ECLECTIC RESILIENCE: REVISITING 'RESILIENCE' IN LIGHT OF RACISM, 'OTHERING' AND RESISTANCE

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Starting Points..

As academics and members of a Racial Equality Council in the UK we found that through racism and flawed perceptions and interpretations of resilience and 'othering' members of ethnic minority communities are defined as in need of resilience support, whilst at the same time their experience of structural racism, e.g., in relation to mental health support, social/health care practices and school exclusions, is being erased.

It follows that there is a need to critically analyse how the concept of resilience can be and has been applied to Black, Asian and minority ethnic families and communities in ways that are biased, stigmatising and pathologising (see also Joseph-Salisbury, 2018; Shaikk & Kauppi, 2010).
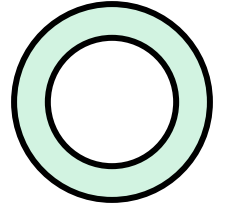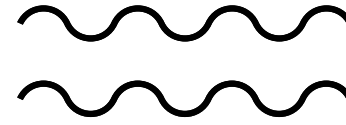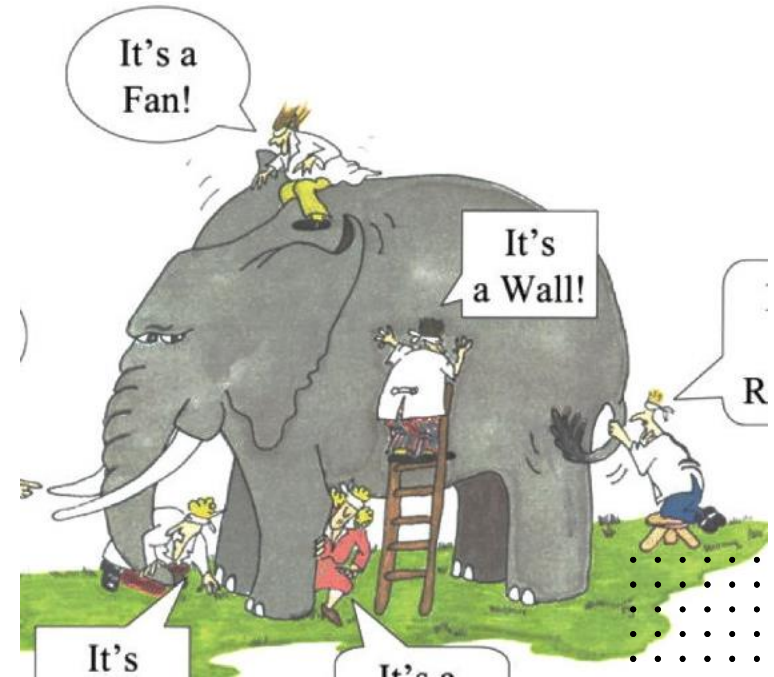
Resilience

- Resilience, defined as "*positive adaptation despite adversity*", first used by Werner in the 1970s, has become a popular term in research and practice with disadvantaged groups, centralising the role of 'positive emotions', 'successful traits', and coping mechanisms in adapting to life despite great odds (Werner & Smith, 2002, p. 3; see also Luthar et al., 2000; Masten, 2015; Rutter, 2012).

- Moreover, the phenomenon of resilience has been adopted in everyday language with a focus on '*making people more resilient*' or the '*need*' to become more resilient.
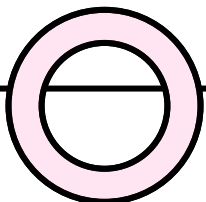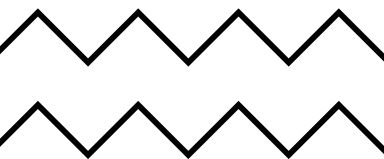
Revisiting Resilience

- Yet, 'resilience' has also provoked scepticism, and at present there is ***little consensus on the referent of the term, standards for its application or agreement on its role in explanations, models and theories***; this has been exacerbated by the C-19 pandemic.

- Some of this is linked to the fact that **key terms**, such as 'success' and 'positive adaptations' are *not clearly defined*, other than being **measured in terms of education success, an 'ability to achieve goals' and having a 'positive attitude**', to name a few, whilst ***'resistance to change' and 'disordered behaviours' are equated with lacking in resilience*** (Ungar, 2020).

My Resilience Research

- **'Man Up', Bullying and Resilience within a Neoliberal Framework'** - Perceptions in relation to bullying, with a particular focus on discussions around resilience, drawing on data from focus group interviews with young people (mean age 14 years old), parents and teachers ($N = 40$) (Sims-Schouten & Edwards, 2016).

- **'A troublesome girl is pushed through': Morality, biological determinism, resistance, resilience, and the Canadian child migration schemes, 1883–1939 -** through analysing case files and correspondence relating to children sent to Canada via the Waifs and Strays Society and Fegan Homes, I shed light on the complex interplay between morality, biological determinism, resistance, and resilience in decisions around which children should be included or excluded. I argue that it was the complex interplay and nuance between the moral/immoral, desirable/undesirable, degenerate, and capable/incapable child that guided practice with vulnerable children in the late 1800s (Sims-Schouten, 2021).

Revisiting 'resilience' in light of racism, 'othering' and resistance *(Sims-Schouten & Gilbert, 2022)*

A critical analysis of how the concept of resilience can be and has been applied to Black, Asian and minority ethnic families and communities in ways that are biased, stigmatising and pathologising.

There is a need to redefine and reconceptualise resilience, particularly in settings dominated by White middle-class voices that define what 'positive emotions', 'successful traits' and 'coping mechanisms' entail.

Here, through racism and flawed perceptions and interpretations of resilience and 'othering', members from ethnic minority communities are defined as in need of resilience support, whilst at the same time their experience of structural racism, e.g., in relation to mental health support, social/health care practices and school exclusions, is being erased.

Instead, we argue that resilience can also mean 'resistance', i.e., resisting bad treatment and racism, as well as reflecting agency, identity and ownership of one's own life and choices within this.

Reframing resilience thus means taking account of multifaceted and interactive effects of personal, material, institutional and political factors that impact on behaviour, wellbeing and resilience.

The Study

- Interviews with members from ethnic minority communities undertaken in the South of England between 2018–2021, as part of a study into their perceptions regarding social care, social services and education.

- In line with Bhaskar's (1989; 2014) critical realist ontology, we adopted a form of reasoning called **retroduction**, which involves *moving from the level of observation and lived experiences to making (non-linear) inferences about underlying structures and mechanisms that may account for the phenomena involved.*

- Critical realism, an ontological framework developed by Roy Bhaskar (1989), has the central premise to promote awareness as a key strategy, providing fundamental insight into the causal factors in the individual agent, the cultural sphere and the wider society.
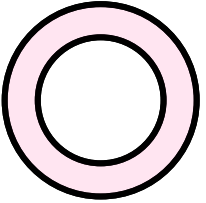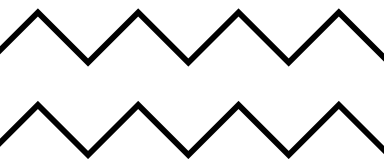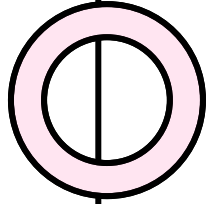
'Resistance' and 'Difference' as threatening

They say 'oh you're shouting' or they said that when you were talking to them, you were shouting, you're raising your voice. We're Caribbean they don't realise that Caribbean people have a very high pitch tone! (Black female)
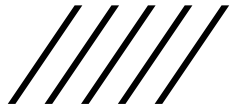
There was another black lady, her son had been taunted and called the N-word, and she kicked off at the school, and they told her that they will call the police to get her arrested. (Black female)

She has shouted at me in the corridor and said to me my son will not be able to participate in a nativity Christmas play because he is a Muslim. I have never started at her whether he is Muslim, Jewish, Christian or whether he can or cannot play part in the play, so I was really in shock because there were a lot of parents around. She was holding out the reception door, so there are a huge amount of people and there to shout at myself and expectedly put me in the shock and I didn't know what to say to her. (Moroccan female)

Absence, Under-representation and 'Othering'

The kids touching (name) hair – there's always kids touching her hair and messing about with her hair and they – we don't see that as a nice thing. You shouldn't do that, you should maybe ask first or something. And they tried to say '[oh] but it's because they like her' and I – I'm saying 'no but that's sort of racist' But it's all about saying 'no' without getting angry I guess 'cause (name) didn't like it, it's a bit rude. She used to say 'I'm not a dog'. [laughs] (Mother of a mixed-race teenage girl)
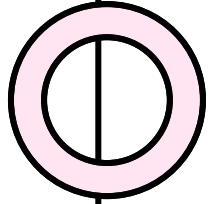
Conclusion

Voices from a range of communities are **absent** from and **under-represented** in resilience research and practice, including from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities in the UK, as well as from global contexts.

This is *despite the wealth of anti-racist research that centres the role of resilience in achieving against the odds, particularly in relation to education*, and which highlights ways in which **communities can be resilient in the context of discrimination and racism**.

Yet not only are voices from a range of communities under-represented in this field, the focus on 'strengthening' and 'building' resilience in ethnic minority communities pathologises these communities, suggesting that they do not already develop resilience and are in need of transformation

Instead, definitions of strong and poor resilience are established which can lead to blaming members from ethnic minority communities for not coping in an oppressive environment
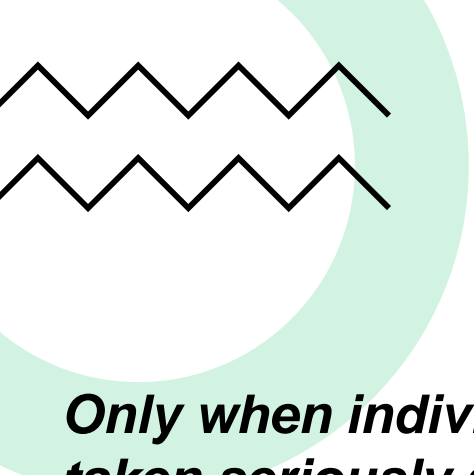
Only when individuals and communities are heard, taken seriously and their needs engaged with is it possible to truly make sense of what resilience entails and what support is required to facilitate the development of resilience in different social and cultural groups. Rather than embracing a form of 'colour blindness/evasion', often wrongly applied in certain 'inclusive practices', there is a need for a race-conscious approach to transformation

What next?? >>>
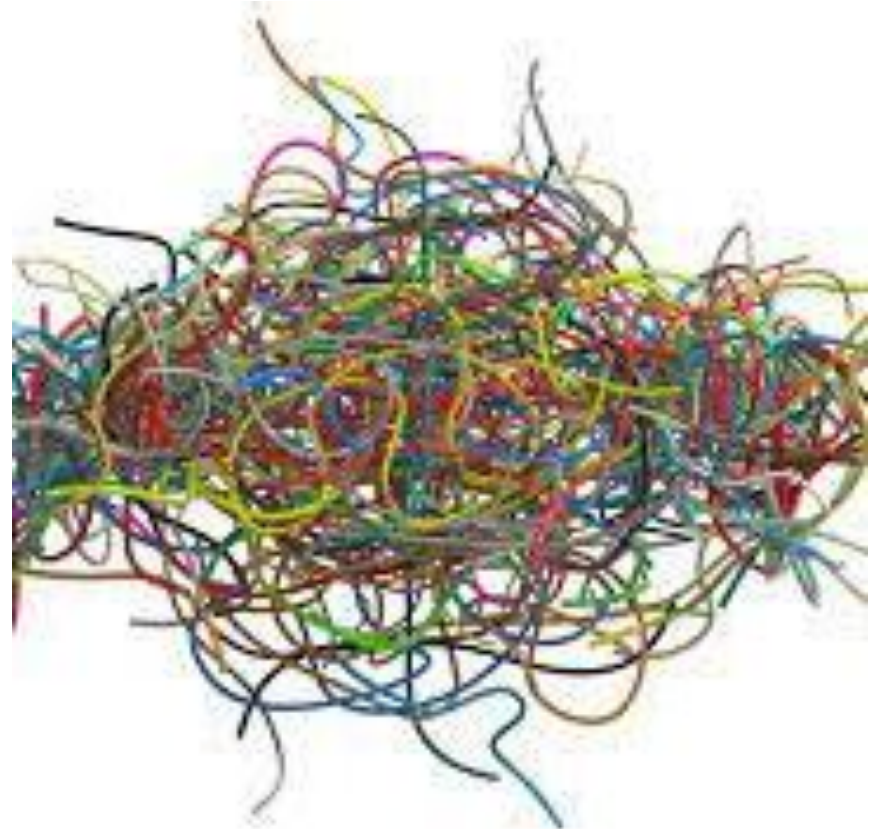
"ECLECTIC" - *Exposing Children's Lived Experiences,* *Co-produced Through Immersive* *Collections*

- *Against the backdrop of the rise in child refugees/migrants across the world, this **project aims to advance understanding of the transformative potential of curating children's stories and experiences in accessible and creative ways to disrupt, counter, and draw critical attention to the impact and legacy of displacement.***

- **'Lived Memories' & 'Survivor Silence'** *- little is known about the every day experiences of (former) child migrants/refugees and displaced children following arrival in their new country.*

How?

- By presenting **contemporary children**, as co-producers/researchers and experts, with **former child refugees/migrants' stories, memories and artefacts**, exposing **the lived experiences and legacies of two historic migration schemes** (**Kindertransport and Windrush**).

- Centred on *'things',* this project acknowledges **objects, stories and artefacts as carriers of complex visual, material, cultural and social meanings generating multiple narratives and interpretations**. This recognition demands embracing an *interdisciplinary outlook* and adopting a multiplicity of research methods, including visual methods and participatory research.
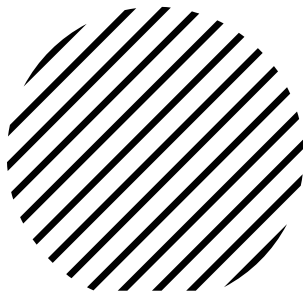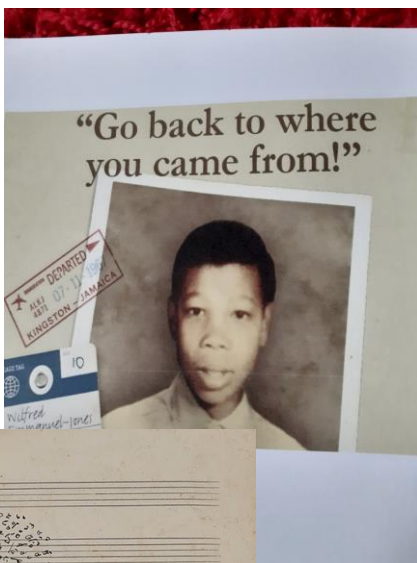
Department for Education UK guidance on 'political impartiality: teachers to be 'balanced' over British Empire and not to back Black Lives Matter.

Instead, this project centralises children's meaning-making and validating children's voice, agency. This involves treating children's ideas and opinions on matters that affect them as central to ideas of participation, social justice, democratic practice and agency, and treating childhood as personal, fluid and relational, recognising the inherent interdependence of children's worlds.

Viewed ***through a critical realist lens and positioning theory***, provides opportunities for making sense of **deeply subjective, sensed, and embodied experiences.**

JUST LIKE US ...

The objects tell you that the children are just like us.

This tells us that the child migrants are just like us. They are normal people who have had bad luck/experience. (misfortune)

The child migrants probably feel like they do not belong. They might be told to go back to where they come which is not possible because they had to escape for a reason.

objects?

unprecedented

people were overwhelmed

sorry for them because they had to leave their family.

the children wouldn't understand why they had

- feel like an outsider
- no where to go
- have no idea what people are saying.

phone

charger

=c

anxious

worried

feeli[ng]

sca[red]

lonely

uncomfortable

the older children
have to feel responsible for
the younger siblings/children

sad to leave

relieved

homesick

(moved away
from danger)

isolated

pressured

they would feel
angry because
they are being forced
to move despite all
the changes they
are going through
personally

F E E L I N G S
&
E M P A T H Y

Contemporary Children's Talk about Former Child Migrants/Refugees

- "<u>Children our age</u>, we always take things for granted. People do things like this and it's not very nice."

- "A memory, I'm just going to get over sad straightaway because like all I've got is a <u>memory</u>."

- "Scary because you've never- you don't have someone that you like always had around, also angry because you're being like forced to change something when you're already like changing physically. <u>Puberty</u>. Changing into a teenager."

- "And people are so <u>selfish</u>. Like, us British people are so proud to be British but our history is like actually <u>nasty</u>. It's just <u>disgusting</u> that people can be so selfish."

WHY?

- **Immersive learning** – *counteracting 'Othering' and 'Otherness'.*

- Focus on **'belonging', rather than 'migrants'.**

- Curated by children, not adults – ***children as constructors and co-constructors.***

- Taking ***a departure from the UK Department for Education's view of children as passive absorbers of one-directional teacher instructions***, evident in their recent advice to teachers in England to be "balanced" in their teaching about the British Empire.

- **Addressing Amnesia and Fragmented memories that are central in colonial and post-colonial empires and migration.**

References

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- https://silo.tips/download/the-history-of-the-moluccans-in-the-netherlands-a-contested-past (**Thesis Hieke van der Voort**).