation of women (the capitalist mantra that women have to work to be individuals, for instance), does not make them a woman-hater. Have some sense.

Race & Leavers: Anything but Coconut? 17.07.2022

Homi Bhaba has described how imitation of the whites in power by ethnic minorities is perceived as threatening by both whites and ethnic minorities (both feel they are losing their identity and power). However, why is there no word that describes such an ethnic minority imitator of the white powerful? Someone who forsakes their ancestor's culture, language, perspective, customs, practices, etc. in favour of all those things in white and seen as more valuable (i.e. so-called 'assimilation' or 'integration')? This forsaking is, of course, achieved through cultural duress by the whites, who have historically been on a mission to destroy alternative cultures and perspectives. The old word was 'coconut', someone brown outside by not inside. However, this word is now seen as a racist slur. So what's the right word for this concept now? And why don't we have it in the English language?

Inside the Coconut Factory: The Quantum Chromatic Disruption Machine, the Creation of Whiteness and the Erasure of Racial Identity

10.03.2018

James Campbell, *Boyface and the Quantum Chromatic Disruption Machine*, St Ives: Hodder & Stoughton, 2014

They had a word for it when I was younger, although I have never heard anyone using this word in later life. The word was a “coconut”. A coconut was someone who looked brown on the outside but was completely white and hollow on the inside. This person was divested of their racial identity. The term was an insult for anyone with brown skin. When we were children and we used the word, we very rarely wondered why a coconut was a coconut. Children are not very philosophical sometimes. As an adult, one can investigate the concept of the coconut without using the offensive term if one chooses to. Such a person would be, to use the political euphemisms of the time, “integrated”. Let us retain the original term for our own purposes, however. A coconut can be one for any number of reasons. Their parents may have been at work all the time so that the elders could not pass on culture and language. The coconut may hate his own roots and identity so much that he can only love white culture and white people. Mature consideration will show that all of these ideas are linked. A coconut is not born a coconut. A coconut, to paraphrase Simone Beauvoir, is made into a coconut. There is a vast apparatus to make coconuts into coconuts. There is the existence of the coconut factory.

I have been reading my nephew's books this whole week. The one work of fiction that he had in his school bag is *Boyface and the Quantum Chromatic Disruption Machine* by James Campbell. This slender volume is, I contend, an example of the operations of the coconut factory which are made apparent to the child reader so that he can become just another worker in the factory, or just another coconut.

Boyface's parents in the novel are stripemongers. These stripemongers remove the stripes of zebras using the Quantum Chromatic Disruption machine and then sell on the animals as ponies to families in place called Stoddenage-on-Sea which is just another place, we assume, in England. It is the colours that are important. The stripemongers take out all the blackness from a zebra's skin so that it is left as a completely white animal. It is only when the stripemongers have achieved perfect whiteness that the immigrant animals can become accepted into the white community. It is indicative that the stripemongers come from a place called Tropical Antartica. This fictional place, we assume, is covered with snow and is a place of whiteness. The stripemongers are imposing their whitewashed reality onto all things and all places.

The Quantum Chromatic Disruption machine is, then, our coconut factory. It disrupts colour and through colour, it disrupts racial identity. The wild African zebra is made into a tame pet through its operations. The racial connotations are clear: through the disruption of racial identity and ideas of whiteness, one can make immigrant peoples ("wild animals") into docile slaves.

The plot of the novel shows how the racist agenda of the stripemonger is passed from father to son and shows how the coconut factory is passed on from generation to generation or transmitted throughout society. When the son has assumed the correct age for becoming a stripemonger, at the age of ten, he enters the coconut factory. Once again, he has a racially charged mission to perform. He is to remove the stripes and therefore the blackness from five “irritable” tigers from Bengal. The young racist makes the heartfelt attempt to erase blackness and difference from the world and is therefore joyfully accepted as a stripemonger by his father and all in a celebratory moment of Nazi ecstasy. The message to children therefore becomes clear. The initiatory rite of passage in this society is to work in making coconuts, in erasing difference, in treating brown skinned people like wild animals to be tamed and controlled, subjugated. The Bengal tigers are “irritable” because they perceived as dangerous to the mission of the whitewasher, deadly examples of difference.

The novel by James Campbell is just one of many in which one sees the operations of the coconut factory. Indeed, one could say, after having surveyed the work of contemporary children’s authors such as David Walliams, Laura Wood (author of the Poppy Pym series), Philip Reeve’s Railhead series and other such works, that the prime aim of children’s fiction in our time is to operationalise and institute the coconut factory into the fabric of things. As Michel Foucault contended, racist strategies have been central to our contemporary existence and the Quantum Chromatic Disruption Machine is just another instance of this reality in our fiction and in our “entertainment” for our children. These are not just isolated works of fiction without any relevance to things as they are. The erasure of racial identity and the

destruction of difference is not just a fictional reality but also a very real one. Our coconuts walk around in England, hating themselves and their roots and only capable of loving whiteness. They are not a problem for the majority white society. These people are, to use the political euphemisms of our time, “integrated”. And here, in fiction, we have contemporary England and the brown skinned Englishman’s lot on a plate.

Racism and the Park Bench: When Comedy Turns Into Reality

30.05.17

I watched some comedy movies over the weekend called “Paul Blart: Mall Cop” and its sequel. They are the story of a loser security guard who manages to save the day when professionals such as the police can’t. One of the scenes was particularly unfunny. A beautiful Hispanic woman accidentally touches the white security guard’s hand when she is handing him something as hotel manager. The white man contrives to make the scene completely awkward. He suggests that the Hispanic woman is making advances on him and then coldly and ruthlessly rejects her advances, leaving her mortified with embarrassment and confusion. He paints her as a desperate loser. Funnily enough, this little comedy scene which I watched just a few days ago in an American film happened today in London, England. Even weirder was the fact that I was the Hispanic woman.

Picture the scene: a crowded London park. A few of the benches are in the sun, however most of the seats are taken up. I walk up to a bench in the sun on which two white women are sitting. There is some space to one side. I politely ask the white woman near the empty space if she minds if I sit down. She stares at me for a few seconds and then says that she does mind. She does not offer any explanation such as there is

someone else sitting there: it is apparent that she is not willing to let me sit down. She just doesn't want to share the bench. She doesn't care that there aren't any other benches in the sun, that the park is crowded, that the bench is obviously a superior seat to sitting on the grass.

The usual objections that I am reading racism into the situation will be raised at this point. As per usual, it will be suggested that it was wrong of me to ask the woman if I could sit down on the bench. The objector will say that the woman could have been saying no for any other reason, perhaps on the basis that I am a young man, etc. They may blame the woman for being selfish and inconsiderate. I will not bother replying to these objections as the objector clearly did not see the expression on the woman's face as she surveyed my face for those seconds before she spoke, or the rude tone of her voice when she did speak to me, a rudeness that was imbued with incredulity, as though I had no right to even ask if I could sit down next to her.

Now, how does this scene in real life relate to the scene in the movie? Here we have a conventional situation. I, the ethnic minority man, used a conventional phrase and asked the woman if she minded if I sat down next to her. The point of that conventional phrase is that it is purely rhetorical. In the particular situation of a sunny day and a crowded park, unless the woman has a good reason, such as someone else is going

to sit there, she shouldn't refuse the questioner. This is the convention. However, by refusing, without offering any reason, the white woman deliberately made the situation awkward. She deliberately constructed the question as an unwanted advance on her own person, rather than the bench which was free to all. The intent behind the rejection was to try and make me feel as embarrassed and confused as the woman could possibly make me. After all, first there was the aggressive look of disgust in my face and towards my person, and then there was the brusque rejection, based not in any reason or excuse, but in aggressive assertion. Like the Hispanic woman in the movie, I was rejected by a white person and made to feel that I was a loathsome person for having tried to intrude upon her person. An exchange in public space that would otherwise have been completely normal was made into a fantasy scenario in which I was some sort of lecher and pervert who had been thwarted from executing my wicked designs. The point of the little ceremony was hubris in its original ancient Greek sense: to make another person feel inferior and degraded so that the oppressor can feel superior and exalted, a hero in their tale. My desire to sit down was constructed as the desire of a rapist and an intruder.

Why have I written up my experience? I thought about forgetting about it and not commenting upon it. I know that the reader of this piece will side with the white woman instead of me, the ethnic minority man. She is more believable than

me because we live in a white majority society. However, I then reminded myself that it is only my duty to record my own truth. I know that I am right. I saw the expression of the white woman's face as she scrutinised my features and I heard the tone of her voice when she spoke to me. I rely on my own senses rather than the automatic and instinctive defensiveness of the white majority whenever they try to lay claim and stewardship of a racist situation to protect their own. And I also wanted to relay the story of the park bench because it is a small but exact metaphor of the reality of the ethnic minority experience in London which everyone passes over as though it were somehow a natural part of reality.

The reader will wonder what the conclusion of the story was. I had had to wake up early in the morning to go to a hospital appointment and had had a long and tiresome day. Instead of telling the woman off and escalating the scene, expending useless energy on a useless and inconsequential person, I decided not to trouble myself with her racism. I went to another bench and asked a Chinese woman if she minded if I sat next to her, which, of course, she didn't.

On The Order of the White Man, Racism, Fights and The Pleasure of Revenge When I was at School

12.10.16

A boy hit my nephew every day at primary school a few weeks ago. We only found out because another boy from his class told us. We complained to the teacher and she didn't do anything. Then we complained to the head teacher. Again, no action was taken. So, I took my nephew aside and told him something. I told him to beat up the boy if he tried it again and make sure that it didn't happen again, because it is completely justified to defend yourself when attacked.

It is a pathetic commonplace that fighting is an uncivilised form of behaviour. They (usually) try to root it out in schools. This attitude stems from a deep rooted cowardice and draws on Christian teachings to turn the other cheek and is historically located in the legal prohibition of forms of duelling in the modern period. The only duelling that is permissible, say the courts, is the duelling of the lawyers (middle class white men, as a general rule). And the only violence that is permitted, says the state, is the violence that we sanction. You can even kill when we say so, they say (even when they kill babies and women it is completely justified – this is the law).

Of course, if I were to suggest that I have been in fights as an adult over racist incidents, then I would possibly get into trouble with the authorities. So, instead, I want to talk about racism and some fights at school and compare them with an incident in which the White Man took charge of the situation and managed it instead of letting things get resolved in a different manner in order to illuminate some of the points I will make.

I will begin with a little anecdote. When I was in Primary school, there was a particularly noxious rich boy with brown hair in curtains called Phillip. Instead of calling me by my real name, Phillip began taunting me by calling me a different name, Sanjay. This was a character in Eastenders at the time, I believe. Of course, I knew that Phillip was mocking me, although I wasn't sure about what exactly it meant. He was trying to destroy the name that my parents had given me as a gift. The other children laughed. To them, it was funny. They were on Phillip's side. Why not? I was the minority. There were only a few other children with brown skin in the school. I swallowed my anger in the classroom with a silent glare and waited to resolve the issue on my own after school.

However, after school, I met my little brother and found out that Phillip had been mocking him too. It was now apparent that Phillip was a racist. So, we found Phillip and we administered the teaching of the body to him. In short, we had

our brutal revenge. Of course, Phillip could never tell anyone that some brown children of immigrants had beaten him up, so nothing happened as a consequence. Revenge was sweet. Tupac Shakur has said that “revenge is the sweetest joy next to getting pussy”. And revenge is sweet because in revenge we are the law. We are in control of our situation. Our revenge teaches a lesson. We are the masters of truth and law and justice in our revenge, not the victims which the oppressor wishes to make us. We are self-determining agents.

I want to compare this incident from primary school with one in secondary school when I was personally insulted, along with others, in a classroom environment. It was a history lesson with the most boring man in the world. We were learning about the British Raj. Suddenly, a boy from the back of the class directed a comment at the few of us in the class with brown skin: “Ha, we used to own you!” I forget the name of the boy. At once, I felt intensely hurt and angry and I looked to the teacher for justice. Where was my justice? There was no justice that day. The White Man didn’t tell the boy off. He didn’t explain why it was wrong to call us slaves and property. He didn’t object to the malicious exultation of the boy from his own race. Instead, he smirked and carried on the lesson. I still remember that smirk. The master of the truth and justice in the form of the White Man could not give us and me our justice. Before him, we had not voice, status or sympathy. Before him, our conflicts meant nothing. It was at that precise

moment that I think I decided that I didn't want to carry on studying history at that school.

I don't think I need to spell out the point of this little comparison, but I will do so anyway. The White Man wishes the brown man to trust him and his structures of truth, law and justice without giving anything to trust in. From school to adulthood, time and time again, that system which pretends that it delivers universal justice fails us. And yet, we are still expected to give our trust to that system. We are expected to come to it with our problems and accept the solutions of the White Man, with his pretended neutrality. We are to become passive spectators of our own destinies as they are decided by the white man, whether or not they are right for us. And the fool will keep coming back, whereas the wise man will say 'no more' and he will take the law into his own hands and make that law his own. Civilisation is not giving up conflicts to another. Civilisation is fighting for your own ground, whatever form that fighting takes. The mythic rule of the law is one that is structurally unjust. It is the rule of the oppressor.

Killing for The Throne: The State and Black and White Politics in the World of the Black Panther Movie

02.03.2018

SPOILER ALERT

Why do terrorists kill innocent civilians? It's because they can't directly challenge the state. Around the people and the institutions of the state there are policemen, security guards, involved security protocols, safety bunkers, any amount of paraphernalia which all combine to make the state and its people impregnable and untouchable. The only way that they can be touched is through the use of nuclear missiles which are controlled only by other states. Thus, violence against the state can only come from another state, not any other competitor.

What would a world look like in which another competitor could challenge the state and its people directly, even challenge the prime figure of authority and their claim for legitimacy? The fictional world of Wakanda, the home of the Marvel superhero, the Black Panther is such a place. Yesterday, because my nephews wanted to watch the movie, I went to watch it too. This politically engaged movie engaged with a topic that is the subject of my first published academic article and the original subject of my PhD thesis: violence.

In Wakanda, the home of the Black Panther, kingship is decided in a ceremonial or ritual fight. Anyone who is of the royal blood can challenge for kingship. The foundations of

Wakandan society are therefore in violence as the source of authority and legitimacy. Power stems from physical prowess. To attain kingship, one can become a killer or force the opponent to yield. The recipient of the throne is the one who exerts superior violence and power of one over another.

In the western imagination, this fictional ritual contest which intuitively, if not actually, seems different to how things are run in Western countries (since the power of the state is ultimately based in the monopoly on coercive violence) leads to the perceived disruption of the state and the world order. The villain of the piece, Erik Stevens, an outsider who has been raised outside of the traditions and culture of Wakanda, is able to successfully claim the throne and become king. His plan is to send the advanced military technology of the Wakandan people to the oppressed people of the world so that they can rule over their oppressors. The assumption is that these oppressed groups are black although the oppressed people are not explicitly shown, rather they are linked with Erik Steven's upbringing in a ghetto area of Brooklyn.

While Erik Stevens is quite obviously the bad guy because he is violent, indeed his nickname is "Killmonger", violence is not always bad in the film. When violence comes from the state of Wakanda then it is perfectly justified. Indeed, one is meant to celebrate the violence of the Wakandan state. Where Erik Stevens wounds the king, T'Challa (The Black Panther), we are shown the horrified faces of his mother, sister and lover. Where T'Challa kills Erick Stevens, we are supposed to see this as a moment of triumph. Thus, even though violence is held to be wrong, it is only when it does not come from the state and the rightful transmission of kingly authority. It is

only when an outsider and a perceived competitor to the state uses violence to counter the state and the status quo and the ultimate conservatism of the institutions of the state that violence is deemed wrong. Thus we see at work the hypocrisy of the state and those who support it, since the state is the origin of mass genocide and mass killings, legal executions, the killing of black people by white policeman and foetal genocide, all of which are seen as perfectly valid since these acts of violence are committed by the state.

How is race implicated in constructions of valid and legitimate violence versus invalid and illegitimate acts of violence in the movie? The supposed villain of the piece, Erik Stevens, kills a white man, a South African. The villain of the piece wants the oppressed, the assumed black people to arm themselves against their oppressors, who we assume are white (none of this is explicitly stated). The hero of the piece, on the other hand, T'Challa (The Black Panther) in a quite explicit comparison, saves the life of the only other white person in the film. Not only does he save him, but this white C.I.A. agent is actually armed by the Wakandan people to kill black people. There is therefore a parallel in the movie: just as violence against the state is prohibited, so violence against the white man is prohibited. They both occupy the same symbolic space of the untouchable, that which is too prestigious and important to warrant any real competitor. Thus one sees that the state is implicitly white just as the white man is implicitly the state.

Race is further implicated in constructions of violence. If one observes the movie as a whole, one is struck by how firmly it upholds the idea of black upon black violence. Constantly,

black people are fighting against other black people and black people are killing other black people. The only real exception to the rule is where the villain kills a white person (a South African who is therefore associated with apartheid and oppression). But he is, of course, the villain. The overall implication of the movie is that black lives don't matter: you are a hero if you save a white life, not a black life, even if you kill other black people.

One further observation will show another racist construction in the violence. The white men, the C.I.A. agent and the South African use guns and planes to commit violent acts. Their violence is abstract and non-bodily since it comes from "advanced" technology. On the other hand, the black people commit violent acts which come more directly from the body through the use of traditional weaponry and bodily combat. Black violence is therefore bodily and more "primitive" and relies on force. White violence, like the flying and shooting of the white American C.I.A. agent, relies on science and technology or "thought".

Touted as a black film by a black director and with a black lead and a largely black cast, The Black Panther film is seen as symbolic of the new form of politics and political representation in Western culture. Like the state and the white man of the film, the film sees itself as impregnable to criticism because it is saved by a coating of "reverse-racism". To see anything wrong in the film is to fly in the face of the new puritanical political correctness and reveal oneself as a racist. Yet if one looks, not deeply, but literally at things, one sees that the film is itself the product of a racist outlook on all things and of a degraded and hypocritical modernity in which

violence is only wrong when it challenges the powers that are and the biggest monster on the planet, the modern-day state. As I watched the movie, one comparison kept on coming to my mind. I am talking of the black panther salute at the Olympics. Those winners on the podium who raised their black gloved hands defied the supposed universality of the modern nation by putting their race and their identity first. They put politics before medals and resistance before adulation. What a degradation in thought and culture that the children in our generation will associate the name of the black panther with the fictional puppet instead of the true hero, the real black panther.

Go Back Home, Darkie: The Racial Politics of the Movie “Lion” and the “Best Supporting Actor” Award

16.02.16

Dev Patel is possibly the most famous male British Asian actor. While he doesn't star in big budget movies, he gets leading roles in films. He has championed British Asian causes. He has been a vocal critic of the lack of diversity in Hollywood. He has pointed out that Asian men aren't offered any substantial roles. Recently, Dev Patel won “Best Supporting Actor” at the BAFTAs for his role in the movie “Lion”. He has also been nominated in the same category for the Oscars. In this short piece, I want to state why I, a British Asian male, will not celebrate his success. I will point out the devaluation strategy directed at British Asian heroes in the category of the award. I will then go on to point out that the movie gives out the wrong message to British Asian men and Indian ethnicity males from Western countries.

Firstly, I want to point out the devaluation strategy in the category of award. Why is Dev Patel being awarded and nominated for “Best Supporting Actor” when he is clearly the leading actor in the movie? There have been a number of interpretations for this categorisation. People have pointed out that Nicole Kidman is also nominated in the same category when she is the leading actress in the movie. They say that the category is easier to win.

I disagree with these interpretations. No category in acting is easier to win than any other. The reason that Dev Patel is relegated to supporting actor in a movie in which he is clearly the lead is because of his race. In the West, a British Asian man cannot be a hero. Can you think of one single movie where there has been a Western born man of Indian descent that is the hero in a serious movie? There aren't any. The West cannot put an Indian descent man in the category of a hero. Even when they made a film about Mahatma Gandhi, he was played by a white man. In "Life of Pi", the Indian descent man is only accepted as hero when is abstracted from society and culture. He can only exist where there is nature. Because the West devalues Indian descent men, the West cannot conceive of them as role models. It is therefore impossible for Dev Patel to be put into the category for "Best Actor". He is necessarily relegated to the role of "Best Supporting Actor" in a movie in which he is clearly the lead actor. Of course, to cover over this strategy of devaluation, it therefore becomes impossible to nominate Kidman as a lead actor. The gross unfairness of the categorisation would therefore become visible.

The category of the award therefore indicates the devaluation of Indian descent men in Western countries. We are not allowed to be seen as heroes or role models. We are not granted proper personhood in representation and in film.

The movie “Lion” in which an Indian descent man stars also gives out the wrong message to British Asian men and Indian ethnicity males from Western countries. The movie is about an Indian descent man leaving the Western country in which he was raised and going back to India. What is problematic about this? It is experience that tells. I was brought up in a predominantly white area. As a result, I often heard the following words: Go Back Home. I could be walking in the high street with my brother and someone would shout them at us. They weren’t expressed as politely. I have heard these words numerous times in my life. If one criticises something in the country, one is told to go back home then. The movie is a literal enactment of the racist’s desire that Indian descent go back home. In the movie, the Indian descent man inflicts this banishment upon himself. The closing scene of the movie is when he is back in India, where the fantasy of the racist is achieved.

The message of the movie “Lion” is that Indian descent men have no place in the West. Their identity is tied to geography. The movie literalises the desire of the racists to remove Indian descent men from their countries. The movie literalises the achievement of no racial mixing. This self-imposed mission of the Indian descent male to go back home is shown as heroic instead of being revealed as the ultimate cowardice. The message that should have been given is that the Indian descent man should stay in the country in which he was raised in and fight.

Why has Dev Patel acted in this film? It is because of ignorance. It is a common strategy in ethnic minority cultures to talk about “traitors”. If someone does something that one does not agree with, they are called “traitors”. However, Dev Patel is not a “traitor”. He is ignorant. He is a dupe. The dupe works for someone in their game. The dupe is exploited. The dupe is a victim. Dev Patel’s award and nominations for “Best Supporting Actor” are reflective of the racial politics in the Western film industry. They are not the cause for celebration. They are sobering reminders of the position of Indian descent men in the West. The day when there is an Indian descent hero in a worthy filmic vehicle in the West remains a fantasy of the Indian descent male.

29.04.2018 - Being Spat on by Racists in the Local Park, an Encounter with the Police, War Mode, and Being an Uninvited Guest at a Wedding

I spent the morning teaching my nephew some English. He was working on sorting out differences and similarities between groups of words. The exercise was to find a word that was the odd one out. You would have words like 'muddle' and 'jumble' and then one which meant something similar but was slightly different like 'chaotic'. He managed the first ones okay but struggled on the bigger words as he wasn't too good with the meanings, not being much of a reader. The next exercise was to put jumbled up sentences into correct order and work out what the extra word is. Here's an example for the reader which I am making up just now:

garden green the kitchen there a tree is in the opposite puddle

It was cold today, so I decided to walk back to my home, a journey which takes about an hour. One of the first stops is the local park. My brother had just given me some headphones and I was admiring the music quality and the scenery around me. There is a beautiful avenue of trees and I was gazing up at the branches, relishing the play of the light on the leaves. A group of three black youths who were dressed all in black cycled past me and then, suddenly, turned

around and came directly in front of me. In what seemed like an instant, one of them spat red coloured liquid all over my white cardigan which was visible through my unzipped jacket. It took a moment to register what happened. Just a single moment. And then, I turned around, took off my headphones and my glasses and chased after the black youth who was now behind me. I almost caught him. If I wasn't busy taking off the headphones and the glasses, I could have got him. He escaped by the skin of his teeth. He was very lucky that he did. If I had caught him, there was no knowing what would have happened to him. I had ran quite a distance after him and as he cycled away, one of his sidekicks cautiously came in the vicinity, although he was standing out of reach of me (they had realised that I was pretty fast when it came down to it). When I saw him, I immediately began shouting at him. I won't write down what I said when my blood was up. The first thing you learn when you write is that you must not say anything that can be used against you. The youth looked at me, spat out some racist remarks about Asians and told me that I was crazy. I walked away, but not without looking behind me at intervals, to make sure that no one was following me.

As I came out of the park, with my blood still up, I saw a police car that was stuck in traffic. Without really thinking about anything, I went up to it and knocked on the window. I told the policeman what happened and they brought the car to a stop at the bus stop to take down my incident report. I didn't really want to give the policemen my personal contact details

but what brought the reality of the incident home was when one of them asked me if I was going to bring charges of assault. I told him that the assaulters were just kids (I thought they were in their late teens or early twenties), although the policeman said that they weren't and should know better. I said that I just wanted the police to have a word with them if they caught them and nothing any more serious than that. After all, even though those black youths were assholes, they still had their whole future in front of them.

There was still the majority of the hour walk back home which gave me time to quietly fume and go over the incident in my mind. Those youths had done their "drive-by" spitting on the weekend. They were clearly out to ruin someone's day. Was I going to let them ruin my day? But how can you not think about something like that when it happens to you? Think of the act like a performance in a public place, the park. Those youths had picked on me because I was an Asian, even though they were black themselves, and by myself, a minority. The weapon that they had used had a red colour, like blood. They were clearly out to intimidate Asian people, who are often ranked lower than black people on the scale of the racists, and make them think about blood and violence, as though they had been physically attacked. The act was planned. They were in a group of three and on bikes so that they could have an easy escape and their victims would have no defence or method of retaliation. In fact, I was lucky that it had just been

some sort of drink. It could have easily been acid or a violent attack.

What was worth dwelling on was the fact that I had not been intimidated. I had immediately pursued the perpetrator and the two sidekicks had cycled off, leaving him on his own. The youth and his sidekicks had been intimidated in his own turn by an angry Asian man. Three people had become scared of what would happen to them by the hand of just one man. The little racist performance was a complete farce and failure.

Why was I not intimidated? Because I am a Punjabi man. Punjabi men come from the warrior culture. The religions that I have been raised in are the religions of the warrior. I have written about how the warrior culture in the Mahabharata was the prime influence on my childhood. Sikhism is also the religion of the warrior. It is the religious duty of a Sikh man to fight in the name of justice and that is why our community is called the community of tigers. I have been taught martial arts, been brought up on samurai and martial arts films. As a Punjabi man I fear no man. The teaching has been ingrained in me: The sacrifice has always been of the goat, not the tiger. Awake! Arise! Become a tiger!

There was also an intense and sudden feeling that came upon me when I saw my white cardigan doused with the red liquid.

You could call it blood lust. You could call it killer instinct or war mode. When I saw that sight, there was no longer any thinking. There was just action. The Samurai favoured zen as their teaching because in zen, you only live in the moment. There is no conscious thought. When war mode was activated, there was only adrenalin and testosterone. My body had mentally and physically transformed into just one identity: that of the warrior, that of the killer. As I said, it was lucky that the youth didn't come into my reach. Something awful would have happened because there was an atom bomb inside me.

It is a sad thing, but that is not the only time that such a thing has happened to me in the park or in my own local area. I have written about walking home one time in winter and a coward threw an iceball at the back of my head in the night time. Similarly, a group of black youths threw apples and other things at me when I climbed a tree in Hyde park. When I was younger, I didn't know that black people could be racist against Asian people. Weren't they just like us? Hadn't they been subjected to the same issues? But my period of innocence is a long time away now. Almost as soon as I moved to East London, I found out that they could be just as racist as racist white people. Ironically, racism has an in built equality for everyone, irrespective of what race they are. Of course, when I was younger, I didn't reflect on the fact that Asian people can be racist when it comes to black people, too.

Well, such is the ugliness of this world. It is just another racist act which I have had to swallow, but it is a reminder of exactly what we are fighting against in this culture and society. There are nicer things in life. In fact, the little performance in the park today stands in contrast to one from yesterday. I was walking home and taking a detour in the park when I saw a beautiful bride with a groom in their wedding clothes. They were an Eastern European couple and the woman had blonde hair and a dazzling white dress. People often come in our beautiful park, which is romantically called Valentine's Park, for wedding photographs. I have seen many weddings in the past, with all the different groups in our society represented. They often come with beautiful brides and bridesmaids and are events that I look forward to, for who would not want to see flowers among the flowers? I was an uninvited guest at someone's wedding, someone that could savour the spectacle and look upon the young dream of love. It was a brilliant feeling and the highlight of my day.

25.03.2018 - The White Woman's Tantrum

I want to write about a few experiences I have had this week. The first one is a little situation which is all too typical nowadays and which was played out before my own eyes. I was waiting in the doctor's office for a routine annual appointment because I am on various preventative medicines, including one for a deficiency in my thyroid. It is nothing very serious although it can lead to systemic problems in the body if the dosage of replacement hormone is incorrect. The waiting room was packed with British Asian women at that time of day (I have written elsewhere that Bangladeshi and Pakistani descent women appear to get sick the most in this country of ours, if the study that I read is a valid study into the matter, which I assume that it is without the correct training in medical statistics). However, there was one middle aged white woman with her teenage son that was sitting there. Almost as soon as I sat down, she got up and started complaining to the Asian receptionist. She said that she had been waiting there for forty minutes with her autistic son. The receptionist was dealing with an elderly white woman that had just come in after me with her son. The complaining white woman then threw a tantrum. She said that the doctor's waiting room, which was full of Asian people who could all, it seemed, be abused at the same time, was like "downtown Calcutta". The white man told the white woman that she was disturbing everyone, including his poor frail mother, who was ninety-seven years old. The complaining white woman, who it turned

out had come to the GP without an appointment on the off chance that someone might see her, despite the fact that our GP in East London is always super busy and it is even hard going to book an appointment a week in advance, began arguing with the white man. She told off the Asian receptionist some more and then proclaimed that this GP “didn’t care about white people”. Then, she stormed off, taking her son.

As I sat there in the waiting room, which I dislike going to precisely because of regular scenes like this, I reflected on this awful woman, who even the white man was now calling a racist. First of all, she was selfish. Her autistic son hadn’t got any treatment because his mother couldn’t sit still and wait to be slotted in. What, after all, was forty minutes of a wait without an appointment? It was nothing. Secondly, this whinging white woman believed in her own privilege so much that despite seeing that the surgery was fully booked, she thought that she was entitled to immediate care for her son (who did not appear to be in a critical condition). What was the reason for this curious sense of entitlement? I don’t think it is too far-fetched to look at her language and her own invocation of racial prejudice to arrive at an answer: she really believed that because she was white she was entitled to immediate attention over the Asian people that had booked appointments. The lack of consideration was also unbelievable: here we had a room of sick people that had to be subjected to this drama when they had to wait around to be

seen at the doctor's. Even mobile phones are not allowed there because they might disturb people.

It is little scenes like this, which are constantly played out in this area, which grate on the nerves and insistently intrude on everyday events. People often wonder why I am angry all the time. It is because this is the kind of stuff that I am subjected to almost every day. It could be a queue at a shop, leisure centre or even in the middle of the street. However, I am not a racist. It is not just selfish, entitled and inconsiderate white people that get on my nerves. As I have mentioned before, the majority of people that I know and talk to regularly are Indian. The majority of people that get on my nerves are therefore not white people, who only come passingly into my life for a few moments, but Indian people.

23.04.2018 - Shakespeare and the Justice of the Oppressed

Abstract: Violence and justice are linked. Our culture teaches oppressed groups in our society that violence is the only viable means available to them to resist injustice. These lessons are evident in Shakespeare's plays in which oppressed characters always demand justice in bodily terms and in horrific acts against the bodies of oppressors. Hamlet is just one example.

Keywords: Violence, Justice, Law, Shakespeare, Hamlet, Nasim Aghdam, Cultural Brainwashing

A recent news item that caught my eye was the case of the YouTube Killer, Nasim Aghdam. The woman in question, now known as a killer, was someone that cared passionately about justice. As the Guardian stated, she “used social media to fight for justice on a planet ‘full of diseases’” (<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/apr/04/youtube-shooting-suspect-nasim-aghdam-profile>). Nasim had been a gentle person from her childhood. In an interview, her father reflected on how out of character her crime was. He told the Bay Area News Group that “his daughter was a vegan activist and animal lover who as a youngster would not even kill ants in the family home, instead using paper to move them to the back yard” (<https://www.theguardian.com/us->

[news/2018/apr/04/youtube-shooting-suspect-nasim-aghdam-profile](https://www.foxnews.com/2018/apr/04/youtube-shooting-suspect-nasim-aghdam-profile)). What led a gentle woman that was committed to justice to such a violent conclusion?

Violence and justice. Violence and justice. Are these two things intimately connected? Or was Nasim's final act just a random event? For the armchair theorist, a theorist who moreover has no time to pursue his many and diverse interests, everything has to remain at the level of speculation. My speculation is that Nasim was one of the oppressed. She was an Iranian immigrant in a country that is thoroughly and systematically afflicted with racism. She had seen how the human race treated our animal brothers and sisters who she felt an honest kinship with. What the immigrant suffers, what the lover of nature must suffer in this world of iniquity and injustice. Have you ever stayed up all night wondering where your justice is? Have you ever cried in your heart of hearts for justice, knowing that it will never come? As Nasim wrote, "I live on a planet that is full of injustice". The justice that she was led to, in the form of violence, was the justice of the oppressed. Already, the reader is enraged. How can one call a random killing an act of justice, like the killer framed it? How can one speak of the justice of the oppressed as a form of justice, hence giving it some sort of validity and legitimacy? What evidence do I base this seemingly bizarre and arbitrary claim upon, that Nasim's act was an act of the justice of the oppressed? The evidence is in Shakespeare's plays.

There is a stock type character in the Shakespeare play, a Nasim, one of the oppressed that demands justice in the form of terrible violence. In the Merchant of Venice, the stock type is a Jew called Shylock. Because of the indignities and hate he has to face in a Christian country, Shylock demands his pound of flesh from one of his oppressors. Shylock is not alone. Tamora, the Queen of the Goths, who is captured in war as a trophy, also demands justice and exacts a systematic plan of revenge against her oppressors. Her wrath is terrible indeed and involves murder, rape and mutilation. This stock type, the immigrant, the oppressed that is out for a violent justice exists in the Western imagination even today. I have written at length about one such character in the recent Black Panther movie, who is called “Killmonger” to emphasise his link with violence. The Killmonger, an immigrant, wishes to arm the oppressed against the oppressors and is therefore treated like a supervillain.

Why does the oppressed victim pursue a campaign of horrific violence against their oppressors? It may seem natural to link violence and revenge in ideas about “instincts” and “natural aggression” but this would be to obscure the cultural link of meaning between them. Moreover, such ideas obscure the fact that the oppressed have had to endure horrific suffering themselves to become what they have become. The reader of this piece has never seen the illusion of justice torn to pieces before their eyes and realized their awful impotency in this world of injustice. That illusion of justice, which gives

meaning to the life of those that live in a thoroughly unjust world is what makes life bearable. When it is gone and replaced by harsh and punishing truth, how does one bear life? What illusion can give meaning and value to life again?

What gives meaning and value to the life of the oppressed is to be revenged. The brutal mental wounds that they have to bear are to be resolved in an act against the body of the oppressor. The oppressed know that they cannot attack the mind of the oppressor. The mind of the oppressor is blind to the justice of the oppressed and to their fury. This mind, the mind of the oppressor, is moreover, a mind shared by the entirety of culture and society. It sits there like an all-powerful Christian god at the heart of everything. It is in the so-called laws and justice of the time, the art of the time, in the literature of the time, in the music of the time, in the commercial transactions and economy of the time, in the international relations of the time and in every act and thought in this culture and society. For the oppressed, there is only one method to attack the oppressor. It is the body. And this is why the justice of the oppressed is inextricably tied to the body.

The greatest play of Shakespeare is about this same idea. Hamlet is one of the oppressed. He has to live as subject to someone who has killed his father. Hamlet knows that the only way that he can achieve justice is to kill his oppressor in a violent act. There is no other alternative. Hamlet doesn't use

poison or any subtle method against his oppressor, although he thinks of it. He doesn't raise a revolution against Claudius, his uncle and usurper. The justice of the oppressed can only be expressed in violent form against the body of the oppressed. This is the ultimate lesson and finale of the play. Shakespeare has taught us that the justice of the oppressed can only take a certain form which allows no exceptions.

When the people judge someone like Nasim then, a woman who loved justice, and write their biased accounts about what led her to her act, when the culture that claims that Shakespeare is some sort of human god, I will always say the same thing. The oppressed have only acted according to the rules which this culture and society has put in place. They have aimed for the only justice which we have accorded them, which is the justice of the oppressed. These people are acting in a framework of thought and action which this culture and society have given them, a framework which is specially intended for them and which has been taught to them even before they were born. As immigrants and oppressed people, they have been taught that they can only express their rage in terms of the body and against bodies. They have not been allowed into the rules that govern thought, only the rules that govern the body and violence. It is this culture and this society that is ultimately at fault. It is Shakespeare that it is at fault. It is the oppressor that is at fault, not the oppressed. A woman that could not hurt an ant can become a cold blooded murderer because of a lifetime of suggestion and

brainwashing in Western culture. And then, this victim, this same woman, can be shown as an example of what immigrants are like in this same culture, as just another example of the same thing. Such is the hypocrisy, malice and deviousness of the culture that we live in, and its ultimate injustice.

25.04.2018 – Internalising Stereotypes: Suggested Identities, Individuality and Free Choice

Abstract: Oppressed groups in our society internalise negative constructions of identity and learned sets of behaviours transmitted in media which override personal responsibility and individuality. They do this because they are required to exhibit such identities and behaviours on the public stage because of the constraints imposed upon them by culture.

Keywords: Stereotypes, Cultural Brainwashing, Free Will, Personal Responsibility, Negative expectations

Elaboration. Clarification. Evidence.

Speculation, even that of the armchair theorist, has to be sustained by the holy trio I have just cited. The last time I wrote, the topic was how the justice of the oppressed has been constructed as inevitably having a violent and bodily conclusion. The argument that I made was that the identity of the violent individual and even the framework of action of this individual have been transmitted across Western culture and time as a model for the behaviour and personhood of oppressed groups in our society. This is a model which they turn to in order to construct ideas of justice and individuality and to deal with injustice in this society since it is conceived of as “their own justice”, a justice that is peculiar to them and

in which constructions of personhood and difference are inherent. Another reason why they turn to these models for identity and action is because they have been systematically denied any other form of expression in this society so that they cannot become factors in public thought, politics and in the apportioning of power.

There is a big assumption in the argument that I made. Instead of talking about individual responsibility, consciousness and so on, I cited the phrase “cultural brainwashing” in the key terms at the start of the speculations. I argued that individuals take up the identity and framework of action evident in the plays of Shakespeare and such productions as the recent Black Panther movie because they have been insidiously insinuated to them from the time before they have even been born.

Why have I assumed that the identity of the violent avenger is suggested to oppressed individuals and can override conventional notions of individuality, free will, conscious choice and personhood? Is there any proof of this? Just because something is there in Shakespeare and the Black Panther movie, and a similar thing seems to happen in real life, does that prove that my speculations are correct?

While I was pondering whether fiction can be invoked to prove something that happens in real life, I thought I would

make a few notes on the topic of suggested identity and the internalisation of stereotypes and how both relate to free will, choice and conscious thought. To introduce the topic, I want to write about a recent change in advertising standards which you can read about here - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-40638343>

As the BBC writes, the Advertising Standards Authority have set out a mission statement to “crack down on ads that feature stereotypical gender roles.” There were particularly aggravating examples that were cited:

One example was an advert for Aptamil baby milk formula that showed girls growing up to be ballerinas and boys becoming engineers.

Complaints had also been made about adverts for clothing retailer Gap that showed a boy becoming an academic, and a girl becoming a "social butterfly".

What was the justification for cracking down on such adverts? As the BBC journalist writes:

The review suggested that new standards should consider whether the stereotypes shown would "reinforce assumptions

that adversely limit how people see themselves and how others see them."

"Portrayals which reinforce outdated and stereotypical views on gender roles in society can play their part in driving unfair outcomes for people," said Guy Parker, chief executive of the ASA.

"While advertising is only one of many factors that contribute to unequal gender outcomes, tougher advertising standards can play an important role in tackling inequalities and improving outcomes for individuals, the economy and society as a whole."

There is a simple idea at the heart of the justification of the advertising crackdown: media plays a role in constraining individuals to adopt certain identities and schemas of action. Media can determine and limit notions of personhood and action. Media can override ideas about free will and choice to produce certain types of individuals that act in a certain kind of way. Stereotypes in the media can be internalised and magnify and build on societal expectations to influence behaviour and identity. There is a qualification: media is just one factor in contributing to "unequal gender outcomes".

The question remains, however, whether this justification is valid or not. The ASA suggests that media is just one aspect of an entire societal apparatus which is producing gender and gendered forms of identity and behaviour. They make the same claim about cultural brainwashing that I do, that such cultural brainwashing produces zombies that lack responsibility and free will. How exactly is this process of cultural brainwashing played out?

As I was thinking over this topic, trying to work out how individuals internalise expected identities and learned sets of behaviours, one persistent image kept on coming to mind. I am talking about the case of the athlete with the home crowd advantage. There is no need to focus on a particular example, since everyone knows exactly what I am talking about. Here is the typical scenario. There is a home crowd which is composed of people of the same nationality. The home crowd have one athlete in the final who is of the same nationality as them. If one looks at the past record of this athlete, there seems to be very little chance that they will win anything. The athlete's ranking is not that good. However, the crowd expects the athlete to bring home a medal. Somehow, amazingly, the athlete performs better than he or she has ever performed in their life. They fulfil the crowd's expectations and bring home a medal. It is the same with teams as it is with individuals.

Here, then, is the prime illustration of how a society's expectations can be internalised in order to produce a certain identity, that of medal winner, and an expected set of behaviours, a medal winning performance. But what isn't remarked on and what is brilliantly weird about this phenomenon is that it actually happens. How can someone whose body hasn't ever and seemingly can't perform at that level suddenly do what it does in the final? Why does their body and their behaviour change so radically? It is precisely because of the societal expectation that they act in a certain way and become medallists. And this societal expectation is based in nationalism and ideas of national identity. These athletes are drawing on notions of shared and constructed identities in order to behave in a certain way. All the training that they did in their life never allowed them access to a medal winning performance before. It required an internalisation of shared national identity and a meeting of the expectation and demand of the nationalist crowd in order to achieve that result.

One can see then, that individuals can internalise identities and behaviours which are expected of them by society and which themselves radically transform them and their actions in a way that is nothing short of miraculous. The expectations of a group can change the very fabric of reality. These expectations can override conscious thought – the athletes have always consciously tried to win but were never able to gain the victory, however much they trained and tried. It is the adoption of a shared cultural identity and set of behaviours by

athletes which, although they are seemingly unrelated to the task in hand (after all, it is not a requisite qualification of being British that one is a gymnast or fast runner) completely changes performance and result and, indeed, alters the body at a fundamental level.

Well. Let us return to our ideas about how culturally shared negative expectations of oppressed individuals can transform their behaviour and override conscious thought, free will and choice. If the scenario in the athlete example can be seen as analogous to how a culture works, then we can see how and why negative expectations fundamentally change the character of individuals. Such expectations, transmitted through media, are internalised and are too powerful to resist. They do away with ideas about free choice, individual responsibility and individuality. Such ideas crush the very stuff that persons are made out of to reproduce stock types. They are too powerful. The group's expectations completely overwhelm and defeat the individual. The individual can then only exhibit learned behaviour. The word exhibit is important. I think the athlete situation is analogous to the situation in culture because of one important point. Both the athlete and the oppressed individual are on display. They have to perform as though they were in a play to a society that is watching since their actions take place in public. This is why I think that the justice of the oppressed is a form of communication and perceived as the only way to express ideas about justice and the resistance to injustice.

Well, such are the speculations of the armchair theorist. What is the importance of such idle speculations and this short note on the matter? I think the significance is that in Western media, there are only really negative representations of oppressed peoples. They are always shown as violent, barbaric, backward and criminal. Where are the positive role models? When was the last time you saw a British Asian as a hero in western media? The fact is that it is negative expectations of us that are always channelled in the western imagination. If people then internalise and act on these negative expectations, which are not just in media, but everywhere around us in this society, are these people really to blame? If personal responsibility and individuality are really obliterated by group expectations, can we point the finger at perceived criminals? Surely our ideas about law and justice, which rely on notions of free will, choice and individual responsibility have to change?