# Institutionalised Racism in Great Britain

Seminar:

Postcolonial theory and short fiction

MAS-Eng-3

By: Nico Eckardt

Matrikel-Nr: 3193500

E-Mail: nico.eckardt@stud.ph-karlsruhe.de

Pädagogische Hochschule Karlsruhe

Lecturer: Prof. Dr. Martin

Semester: Sommersemester 2020

## Table of contents

## Introduction

Institutionalised racism is a widespread topic right now and discussions are all over the world, in politics and media. Last May George Floyd, a black man, was killed by a police officer in the USA who was kneeling on his neck. The killing sparked a movement of protests against institutionalised racism throughout the country, also in Berlin and London.

Great Britain has always been characterised as a country with a multi-ethnic society. Because of inequalities within society discussions about racism come up regularly. Not only individuals can show racist behaviours but also institutions can have practices which lead to inequalities between ethnic groups. Therefore, I will pursue the following question in this paper: In which ways is institutionalised racism a part of Great Britain?

In order to answer this question, I divided this paper into three main parts. In the first part I will define racism and institutionalised racism and show how they are related. Second, I will go into institutionalised racism in Great Britain, how it came up and evolved. Third, I will talk about areas of institutionalised racism in Great Britain, especially education and the criminal justice system.

## What is institutionalised racism?

First of all, there should be a discussion about racism and its relation to institutionalised racism. Therefore, there has to be a clarification of the term racism.

Racism can be described as "a set of ideas and practices" (McIlroy 1987, 207). These ideas are about human beings which are divided into groups and races through physical features, for example skin colour (cf. McIlroy 1987, 207). Physical features, intelligence, personality and culture are inherited (cf. McIlroy 1987, 207). In addition, "some groups or races are naturally inferior" (McIlroy 1987, 207) to others. As a result, there is different and less favourable treatment for groups which are looked at as inferior (cf. McIlroy 1987, 207).

Racism has changed over time and nowadays there is a new kind of racism. In the past, old racism, was about biology, race and superiority (cf. McIlroy 1987, 207). Today, new racism, is more about culture and nation (cf. McIlroy 1987, 207). Overall, less favourable treatment for some minority groups stay the same. In general, there are three steps for racist behaviour: "(a) prejudiced attitudes lead to (b) discriminatory behaviors and (c) exclusion and inequality are the result" (Parekh 2002, 72).

Although there have been numerous attempts to explain racism within societies one keeps coming up regularly. The explanation is about "a few bad apples" or the "rotten apple" theory. Especially in political discussions the theory keeps coming up. The phrase "a rotten apple quickly infects its neighbour" has a long history and came up first in 1340 (cf. Cunningham 2020). Benjamin Franklin used the theory in 1736 for a different topic (cf. Cunningham 2020). After the beating of Rodney King in 1991 the context for the phrase flipped and became an explanation for racism (cf. Cunningham 2020). Now we can hear the phrase in the context of the killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor where the police are defended with its usage, in the same way of the beating of Rodney King. The theory is used to minimize the publics concern about racism and the institution because the problem is only about one bad apple or one individual who is infecting the other, instead of a system of racism (cf. Cunningham 2020).

In the late 1990s institutionalised racism came into discussion in Great Britain after the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry. I will go into detail about the case later. For the inquiry a definition for

institutionalised racism was needed which the participants struggled to come up with. The definition which was put up said institutionalised racism is:

> The collective failure of an organization to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behavior which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people. (Macpherson 1999)

The Parekh report stresses how racism and institutionalised racism are related and go hand in hand. "Subtle and hidden forms of racism are draining and depressing, particularly when institutionalised in the structures and cultures of public bodies" (Parekh 2002, 59). When institutionalised, racism is not always obvious and apparent in the processes of an organization and its output which leads to inequality (cf. Parekh 2002, 72).

## Institutionalised racism in Great Britain

Colonialism plays a key role in the history of Great Britain and therefore, racism has a long history in the country. An integral part of colonialism is about undermining and dismissing indigenous knowledge by forcing the European epistemologies into the oppressed culture (cf. Bartels et al. 2019, 153). This happens assuming that western knowledge is truth (cf. Bartels et al. 2019, 153). As a result, through colonialism ideological constructions of race found its ways into social, political and academic institutions (cf. Graham & Robinson 2004, 661).

Nowadays, Great Britain is characterized by its multi-ethnic society.

> Britain is a land of many different groups, interests and identities, from Home Counties English to Gaels, Geordies and Mancunians to Liverpudlians, Irish to Pakistanis, African-Caribbeans to Indians. Some of these identity groups are large, powerful and long-settled. Others are small, new and comparatively powerless. Some are limited to Britain but others have international links; some of the boundaries are clear, some are fuzzy. Many communities overlap; all affect and are affected by others. (Parekh 2002, 10)

This multi-ethnic society had its "heyday of immigration" in the 1950s and 1960s (cf. McIlroy 1987, 209). In 1951 only 0.2 million Britons were black. Twenty years later the number already

had risen to 1.2 million and in 1987 there were over 3 million black Britons (cf. McIlroy 1987, 209). These numbers show how fast a society can change.

Since ethnic minorities are confronted with "everyday racism" by "recurrent familiar practices" (Graham & Robinson 2004, 655), a point which comes up is about the silencing of those groups. Already in school students are silenced or ignored (cf. Graham & Robinson 2004, 655). "The dynamics of silencing is a powerful tool in the British context because it is institutionalized within power relations that perceive society as simply "theirs"" (Graham & Robinson 2004, 655). Furthermore, silencing can also appear in the form of "self-silencing" which

> emerges from the frustration of the enormity of race issues that become embedded in society so that the Black individual can become "locked into silence through an insidious and unconscious process of self preservation and social amnesia" (Gordon 2001, 319, quoted in: Graham & Robinson 2004, 662)

Also, on the one hand who gets listened to is related to how powerful the position within the society is (cf. Graham & Robinson 2004, 662), but on the other hand ethnic minorities are often excluded from centers of power (cf. McIlroy 1987, 211). Silencing is a powerful tool because only a few speak about their experiences of racism (cf. Graham & Robinson 2004, 662).

As stated before, the murder of Stephen Lawrence brought institutionalised racism in Great Britain into discussion. The inquiry brought up that the problem of this racist case was not only about individual police officers being racist (cf. Cole 2004, 35), like rotten apples, but the problem lies deeper and is about the police which is undermined by racist practices. As a result, the awareness of the topic changed after the inquiry.

After the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry came up a commission was formed to come up with strategies for a successful multi-ethnic Britain (cf. Eckstein et al. 2008, 9). The results became known as the 'Parekh report'. The report talks about the problem of racism in Great Britain. For example, how a 1990s investigation showed how one in eight Bangladeshi, Caribbean, Chinese, Indian, Pakistani or others had experienced racist insults during the 12 months before the survey (cf. Parekh 2002, 57). In addition, the report stresses the problem of institutionalised racism in Britain. "The inquiry into Stephen Lawrence's murder and its aftermath confirmed that racist attitudes and assumptions are embedded in the routine working practices and in the

occupational cultures of most or all public institutions" (Parekh 2002, 10f). "Its acknowledgment of institutional racism … was a major step forward. For 30 years British officialdom had consistently denied that it had a meaning when applied in Britain" (Parekh 2002, 71). So, the murder of Stephen Lawrence lead to a change in society and politics about the awareness of institutionalised racism.

## Areas of institutionalised racism in Great Britain

The areas in which institutionalised racism can be found in Great Britain are widespread and become most obvious in the exclusion from centers of power, missing black ministers, missing black MPs and policer officers, as well as missing black judges (cf. McIlroy 1987, 211). Other areas can be health care, housing, education, employment and the criminal justice system. For health care it can be recognized how employment and unemployment can lead to ill-health of minority ethnic groups. This leads to the point that there is a higher risk of chronic illness for minorities (cf. Luthra 1997, quoted in: Abercrombie & Warde 2000, 252).

When it comes to housing there are two parts to look at in the context of institutionalised racism. First, there is the problem that the minority ethnic population lives in households with more people per room. While whites live with 1.5 persons per room and only two percent live with 2.5 persons per room, 54% of West Indian households and 65% of Asian households live with more than 2.5 persons per room (cf. McIlroy 1987, 210). Second, there is the problem of lower quality housing for minorities. The accommodations are older, terraced houses, fewer bedrooms, more people per room and fewer gardens (cf. Abercrombie & Warde 2000, 251).

## Education

The educational system is one of the most common areas when it comes to institutionalised racism, but also one of the least noticeable. Most times children start their school life motivated but are disappointed quickly.

> It is widely acknowledged that Black children enter the educational system at 5 years old, full of promise, eager to learn, and achieving on par or even better than their White peers. However, toward the end of the schooling process, Black children's experiences are often tinged with disappointment, some resentment about the way they have been treated, and unfulfilled potential. (Graham & Robinson 2004, 663)

The students are disappointed in school because they are confronted with racism in their everyday lives because of different practices. Gabriel, a black male student in Great Britain, says:

> The racism was *ferocious* from the other students in the school and some of the teachers (…) thinks like calling me names, like 'gollywog' and 'jungle bunny'; putting the blackboard rubber across my brow, marking my face. All day, all day, comments from them. So it was a miserable place… (Gillborn et al. 2012, 127)

One of the main practices for institutionalised racism in education is about school exclusions. This is most apparent for black male students. There is a notable absence of black students when it comes to prizes since their achievements in school are overlooked a lot of times (cf. Gillborn et al. 2012, 131). The problem became present on the 1990s and is due to stereotyping of abilities for black students, who are blamed for the problem themselves instead of the teachers (cf. Graham & Robinson 2004, 661).

> In recent years, there has been considerable concern among educators, parents, professionals, and communities about the growing numbers of Black children cited in official school exclusion data (Department for Education and Employment [DfEE], 2000, 2001; Social Exclusion Unit [SEU], 1998). These statistics have highlighted the overrepresentation of Black boys who have been permanently excluded from school. (Graham & Robinson 2004, 654)

Furthermore, a problem in the educational system comes up with different teacher expectations for white students and students of minority ethnic groups. These different expectations are hard to pin down, but also black teachers are concerned about the problem themselves (cf. Gillborn et al. 2012, 129f). One teacher said to a black student: "Well you got a pass, so what more do you want? Where we weren't expecting you to get a pass." (Gillborn et al. 2012, 131). This quote shows how the expectations are obviously different for some of the children.

Teachers expectations start with continuing criticism by teachers for some students, which lead overreaction about minor problems, which lead to a course of students who are at the risk of failing (cf. Gillborn et al. 2012, 132f). For this course the teachers have the mindset that there is less professional preparation needed because the course would not require the same level of skills (cf. Gillborn et al. 2012, 133). As a result, the "teachers' lack of academic expectations,

in tandem with a heightened degree of surveillance and criticism, create powerful barriers" (Gillborn et al. 2012, 137).

The number of examples from black students who have experienced different teacher expectations first-hand is high. Andrew, a 14-year-old black boy, reported how teachers treated him differently than his white classmates. While Andrew was treated harshly for breaking school rules his white peers "got away with little or no sanctions" (Graham & Robinson 2004, 664).

On the one hand, a number of teachers have the mindset that through the different treatment and different expectations for black students they help the students instead of seeing it as misconduct on their side. The teachers say the students would need to be treated different in order to keep them from becoming involved in criminal activities (cf. Graham & Robinson 2004, 660). The problem of teacher expectations has effects on the achievements and learning opportunities of students (cf. Graham & Robinson 2004, 660). The behavior of the teachers conveys messages about ability of the black population (cf. Graham & Robinson 2004, 660). In addition, a "hidden curriculum" is set up which "carries negative stereotypes into everyday classroom interactions and school practices" (Graham & Robinson 2004, 660).

Nevertheless, not all students from minority ethnic groups are failing in the British educational system.

> Despite these continuing injustices, very many young people from ethnic minority backgrounds *do* succeed in the education system. Unfortunately, the best evidence to date suggest that such successes are often won despite the system rather than because of it. Too many young people from ethnic minority background find their aspirations frustrated by a system that places additional barriers in their path. (Gillborn 1999, 90)

As stated before, the murder of Stephen Lawrence which led up to the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry was a turning point in discussing the topic of institutionalised racism in Great Britain. Therefore, the criminal justice system is a key area for institutionalised racism.

So, what was the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry about? Stephen Lawrence, who was an A level student and waiting for a bus, was stabbed to death by five white youths in 1993. The white youths were known to be racist and were arrested and acquitted for the murder (cf. Macpherson 1999). The parents of Stephen Lawrence uncovered failures of the investigation of the murder by the police (cf. Macpherson 1999). Points which the parents brought up were about the police having "a reluctance to accept the murder was racially motivated, failure to follow up witnesses properly, and delay in gathering evidence" (cf. Macpherson 1999). Because of the parents the case became popular and led to a lot of coverage by the media (cf. Abercrombie & Warde 2000, 258f). Overall, the parents were unsatisfied with the actions the police took:

> The wall of silence [surrounding his murder] was not only in the surrounding area where my son was killed but with the police officers who were supposed to be investigating the crime. What I have seen and heard in the last three days only confirms what I have been saying all along. Right from the start, the night our son was murder, it seems that in the minds of the police he was only a black boy, why bother. No-one can convince me otherwise, the evidence is clear to see by the action they took or didn't take. (Macpherson 1999)

The media coverage then led to the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, which for the first time in Great Britain took up the problem of institutionalised racism. The Inquiry came to the conclusion that there was a "collective failure" on the side of the police (cf. Macpherson 1999).

While the case of Stephen Lawrence is widely known it is not the only one. For example, in 1998 Imran Khan, a 15-year-old boy, was stabbed to death by two white youths (cf. Parekh 2002, 125). There was a gang rivalry between Asians and white youths. The two white youths were expelled from school for racial harassment before the murder (cf. Parekh 2002, 125). So, they were known to have racist views. When the two white youths were put on trial the defense argued the death was because of inadequate care in the hospital (cf. Parekh 2002, 125). In addition, the judge showed a reluctance to accept the racist motivation behind the murder: "There has been no evidence to suggest that this was a racist attack. This case again demonstrates the dangers inherent in young men going about with knives." (Parekh 2002, 126)

Furthermore, in the British criminal justice system there is a problem about racial harassment. A survey found out about a problem for reporting racial harassment. The outcome of people reporting racial harassment to the police show how half of the interviewees were not satisfied with the responses they got (cf. Virdee 1997, 279). There are two reasons for the dissatisfaction. First, the police officers had "shown a lack of interest or indifference towards addressing the problem even though the incident constituted a criminal assault" (Virdee 1997, 279). For one of the reports the police even did nothing at all (cf. Virdee 1997, 279). Second, "the police had acted in a manner which was unreasonable and which they interpreted as being racist or, at best, in implicit sympathy with the actions of the perpetrators" (Virdee 1997, 279). As a result, there could be reluctance when it comes to reporting racial harassment.

In addition, the problem of racial harassment goes deeper. Racial harassment can also be practiced directly by police officers.

> In this survey, three of the 59 people who had been racially attacked and two of the 103 people who reported racially motivated property damage, identified the offender as a police officer. A further 3 per cent of all people who had been racially abused in the past year identified the perpetrators as police officer. (Virdee 1997, 28)

As a result, the problem about racial harassment is both about heavy policing and police neglect (cf. Parekh 2002, 111). So, there is "criminalization on the one hand and inadequate attention to racist crim and behaviour on the other." (Parekh 2002, 111f).

At last, black Britons are treated differently all throughout the criminal justice system (cf. Parekh 2002, 129). The start is with the policing in the streets, here black suspects are more likely to get arrested than whites (cf. Parekh 2002, 129f). Next black suspects face longer prison sentences (cf. Parekh 2002, 129f). Finally, it is six times more likely for black suspects to end up in prison where they are confronted with racism from prison officers and other prisoners (cf. Parekh 2002, 129f).

## Conclusion

Throughout my research for the topic of institutionalised racism in Great Britain it became clear how deeply rooted the problem is. All areas where institutionalised racism can be found and observed, such as education, employment, housing, health care and the criminal justice system, go hand in hand. Here, education comes out as one of the most important areas, since the life of young Britons is set during their time in school. So, education should be one of the first areas to take up the problem and set out for solutions and prevention.

The first part of this paper showed how racism and institutionalised racism are interrelated and even though different definitions can be found they cannot be completely differentiated. Which leads to the conclusion that both parts need to be addressed in the same manner.

Colonialism plays a key role in the history of Great Britain because racism is related to it. Nevertheless, there were a lot of decades going by until the discussion about institutionalised racism took place in Great Britain. The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry therefore signifies a turning point in the awareness and the politics about racism. A problem which a further paper could look into is how much the Inquiry really has changed. The conclusion would probably be that only a few aspects have changed since then.

Finally, it is to say that institutionalised racism can be found in all areas of British society and that it is a major part of Great Britain. The whole topic cannot be addressed fully in a ten-page paper. The topic needs awareness in order to challenge the problems. Now there is a good time to get into this and spread awareness since the death of George Floyd brought institutionalised racism into a new perspective and new discussions come up almost daily. At last, the discussions about racism and institutionalised racism also found a place in Germany.

References

Abercrombie, Nicholas & Alan Warde (2000). *Contemporary British Society.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bartels, Eckstein, Nicole Waller & Dirk Wiemann (2019). *Postcolonial Literatures in English. An Introduction.* Berlin: J.B. Metzler Verlag.

Cole, Mike (2004). "'Brutal and stinking' and 'difficult to handle': the historical and contemporary manifestations of racialization, institutional racism, and schooling in Britain." *Race Ethnicity and Education* 7 (1): 35-56.

Cunningham, Malorie (2020). "'A few bad apples': Phrase describing rotten police officers used to have different meaning" https://abcnews.go.com/US/bad-apples-phrase-describing-rotten-police-officers-meaning/story?id=71201096 (accessed July 10, 2020).

David Gillborn, Nicola Rollock, Carol Vincent & Stephen J. Ball (2012) "You got a pass, so what more do you want?: race, class and gender intersections in the educational experiences of the Black middle class." *Race Ethnicity and Education*. (Volume 15, Issue 1): 121-139.

Eckstein, Korte, Eva Ulrike Pirker & Christoph Reinfandt (2008). "A Divided Kingdom? Reflections on Multi-Ethnic Britain in the New Millennium." In: *Multi-Ethnic Britain 2000+. New Perspectives in Literature, Film and the Arts,* 9-21. New York: Rodopi.

Gillborn, David (1999). "Race, Nation and Education: New Labour and the New Racism." In: Demaine, Jack (ed.). *Education policy and contemporary politics*, 82-102. Houndmils: Palgrave.

Graham, Mekada and Gil Robinson (2011). "'The Silent Catastrophe': Institutional Racism in the British Educational System and the Underachievement of Black Boys." *Journal of Black Studies*, 34 (5): 653–671. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3180922 (accessed June 19, 2020).

Macpherson, Sir William (1999). "The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry" https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/277111/4262.pdf (accessed June 19, 2020).

Mason, David (1995). *Race and Ethnicity in Modern Britain.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

McIlroy, John (1987). „The politics of racism." In: Jones, Bill (ed.). *Political Issues in Britain Today,* 207-223. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Modood, Tariq (2005). *Multicultural Politics. Racism, Ethnicity, and Muslims in Britain.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Parekh, Bhikhu (2002). *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain. The Parekh Report.* London: Profile Books.

Virdee, Satnam (1997). "Racial Harassment." In: *Ethnic Minorities in Britain. Diversity and Disadvantage,* 278-289. London: Policy Studies Institute.

## Statement of authorship

I certify that the attached material is my original work. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement. Except where I have clearly stated that I have used some of this material elsewhere, it has not been presented by me for examination in any other course or unit at this or any other institution. I understand that the work submitted may be reproduced and/or communicated for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. I am aware that I will fail the entire course should I include passages and ideas from other sources and present them as if they were my own.

| July 19, 2020 | Nico Eckardt |
|---|---|
| Date | Name |