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Biography

Dr Oakleigh Welply is a Lecturer in International and Intercultural Education at the School of Education, Durham University. She received her PhD in Sociology of Education from the University of Cambridge. Her main areas of research and teaching include social theory, the relationship of education to issues of language, religion, globalisation and citizenship; national policies of integration and youth identities; immigration and education in France and England; the development of cross-national methodologies for research with diverse communities in European countries.

Title: 'I'm not being offensive but…': intersecting discourses of discrimination towards Muslim children in school

Abstract

This article examines forms of implicit discrimination towards Muslim children in children's discourses of Otherness. Findings in this paper draw on qualitative data exploring the discourses of 17 children from a Year 6 class in a culturally diverse primary school in the East of England. Building on Critical Race Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis, this article shows that children's discourses of Otherness acted in tacit discriminatory ways by constructing difference as problematic, which positioned Muslim children as the 'bad Other'. These findings show the intersectionality of discrimination experienced by Muslim children in school, and offer a reflection on the role of multiculturalism in schools and the limitations of uncritical discourses of tolerance in fostering an understanding of difference and Otherness.

Keywords

Introduction

Forms of prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination based on difference and Otherness amongst children or young people have been widely documented in scholarly research in the UK and internationally (e.g. Youdell 2012; Crozier and Davies 2008; Hawkins 2014). These forms of discrimination can take the form of open violence or racist insults (Shain 2012), non-verbal discrimination or tacit rejection through silence or under the guise of humour (Youdell 2006) and underlying 'everyday' racist discourses, inscribed in institutional structures and peer group dynamics (Gillborn 2008; Miller 2015).

Whilst a majority of studies has tended to look at discrimination through the lens of race or ethnicity, recent work has shown how these old categories of difference intersect with new categories such as language and religion in young people's experiences (Welply 2015). Religion, in particular Islam, has begun to emerge as central in recent research on children from minority groups in the UK (Archer 2003; Shain 2011, 2012; Ipgrave 2013, 2016). In many cases, this has shifted the focus from ethnic to religious identity, with the category 'Muslim children' slowly taking over former categories such as South Asian (Basit 2009). This trend responds to increased tension around Islam in media and public discourse and the rise of forms of religious discrimination and islamophobia in schools in the past few decades (Shain 2012).

In recent years, educational policy and discourse in the UK have been marked by tension and mistrust towards Muslim youth (Lynch 2013; Pal Sian 2015; Davies 2014; Abbas 2012). The Birmingham 'Trojan horse' controversy in March 2014, which saw schools in Birmingham investigated by the Department for Education, under the suspicion of a plot to promote the 'islamisation' of secular schools, illustrates the centrality of this question in educational policy discourse. This has led to debates around the need to prevent religious extremism in UK schools, illustrated by former OFSTED[i] inspector Sir Michael Wilshaw's warning of the radicalisation of Muslim faith schools in London (2014). The introduction of the counter-terrorist *Prevent Strategy* in 2011 followed by the *Prevent Duty* in July 2015 to encourage teachers to have 'due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism' (DfE 2015, 4) also echoes this underlying climate of mistrust.

Implicit to these debates is the question of how Muslim children can 'integrate' in Britain, with an emphasis on British values as the solution to countering forms of extremism and communitarianism. This theme has been central to policy discourse in the last ten years, from former Prime Minister Tony Blair's declaration that radical Muslims had a 'duty to integrate' and respect Britain's 'essential values' (Gillborn 2008) to Education Secretary Nicky Morgan's comments in the wake of the Charlie Hebdo shootings in January 2015 in Paris: 'we've seen what can happen (…) when people don't appear to respect some of those values' (2015). The introduction of Fundamental British Values in the curriculum in November 2014, with its insistence that 'pupils should be made aware of the difference between the law of the land and religious law' (DfE 2014, 2), also points to this notion of assimilation of the 'Muslim Other' into a dominant ideology (Richardson and Bolloten 2015).

Against this backcloth of increased tension around Islam in society, anti-Muslim prejudice in schools in Britain has risen in the past few decades, intensified by terrorist events such as 9/11 and the London bombings of 2005, and more recently the attacks in Paris, Brussels and Nice in 2015 and 2016. These attitudes range from open anti-Muslim hostility, such as ripping off hijabs or name-calling as terrorists (Abbas 2012; Housee 2012) to more implicit forms of discrimination such as an increase in stigmatisation, the development of polarised 'Them' and 'Us' identities and 'cultural pathologising' (Shain 2011). Silent misunderstandings by peers who assimilate Islam to terrorism, references to negative media portrayals of Muslims and a lack of engagement of the school with these issues were also reported as creating unease and discomfort for young Muslims in school (Shain 2011, 75; Pal Sian 2015).

This current social and political climate calls for a closer examination of the experience of Muslim children themselves. Whilst these wider social and political discourses undeniably have material effects on these children's lives, their voices tend to be absent from these debates (James 2007). This article aims to hear the voices of Muslim children and investigate the way these wider discourses impact on their lived experiences at school.

To date, research on Muslim youth has tended to focus mainly on the religious aspects of discrimination and the risk of extremism and radicalisation this presents (Archer 2003; Crozier and Davies 2008; Abbas 2012). Whilst there has been an increased focus on young Muslims' subjectivities at the intersections of race, religion, gender and class (Shain 2012; Hopkins 2007; Ramji 2007; Shah, Dwyer and Modood 2010) fewer studies have examined the intersectionality of discrimination faced by young Muslims and the more implicit forms it might take (Shain 2012; Bhopal and Preston 2012; Youdell, 2012; Franz 2007). This article aims to conceptualise the implicit forms of discrimination faced by Muslim children in daily interactions with peers at school, at the intersection of race, religion and language.

Theorising anti-Muslim discrimination

Critical Race Theory

Implicit forms of racism have been well documented in the field of race research, under the impetus of Critical Race Theory (CRT), highlighting the pervasive nature of every day racism and forms of 'micro-aggressions' (Atwood and López 2014; Kholi and Solórzano 2012; Peréz Huber and Solórzano 2015; Gillborn 2006; Ladson-Billings 2005). These concepts offer novel perspectives for investigating the pervasive and cumulative nature of everyday discrimination faced by Muslim children, which most often goes unnoticed in school settings (Housee 2012). Whilst the prime focus of CRT is race, in recent years CRT scholars have emphasised the ways in which discrimination lies at the intersection of race, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and language. Through the recognition of this 'intersectionality of oppression' (Kholi and Solórzano 2012, 445) CRT can strongly contribute to the understanding and conceptualisation of anti-Muslim discrimination (Mac an Ghail 2015; Aziz 2012; Housee 2012).

This article is premised on the following notions that underpin Critical Race Theory: 1) Racism and discrimination towards Muslim children are experienced on a daily basis, most often in a tacit way; 2) these forms of discrimination and exclusion need to be revealed in order to be challenged, and re-centre marginalised perspectives (Kholi and Solórzano 2012, 445); 3) these forms of discrimination and racism are

inscribed in wider historical discourses and forms of oppression (Ladson-Billing 2005); 4) these forms of discrimination are also structurally embedded in the very institutions that claim to address them. As such these discourses need to be critically addressed (Gillborn 2006); 5) research in CRT should emphasise the voices of marginalised groups; 6) in order to do so, research needs to adopt an interdisciplinary approach to engage with the intersectionality of oppression and understand the multiplicity of perspectives; 7) both forms of discrimination and responses to discrimination need to be examined to understand the mechanisms and processes at play (Kholi and Solórzano 2012; Peréz Huber and Solórzano 2015).

Micro-aggressions

The concept of 'micro-aggressions' was developed in the field of CRT to engage with the 'subtle forms of racism that exist in daily life, which may be hard to pinpoint as racism but cause harm nonetheless' (Kholi and Solórzano 2012, 446). This notion has been developed in U.S. scholarship to unearth forms of implicit racism that take place in school settings, through everyday communication and interactions (Peréz Huber and Solórzano 2015, 298). The concept is less widely developed in UK literature, and quasi inexistent in relation to anti-Muslim discrimination in schools.

Micro-aggressions can be defined as 'subtle verbal and non-verbal insults' often carried out unconsciously, which are layered and cumulative in nature (Kholi and Solórzano 2012, 247; Peréz Huber and Solórzano 2015, 298). The pernicious nature of micro-aggressions is that their tacit, sometimes unconscious form often means that the perpetrators of these micro-aggressions will deny any racist intent or claim that the victims of these insults are overreacting or too sensitive. This leaves the victims in a double-bind in which they cannot easily presume racist intent and cannot oppose these tacit aggressions because of their implicit nature and absence of concrete proof (Atwood and López 2014, 1134).

Whilst the concept of micro-aggression focuses on the immediate, tacit forms of racism that occur on a day-to-day basis, it is not limited to a micro-level of analysis. Rather, the concept provides a tool for understanding the way in which everyday racist events are articulated with wider structures and processes (institutionalised

racism) and ideologies of supremacy of the dominant group (Peréz Huber and Solórzano 2015, 298).

Discourses of racism

Wider discourses of racism have been examined in sociolinguistics, in particular through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), informed by a range of disciplines (linguistics, critical discourse studies, sociology, social psychology) (van Dijk 1992; Augoustinos and Every 2007). CDA is an interdisciplinary approach to the analysis of discourse, which primarily focuses on the social and political dimension of talk and text, and the way in which power inequalities are reproduced and resisted (van Dijk, 1992). With a focus on power, dominance, inequalities and reproduction (van Dijk 1992), CDA studies of the 'discursive patterns of text and talk on issues pertaining to race, multiculturalism, immigration' (Augoustinous and Every 2007, 123) support the CRT view that overt racism has been replaced by new symbolic and tacit racism, which is present in everyday talk and interactions (Augoustinos and Every 2007; van Dijk 1992; Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2001).

With its focus on how talk and text are inscribed within wider social and political discourses, a CDA lens can bring new insights to CRT's focus on ideologies of supremacy and historically inscribed forms of oppression. The in-depth analysis of talk in interactions is a powerful tool to give voice to marginalised groups, by looking at both forms of discrimination and responses to them. The focus on the social dimension of speech acknowledges the way institutional discourses are intertwined with daily forms of discrimination. The interdisciplinary nature of CDA is well suited to CRT's focus on the intersectionality of oppression through a multiplicity of perspectives. Combined, CRT and CDA offer a solid framework that can take into account the implicit nature of discriminations, and the way these are inscribed within wider discourses (social, political, institutional) and hierarchies of power. This framework, by bringing the voices of marginalised and minoritised groups to the fore, can contribute to understanding inequalities and discrimination faced by Muslim children in schools.

Building on this framework, this article aims to conceptualise the forms of implicit discrimination experienced by Muslim children in interactions with peers, and the ways in which negative constructions of Otherness participated in positioning Muslim children as 'undesirable Others' (Youdell 2006). Through an analysis of specific extracts from group interviews with children, this article examines the way in which intersecting discourses of race, ethnicity, religion, language and national belonging constituted forms of micro-aggression, which acted in discriminatory and excluding ways towards Muslim children. In doing so, it highlights the relationship between everyday forms of implicit racism at a micro-level, institutional ideologies and racism, and wider discriminatory discourses against Muslim and immigrant Others at a macro-level.

Difference and Otherness in young children's discourses

Exploring children's discourses in relation to cultural, linguistic and religious differences raises a particular challenge: the designation of terms to talk about differences without falling into unwanted set categorisations. This article recognises that the use of the term Otherness is not neutral, but is inscribed in a 'Them' *versus* 'Us' divide (Ladson-Billings 2005), historically tinted by colonialism and embedded in a history of inequalities and oppression (Said 1978). In light of the above, this article does not presuppose the terms difference and Otherness are fixed representations. Rather, these terms functioned as a starting point for the analysis and were challenged, contested, reaffirmed, deconstructed and reconstructed through the lens of children's discourses.

Whilst there has been an increase in recent years in research about the experiences of discrimination faced by young Muslims in educational settings, most studies have focused on older Muslim youth (Shain 2012; Housee 2012; Youdell 2012). In contrast, only a few studies have engaged with the experience of younger Muslim children (Basit 2009). Studies on race and ethnicity have shown that prejudices and racist discourses can be developed very early in life (Hawkins 2014). However, younger children's understanding of difference and Otherness remain largely unexplored (Miller 2015).

This reflects the tendency in research to treat younger children as a homogenous group, which overlooks the way in which forms of Otherness such as race, religion, gender or social class impact on the everyday experience of children (James 2007; Welply 2015). This article contends that there is a need to listen to children's constructions of Otherness and the way in which these shape interactions amongst peers. Within the wider context of anti-Muslim discourses and increased islamophobia, listening to children's views on these issues is important for schools to be able to tackle forms of discrimination and prejudice that might not be immediately apparent.

Underpinning this view is the belief that children are competent social actors who are able to make sense of their own experiences and offer new perspectives on contemporary social and political issues (James 2007). This article holds the view that children's accounts of their experiences participate in a 'politics of scale' which articulates local, national and global contexts (Ansell 2009; Welply 2015). Within this view, this article focuses on the 'micro-picture of interpersonal behaviour' in an attempt to theorise children's perspectives, by connecting their smaller world to the wider socio-economic and political world (Housee 2012, 104-105).

Methodology

This article draws on findings from a wider cross-national ethnographic study which investigated the experiences of children from immigrant backgrounds in primary schools in France and England (Welply 2015). This paper focuses on the English primary school only. In line with the aims of the study, the school was selected to represent a culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse population, within a socially deprived area. The school was located in an average size town in the East of England, in an area that was '*more socially and economically disadvantaged than is typical in England'* (OFSTED 2011) and ranked amongst the 25% most deprived areas in the country. This area included a majority of socially deprived White families, minorities from South Asia (mainly Bangladeshi and Pakistani) and recent immigrants from Eastern Europe (Poland, Lithuania) (Local council annual demographic and socio-economic report 2011). The majority school population was

White, but the proportion of children from ethnic minority groups was higher than average (OFSTED 2011) with 20 different languages spoken, the two main ones being Bengali and Polish. 25 % of children did not have English as a first language. The school had a relatively high proportion of children who could be classified as second-generation immigration (mainly Muslim Bangladeshi, 13 % of the school population), as well as newly arrived migrants (from the new EU Accession countries, 11% of the school population).

The research was carried out with 10-11 year old children from a Year 6 class, which comprised a total of 30 children, 17 of which participated in the research, nine girls and eight boys. Four out of the 30 children were Muslim Bangladeshi. All four of them chose to participate in the research, three girls (Taahira, Nabeela and Saalima) and one boy (Akhil)[ii]. Out of the 17 participants, three other children were from immigrant backgrounds, two girls (Italian and Russian) and one boy (Albanian). The others were White British [iii]. All children spoke English fluently. Parent occupation for all children in the class could, for the majority, be classified as working class (e.g. taxi driver, lorry driver, cleaner, waiter, electrician) or unemployed, although a minority held professional or technical jobs (teaching assistant, nursery worker).

The researcher spent four months in the school between September and December 2010. During the whole period of fieldwork, the researcher followed the same timetable as the children and was present full-time in the classroom.

In order to privilege children's perspectives in the research, interviews (group and individual) were the preferred form of data collection. The research design focused on adapting interview methods to research with primary-age children. The use of language and concepts was carefully matched to children's understanding to encourage greater inclusion of children in the research process. One of the core methodological challenges of this study was finding ways of asking young children to talk about their perceptions of difference and Otherness whilst minimising researcher-imposed categories or leading questions.

To achieve this, group interviews were carried out in two phases. In the first phase, questions did not include any mention of Otherness (language, religion, culture, ethnicity) and the term 'different' was only introduced in the final interview question: '*What do you think makes pupils different?*' This question was asked in a wide sense, and across interviews, children's responses showed that they conceptualised difference in multiple ways. In the second interview phase, which focused more explicitly on the notion of 'difference', the only direct references to Otherness were questions about language, as shown below.

> What language do you speak at home?
> Is that the language that your parents speak?
> Can you read and write in another language? Do you have schooling in another language? What is it like to speak more than one language? Is it important for you? Why? Do you talk about this language with others?
>
> (Extract from interview schedule, Phase 2)

Although some initial questions were prepared, in practice the researcher ensured that these interviews were mainly children-led. To facilitate this, non-verbal methods were used, including illustrated prompts, children's drawings, games and maps (Welply 2015). This gave children ownership of the discussion, which allowed them to raise issues around Otherness in their own words and minimised researcher-imposed categories. This provided deep insights into children's conceptualisations of Otherness and how this was articulated in interactions with peers.

Particular attention was given to specific ethical issues that emerge in relation to carrying out research with young children. The length of time spent in each class allowed the researcher to build a positive rapport with the children participants and helped minimise the adult/child power differential. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured for all participants, and all names and identifying details have been changed. Children were also made aware of confidentiality issues related to sharing information with a group and interviews were carefully monitored to help reduce tensions that might arise during discussion.

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were initially coded thematically using a qualitative software package (NVivo). Sections of transcripts that were coded as 'implicit discrimination' or 'micro-aggressions' were

re-analysed through a discursive framework, which built on Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), focusing on the use of language to express implicit discriminatory or stereotyping views (van Dijk 1992; Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000; Augoustinos and Every 2007). This framework allowed for a closer discursive analysis of these particular episodes. At this level, the analysis focused on children's *interpretive repertoires*[iv], *semantic moves*[v], and *rhetorical strategies*[vi] during interactions (van Dijk 1992; Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000; Augoustinos and Every 2007) in an attempt to understand how children's talk was 'shaped both by broader social and cultural repertoires of understanding and by the practical and local concerns of interaction' (Augoustinos and Every 2007, 125). The focus was thus on children's interactions and what they revealed in terms of implicit discrimination and negative framing of Otherness.

Located within a CRT tradition, the findings discussed below not only show the interpretive repertoires and discursive strategies that children used in talking about difference and Otherness, they also highlight how these repertoires were located within wider social discourses, both institutional (from school) and historical (old and new constructions of the Other).

The school ethos: tolerance and celebration of diversity

In order to understand the role of institutions and structures in perpetuating ideologies of White supremacy (Gillborn 2006), the school context and ethos are important to gain insights into children's discourses of Otherness. Whilst there is not the space here for an extensive discussion of the school context, some elements of background provide a helpful framework for interpreting the findings of this study.

Whilst the majority school population was White, the school population was ethnically and linguistically diverse, with the two main minority/immigrant groups being Bangladeshi and Eastern European. The school enjoyed a strong reputation for good multicultural practice (OFSTED 2011) and demonstrated a strong commitment to multiculturalism, which built on 'the celebration of diversity of backgrounds, race, cultures, religions and languages' and 'a whole-school ethos of tolerance and respect' (interview with the school bilingual coordinator).

Our school aims to be an inclusive school, reflecting the diversity of the local community. The school recognises and values diversity, so that all have a sense of belonging. Pupils from different backgrounds mix and get on well with each other. The school creates positive relations with the wider community. (School race equality leaflet).

These aims were supported by a range of school policies ('anti-racist policy', 'bilingual learners policy', 'equality policy', 'equal opportunities policy') and through the organisational structure of the school. A bilingual coordinator was in charge of provision for ethnic-minority and English as an Additional Language children, as well as staff training. The school also had two Polish bilingual Teaching Assistants and one Bengali bilingual Teaching Assistant. The school provided on-site multicultural and multilingual training for trainee teachers in the local Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) course. During the time of the research, it had also been selected as a 'model multicultural school' to be part of a cross-national European project to help promote multiculturalism in other European countries.

The multicultural ethos of the school, and this celebration of diversity was made visible through a range of multilingual displays across the school, and specific religious or cultural events, such as an Eid party, which was coordinated by the Bengali bilingual Teaching Assistant and organised by the Year 6 Muslim children.

There was, however, little evidence of multicultural practice during the entire four months of full time participant observations in the school, and children's views of school tended to emphasise its monocultural nature[vii]. Whilst the school displayed a strong commitment to its multicultural ethos, in practice children were discouraged from speaking other languages with peers, and mention of different cultures and religion was confined to particular curriculum areas, such as Religious Education. For the Eid party organised by the school, only Muslim children were involved in the preparation, and only Muslim parents were invited to attend. As such, these attempts at multiculturalism echo critiques of superficial multiculturalism (Gillborn 2006) rather than a deeper critical engagement with diversity and Otherness. However, this absence of a deeper and more critical multicultural engagement on the part of the

school is ambiguous to interpret. On the one hand, it could be argued that it is the sign of what the school's OFSTED report noted as being harmonious relationships in a multi-ethnic environment. On the other hand, silence and unspoken discourses hold their own constitutive power and performative force (Youdell 2012). As such, the limited evidence of multiculturalism in practice in the school could also be interpreted as absence rather than harmony. To some extent, this absence could be interpreted as a 'doublethink ideology', with a contrast between the professed multicultural ethos and the underlying monocultural ideology of the school (Blackledge 2001; Gillborn 2008) inscribed in silent discourses of White supremacy (Youdell 2012). Whilst one cannot conclude that the school's approach to multiculturalism was uncritical, the attempts at multicultural practice observed during the time of research did tend to remain superficial in nature.

Children's discourses of Otherness

In contrast to the professed multicultural ethos of the school, children's discourses demonstrated an ethnocentric understanding of the place of Otherness in peer group relations. These representations were underpinned by tacit forms of stereotyping and discrimination towards Muslim children, located at the intersection of race, religion, language and national identity. These negative views were in turn internalised in Muslim children's discourses of difference. These discriminatory discourses built on a range of rhetorical strategies, which are examined in this section.

Essentialising segregation

In some cases, children's views expressed implicit forms of discrimination based on what Bonilla-Silva and Forman call processes of 'naturalization' of racism (2000). The interaction below between Louise, a White non-Muslim girl, and Taahira and Nabeela, two Muslim girls from Bangladeshi background, illustrates this (Welply 2015).

> Louise: Sometimes it depends on your skin colour, because quite often you will find that people with a different skin colour are like always hanging around in the same group, because...

Taahira: yeah because of the skin colour and stuff...

Louise: yeah like these people they kind of all follow the same religion and they've got the same skin colour and everything, and they'll all stay together and be best friends, and then all the other people they will all just stay together and be best friends.

Taahira : yeah like me, Nabeela...

Nabeela: and Saalima

In this exchange, Louise defines race and religion as the basis of friendship and separation between peers. Whilst the statement might initially appear to be a mere observation, it carries forms of subtle racism at different levels. First, the most obvious perhaps, is the drawing of lines of segregation based on race and religion as a legitimate practice. The statement itself carries forms of Othering and discrimination that remain unquestioned. This apparently neutral statement masks a form of micro-aggression. Whiteness is constructed as the norm, whilst *'different colour skin'* or other religions are constructed as Other. Through this 'otherizing talk' (Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000) Louise constructs a dichotomy between 'Them' and 'Us', interpreted as the basis for segregated friendships.

Second, although the conversation is taking place with a group that includes the children Louise is mentioning (Muslim, Bangladeshi background girls, with different skin colour and religion), Louise does not mention them directly, nor does she refer to a particular skin colour or religion. This process of abstraction, though a rhetorical strategy of *displacement* and *indirectness* (Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000), allows Louise to distance herself from any racist connotations in her comment.

Third, Louise's comment *naturalizes* these segregated friendships, discursively framing this process of segregation as something that occurs naturally because children are drawn together through similarities (Bonnilla-Silva and Forman 2000). Here, these friendships are seen as the results of the choice of 'other' children (with the same skin colour and religion) who choose to '*all stay together and be best friends'*. Louise's discourse builds on the notion of natural self-segregation as a way of justifying these lines of separation. This construction of Otherness is characteristic

of new forms of racism, shifting the blame of discrimination or segregation to the individuals who suffer from it (Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000; Gillborn 2006).

Fourth, this exchange highlights processes of internalized racism. This process has been widely theorised by CRT scholars (Peréz Huber and Solorzano 2015) and refers to the 'conscious and unconscious acceptance of a racial hierarchy' (Kholi and Solórzano 2012, 448) in which forms of discrimination are internalized as natural. In the exchange presented above, the two Muslim girls, Taahira and Nabeela agreed with Louise's statement by referring it to themselves 'yes, like me'. This tacit agreement shifts the focus away from the discriminatory connotation of Louise's comment by reinforcing its legitimacy.

Framing 'tolerance: the role of discursive buffers

This discussion above highlighted the implicit forms of discrimination experienced by two Muslim girls, and the ways in which negative discursive framing of Otherness came to be internalized by all children as the norm. This was reinforced by processes of *minimization* in which victims of discriminatory comments are viewed as being oversensitive (Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000). This is illustrated by Chloe's comments, a White non-Muslim girl, which followed on from Louise's comment in the same interview.

> Chloe: Sometimes when you are with a friend that's... I'm not being offensive but… black, and then you accidently say something like 'yeah but'..., and they find out, you say something about their skin colour, and you really didn't mean it as offensive, they sometimes can get very upset, and you don't really know how to deal with it, because you accidently called them it.
> Taahira: And you can get in trouble and it's not your fault.
> Chloe: Because if you tell the teacher that it was an accident. "I didn't mean to say that'', they don't believe you sometimes.

Chloe's discursive strategy of *minimization* operates a reversal in which the blame is shifted onto the victims of the discriminatory comments, accused of being too

sensitive or exaggerating claims of racism (Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000). Taahira's agreement with Chloe's idea of over-exaggeration of racism shows the way in which implicit forms of discrimination underpinned by a colour-blind rhetoric can be assimilated as the norm. Chloe's comment also offers an example of re-interpretation of the school discourse of tolerance by children. Chloe interprets the reaction of the teacher as a misunderstanding, rather than an anti-discriminatory intervention. In doing so, she individualises the reaction of the teacher rather than relating it to the school discourse of tolerance and multiculturalism. This discursive strategy shifts the blame to individual misunderstandings and allows Chloe to distance herself from racist intent. This distancing from accusations of racism is further emphasised by Chloe's use of '*I'm not being offensive but*'. This rhetorical strategy, which I have termed 'discursive buffer' constitutes a semantic move that discursively frames implicit racism as non-offensive (van Dijk 1992; Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000). It can be interpreted as a discursive device to re-articulate the school's ethos of tolerance in Chloe's own interpretation of Otherness.

This rhetorical construction was not isolated. In a range of interviews, children used similar discursive buffers to talk about Otherness in school.

> (1) *Interviewer: what do you think makes pupils different?*
> Louise: By their skin colour, and **I'm not being racist or anything**, but by their skin colour, they often... you can tell if ….

> (2) Clarissa: Cause also **I am not trying to be like mean or anything**, but when you come from like Hong Kong, like Japan; they've got eyes that are different, their eyes are different.

> (3) Kaytlin: **I'm not being nasty** to Saalima but they wear different clothes to us on certain days[viii].

Whilst the question 'what do you think makes pupils different?' could be seen as leading children towards mentioning cultural or racial differences, it is interesting to note that this was not the case for most children interviewed. More remarkably, only White, non-Muslim children saw racial or cultural characteristics as something that

made pupils different. These responses do show children's sensitivity to racism which can be seen as a positive characteristic. However, what is of interest in these responses is that the discursive buffers used by children framed Otherness as potentially problematic, with the need for children to offer a disclaimer. This raises several issues. It stresses the unease felt by children when talking about racial or cultural differences in school. This points to the lack of understanding of the discourse of tolerance promoted by the school. These children were conscious of 'not being offensive', but they did not have a deeper understanding of the concept of tolerance and how to articulate it in interactions around Otherness with peers. Although not all these comments were aimed at Muslim children, this negative framing of differences pathologises Otherness (Shain 2012) and implicitly impacts on the way in which Muslim children can articulate Otherness amongst peers.

Intersecting Otherness: stereotyping and attribution

The discussion above highlighted discriminatory discourses that were not directly aimed at Muslim children, but nevertheless participated in framing Otherness as negative and problematic. Muslim children also had to contend with more direct discriminatory discourses, at the intersection of language, religion and national identity. These included the use of stereotypical lexicon in relation to children's home language (van Dijk 1992) as shown in the exchange below between three friends: Ollie and Harry, two non-Muslim White children, and Akhil, a Muslim boy of Bangladeshi background.

> Ollie: Taahira, Saalima, and Nabeela they were saying stuff, and we didn't know what they meant. [*they were speaking in Bengali*]
> Akhil: they were saying bad things, and yeah...
> Akhil: I think that's bad that they're doing that...because they're like saying mean things and then laughing
> Harry: Some people were upset because they were taunting them with their 'Arabickian'

Harry's use of the term 'Arabickian' to designate Bengali is pejorative and carries essentialist connotations from orientalist literature and old stereotypes (Said 1978;

Youdell 2012) and as such can be considered a form of micro-aggression. Interestingly, in this exchange, Akhil never intervened to correct his friend's pejorative misnaming of Bengali. This silence operates as a form of internalized racism, as an implicit agreement with this stereotypical construction of Otherness. It shows how tacit discrimination makes it difficult for children to respond to these micro-aggressions (Atwood and López 2014).

This comment also emphasises the intersectionality of discrimination faced by Muslim children. This is reinforced by a comment Akhil made later on in the interview.

> Akhil: Cause I don't like it when they [*Taahira, Saalima and Nabeela*] keep doing it [*saying 'bad things' in Bengali*] because like it's showing our religion...like hmmm...let's say like hmmmm...like they're going to be like…a Muslim (…) and then someone...a Muslim does something bad to you and then like, then you think…That's why I don't like them doing that, so it makes our religion...it gives a bad image to other people and then they tell their mums and they have to talk to parents and then....

Akhil's comment highlights the relationship between language and religion and reveals the multiple points of tension he experienced in negotiating Otherness with peers. The way in which he views speaking another language as participating in the construction of a bad image of Islam reveals the intersectionality of discrimination in his experience. This echoes wider discourses in which, by default, Muslim subjects are considered 'bad Muslims' that need to prove that they are 'good Muslims' (Mamdani 2004)

The intersectionality of discrimination for Muslim children is further illustrated in the case of Saalima's (a Muslim girl of Bangladeshi background) attitude to national identity. Saalima had already mentioned that she tended to speak less Bengali in school because her peers felt uneasy about it (individual interview). The following exchange shows the way national identity and belonging are articulated by peers in an exclusionary and stereotyping way.

Interviewer: So would you say you are all English here? Or British?

Izzie: Except for Saalima, but she doesn't say...

Kaitlyn: She tries to be English.

Siobhan: She's English and Bengali

(…)

Siobhan: [about Saalima] She was born here.

Interviewer: Can I just hear Saalima?

Saalima: I don't like Bangladesh, it's quite dangerous.

Here, Saalima's identity is defined by her peers as 'not English', yet trying to hide her Otherness ('*but she doesn't say'*). This carries a negative connotation of deceit, reminiscent of Orientalist stereotypes (Said 1978). Saalima does not directly contest this negative framing of her identity, but discursively distances herself from it, by mentioning, out of the blue 'I don't like Bangladesh, it's quite dangerous', thus contesting this attribution of a label of Otherness by her peers.

Constructing the threatening 'Other'

Whilst these forms of micro-aggression were located within specific interactions between children, they were inscribed in wider negative discourses of the 'threatening Other'. Chloe's xeno-racist views of the 'immigrant Other' (Fekete 2009) strongly illustrate this point:

Chloe: My family doesn't…you know some people don't agree on these people. Um, I don't know how to say it. People like coming into our country...not...[*turns to Taahira and Nabeela of Bangladeshi background*] not like you, but not you, but like the Polish and that...

(…)

Chloe: My mum and dad don't agree on that, because they say they should be in their own country.

Interviewer: Oh, why is that?

(…)

Chloe: They steal money off us

Taahira: Err what if, say like your dad is here and your mum came from Africa, and then your Dad came all the way to Africa to marry her?

(others giggle)

Chloe: And then they came back?

Taahira: And then they came back

Chloe: No, but it's like the Polish like come here, and then they just like work here illegally and they take the money, and my mum went into the bank once. (…) My mum knew how much exactly how much money she spent and... on her taxes, and there was somebody there…and her taxes were getting lower and lower, because there were more people on benefits and that's why... because her tax…well the bank said she had to pay for people that are... had less money.

Taahira: Well, that's not... but we have to pay, for Muslims, because one of the five pillars of Islam is to do '*Saka*', which is at least give five hundred pounds to the poor.

Chloe/Louise/Chrissy: oooh!

(…)

Taahira: Every single person.

Nabeela: Yeah, in Ramadan, there is this T.V. show, and it's always in Ramadan and we have to like give money...to give like, we give money to the poor.

Chloe's comments show the tension that exists around Otherness in children's discourses and the implicit forms of discrimination that underpin it. In this exchange, Chloe builds on a process of abstraction by specifying to Taahira and Nabeela that it is 'not like you'. Again, this discursive strategy of *indirectness* and *displacement* (Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000) functions as a discursive buffer to claim tolerance. However, by specifying that she is not speaking about Taahira and Nabeela, she positions them as Other, establishing a separation between 'Them' and 'Us' which places the girls at the receiving end of Chloe's 'otherizing talk' (Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000).

Taahira and Nabeela's responses to Chloe show the discursive strategies the girls mobilise to respond to these micro-aggressions in similar implicit ways. Taahira's reference to 'Africans' allows her to discursively distance herself from being a victim of Chloe's stereotypical comments, yet challenges Chloe's views by offering a positive justification for immigration. She then responds to Chloe's comment about immigrants 'stealing' money, by offering an alternative more positive view about charity (*Saka*) in Islam, which is supported by Nabeela. In both cases, she attempts to

offer alternative positive representations of Otherness in response to Chloe's discriminatory comments.

Discussion

Findings in this article have shown that forms of implicit racism and micro-aggressions experienced by Muslim children in interactions with peers were inscribed in a range of discursive strategies which articulated claims of tolerance and a shift of blame through processes of naturalization or minimization. These discriminatory discourses, at the intersection of race, religion, language, nationality and immigrant status, participated in a negative construction of Otherness in peer group relations, where differences were viewed as problematic and a potential source of tension.

Implicit responses and intersectionality of discrimination

As argued by Kholi and Solórzano, in order to understand forms of micro-aggression, attention needs to be given both to the act itself and to the response to these micro-aggressions (2012, 447). Data presented in this article highlights the tacit and cumulative nature of discrimination faced by Muslim children, and draws attention to implicit ways in which Muslim children respond to these micro-aggressions: Akhil's silence about the pejorative term 'Arabickian', Saalima's tacit distancing from the Otherness label attributed by her peers and Taahira's and Nabeela's alternative suggestions to Chloe's discriminatory comments. These responses seem to mirror the implicit nature of their peers' discriminatory discourses, through similar implicit discursive strategies, which range from silent accommodation to tacit resistance. This range of implicit responses could be explained by the fact that the implicit nature of children's discriminatory comments and the 'tolerant' discursive framing made it difficult for Muslim children to clearly pinpoint and directly contest them, without the risk of being interpreted as oversensitive or exaggerating (Atwood and López 2014). This resulted in a tendency to silence talk around Otherness amongst children for fear of causing tension.

The forms of tacit discrimination presented in this article articulated references to race, culture, religion, language, immigrant status and national identity, which all participated in discourses that framed Otherness as negative and problematic. This

'intersectionality of forms of oppression' (Kholi and Solórzano 2012) which has been documented in the field of Critical Race Theory, is still largely absent from research on Muslim youth, in which religious discrimination (associated to claims of terrorism) remains the central point of focus (Abbas 2012; Shain 2012). This article has shown that whilst religious discrimination does play a part, Muslim children have to contend with a range of discriminatory discourses, which may, more often than not, remain invisible because they are discursively framed as devoid of any racist intent. This shows how 'Otherness is related to the notion that identity itself is fragmented, fragile even yet constantly evolving through multiple engagements and relationships in society' (Bhopal and Preston 2012,1). Recognising the intersectionality of Othering that Muslim children are subjected to by peers can provide deeper insights into their experiences of discrimination at school, whilst challenging the notion of younger children as a homogenous category (James 2007). Highlighting the intersectionality of discrimination faced by Muslim children can help situate islamophobia within wider racist and discriminatory contexts to understand the experience of the 'race-nationed-religioned' child (Youdell 2012, 209). With its emphasis on multiple forms of oppression, Critical Race Theory, combined with Critical Discourse Analysis, offers a powerful framework to engage with this complexity of discriminatory discourses.

Re-negotiating the school discourse

Findings presented in this article stand in sharp contrast to the apparent success the school enjoyed in terms of multiculturalism. This contrast draws attention to the way in which the school's ethos of tolerance was re-articulated by children. Chloe's example showed how teacher's anti-discriminatory attitudes were re-interpreted as individual (over)reactions. Children's use of qualifiers such as '*I'm not being offensive but…*' also show how notions of tolerance were re-articulated through discursive buffers that participated in framing Otherness as problematic.

These discursive re-interpretations raise questions about the school's multicultural culture. As discussed earlier in the article, despite a professed multicultural ethos, children still perceived formal school spaces as monocultural. In this sense, children faced a situation of 'doublethink' (Blackledge 2001; Gillborn 2008), which presented children with conflicting ideologies of difference: professed multiculturalism

underpinned by perceived (implicit) monoculturalism. Although the school's monocultural ideology was not directly spoken, it could impact, to some extent, on children's constructions of Otherness. As argued by Youdell (2012, 204) 'discourses that go unspoken, that are silent or silenced, remain constitutive'. These contradictions and potential lack of clarity could explain why children appeared to negotiate the school discourse of tolerance at a superficial level, without understanding its deeper meaning. This led to rearticulating the school's language of tolerance into 'non-offensive' discursive buffers, which were devoid of meaning. This language of tolerance sometimes acted in a dissuasive way by preventing children from talking about differences with peers, for fear of appearing offensive.

Forms of pluralist multiculturalism in school have been criticised for focusing solely on the recognition and celebration of differences and failing to recognise the way in which race, ethnicity, religion are constituted into lines of differentiation and segregation underpinned by unequal power relations (Youdell 2012; Gillborn 2006; Ladson-Billings 2005). Since the 1980s, critiques in British academia have questioned the 'veneer of tolerance' promoted by multiculturalism in school, accused of hiding more fundamental monocultural/racially dominant ideologies (Blackledge 2001; Gillborn 2008). In the last five years, variations around 'the death of multiculturalism' have underpinned official policy and media discourse across Europe (Torres 2013), accompanied by an increased focus on securitisation and fear of the immigrant Other. Children's views presented in this article show how they articulated these multiple discourses of tolerance and threat at different levels (the school ethos of tolerance, parent's views, wider social and political discourses). Examining these views in relation to the school ethos can help understand the limitations of discourses of tolerance that remain superficial and misinterpreted by children. In the same way in which neo-liberal and democratic discourses are re-articulated to underpin racist repertoires (Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000; van Dijk 1992; Augoustinos and Every 2007), the schools' ethos of tolerance was re-negotiated to support more discriminatory views of Otherness by children. As such, these school principles become 'ideological resources' (Augoustinos and Every 2007) that are used to justify separation and discrimination around difference and to discursively frame Otherness as negative. In a time of increased surveillance and moral panic about the Muslim other, in which Muslims are being defined as the 'New Folk Devil' (Shain 2011), this

article has shown how the intersection of negative discursive constructions of Otherness participate in framing Muslim children as 'bad subjects' or 'undesirable Others' (Youdell 2012; Said 1978; Mamdani 2004).

Wider discourses: historical, global, local

Children's negative and discriminatory constructions of Otherness were inscribed both in wider discourses about the Other and children's immediate lived-reality, offering an illustration of Youdell's notion that 'long-established discourses echo in contemporary contexts without ever being spoken.' (2012, 227).

Children's forms of discrimination built on a range of Othering discourses, old and new. Some of the children's comments resonated with Said's concept of Orientalism (1978), in which the Other, here the 'Oriental/Arab/Muslim' is viewed in the Western world as uncivilised, 'the savage Arab' in need of taming' (Youdell 2012, 204) and lines of differentiation of 'Them' *versus* 'Us' (such as the use of the term 'Arabickian' to designate Bengali). These older discourses of Otherness intersected with newer discourses on the immigrant Other, which echoed negative tabloid and media descriptions of new migrants from Eastern Europe (as shown in Chloe's comments on Polish immigrants) (Fekete 2009; Augoustinos and Every 2007) and also built on representations of other languages as illicit and threatening (Blackledge 2001).

Muslim children's responses were also inscribed in these wider discourses. Fear of being framed as the 'threatening Other' both in relation to historical discourses of the 'Oriental/Arab Other' (Said 1978) and in post-9/11 discourses of terror (Abbas 2012) were apparent in some of the children's discourses. Abikh's comment on not wanting to give a bad image of his religion strongly exemplifies this. Saalima's attempt to distance herself discursively from Bangladesh by claiming it is dangerous also echoes the idea of an uncivilised, threatening non-Western world with which she does not wish to be associated. In this study, Muslim children's forms of silent accommodation or tacit resistance to implicit racism can be read in relation to the prevalence of a 'bad Muslim' discourse in society in which Muslim subjects have to prove that they are 'good Muslims' (Mamdani 2004). In the same way, Muslim children in this study

were discursively positioned as the default 'bad Other' and had to develop a range of low impact, tacit discursive strategies to attempt to reposition themselves as 'good Others'.

In addition to institutional and wider social and political discourses, children's representations of Otherness in relation to peers can also be understood in relation to their 'local geographies' (Shain 2012, 153; Ansell 2009). Children's experience outside school did not provide an environment on which children could draw to create alternative discourses of Otherness and representations of differences. Muslim and non-Muslim children lived in urban areas that were fairly ethnically divided. The Muslim Bangladeshi children presented in this article all lived in close proximity, whilst non-immigrant children lived in different areas. Muslim and non-Muslim children did not meet outside school, and Taahira even mentioned that 'it would be embarrassing' to see them (individual interview). As such, they did not share a common form of multi-ethnic youth culture or language on which to base a sense of common, inter-ethnic identity and to create alternative representations of Otherness (Welply 2015).

Conclusion

Children's discursive constructions of Otherness were inscribed in multiple spaces and levels of experience that need to be taken into account to make sense of the complex intersections of discrimination experienced by Muslim children amongst peers. Perspectives from Critical Race Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis can help reveal the less visible forms of discrimination experienced by Muslim children from peers, and the wider discourses and structures (institutional, parental, local) in which they are embedded. The intersectionality of micro-aggressions has shown that the experience of Muslim children cannot be understood solely from the perspective of religion, but through a complex interplay of race, religion, language, culture, national identity and immigrant status. As such, it calls for reframing the concept of islamophobia within a wider analysis of forms of discrimination and oppression which recognises both the specificity of anti-Muslim prejudice and its intersection with other categories of Otherness. This is important both for future research and for

engaging in educational policy debates, which tend to 'read Muslim youth exclusively through the lens of culture and religion' (Shain 2012, 153).

Findings presented in this article contribute to current debates about how schools can engage with racial or cultural diversity. Whilst this article does not offer an answer to the contested debate around multiculturalism in schools, it does show the limitations of multicultural approaches that fail to engage deeply with issues of difference and Otherness. Whilst findings in this article show that school is not the only site of production of discriminatory discursive repertoires, this article offers lines of reflection for schools and practitioners to engage further with difference and be aware of the way that, even with best intentions, discourses of tolerance might prohibit rather than engage children in discussions around Otherness. In particular, it calls for breaking the silence around Otherness and allowing dialogue around misconceptions or controversial issues (Davies 2014) to help children develop a language of difference amongst each other. This call is not new. There has been a long history of pedagogical attempts to engage more critically with difference and multiculturalism (May and Sleeter 2010). Yet at a time where 'the Other' in Britain is being defined through discourses of islamophobia, assimilation and securitisation, it becomes urgent to help teachers and children develop the tools to re-frame discussions around Otherness in more critical ways.

The denial of racist intent through discursive buffers participated in silencing any form of open contestation on the part of Muslim children. However, this does not imply that Muslim children were mere passive recipients of discriminatory discourses. This article showed that Muslim children displayed a range of implicit forms of discursive resistance to create more positive representations of Otherness. As such, Muslim children demonstrated 'discursive agency' defined as the resistance performed by 'discursively constituted and constrained subjects [who] act within and at the borders of the constraint of their subjectivation' (Youdell 2012, 208). This discursive agency holds the potential to 'both reinscribe and unsettle hegemonic meaning' (2012, 209). Although this article has shown the multiple and pervasive forms of discrimination experienced by Muslim children, it also holds some hope for potential spaces of encounter and dialogue. Whilst Muslim children's responses to discrimination remained implicit, they did show an attempt to talk about their

perceived Otherness and to present alternative positive images to the negative representations to which they were subjected. This highlights the importance of recognising the more implicit forms of discrimination towards Muslim children, which often remain unnoticed. It is hoped that once rendered visible, these implicit discriminatory discourses can be challenged and alternative, more engaged and reflective forms of dialogue around Otherness can be fostered amongst children.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

i The *Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills* is the institution in charge of school inspections in the UK.

ii Pseudonyms were used for all participants in the study

iii These categories were based on children's self-identification.

iv *Interpretive repertoires* refer to the figures of speech, often as metaphors, images or systems of signification that are mobilised in talk to interpret and evaluate facts and actions (Bonilla Silva and Forman, 2000).

v *Semantic moves* refer to speech strategies in which the speaker attempts to present an affirmative and positive version of an action or an opinion that could be considered negative. This strategy takes into account what has been said, and what will be said next. A common example of semantic moves associated to prejudice is 'I've got nothing against foreigners, but…' (van Dijk, 1992).

vi *Rhetorical strategies* refer to use of persuasive language and argumentation, in which the speaker attempts to convince or project a positive self-image within a socially desirable frame of reference. This might include a positive statement followed by a qualifying statement. Semantic moves are closely related to rhetorical strategies can overlap (van Dijk, 1992).

vii Data from interviews highlighted children's perceptions of school as a monolingual and monocultural space, in which cultural, linguistic and religious differences were relegated to the private sphere.

viii These excerpts are all from separate interviews with different children.