Follow-up document (summary of key ideas)

The Uprising: Deconstructing Institutional Racism through a Decolonial Lens

Hosted by Decolonial Dialogues & Race, Ethnicity and Education Network

Guest Speaker: Pravini Baboeram

14 October 2020

4-6pm

Acknowledgments: The organisers of the event are grateful to Sana Rizvi (lecturer in education, University of Exeter, UK) for capturing the most significant reflections, commentaries and questions raised during the event.

Introduction and Q&A with Pravini Baboeram

Introductory words from Riadh Ghemmour (PhD student in education, University of Exeter)

Salaam Walaikum, Azul felewun, good afternoon- Welcome everyone to our first event. This is co-hosted by DD and REEN. Today we have the huge privilege to welcome Pravini to talk about decolonial movements with us. Before we do this, let me go over the house rules with you all. This event is a safe space- so please respect this space. Thank you Pravini for joining us.

Brief background about ‘The Uprising’

Pravini: I work at an NGO where I focus on diversity and inclusion in higher education. I wanted to make a film on limits of diversity and the decolonisation movement. So, I want to give you a brief background about how this film was developed. As you have noticed, this is a music documentary. The music came first, and then the film. A few years ago, I started writing about this, as a musician I started becoming more vocal about decolonization in the
Netherlands and speaking out against racism. I am unapologetic about my political views. I started writing songs, and with every song I wrote, it was more than just music, I wanted to connect the emotional part with the analytical part. I ended up with this idea of adding this film to the song, a journey that includes academic analysis- it is a very heavy subject and so the music was a way to take everyone on this journey, to feel empowered about this.

*Andrea Jimenez (University of Sheffield, UK)*

**Reflection:** Hello. I absolutely loved watching The Uprising. I felt both inspired and motivated to continue in this decolonial learning. As I was watching I had moments of anger, learning more about the historical colonial moments. I also had moments of hope, in listening to the amazing people who shared their knowledge in the video. I was trying to look for the songs online and was wondering if Pravini has them somewhere so I can listen to them :) Andrea

*Pravini:* The songs are available on Youtube, Spotify. You need to google Pravini and The Uprising and you should be able to find the rest of the songs.

*Andrea Jimenez (University of Sheffield)*

**Reflection:** There were several moments- moments when they were talking about history of colonialism, and slavery. It made me angry. It made me aware that my own education did not address this. Moments when they talk about hope and solidarity. I need that. In my dept, I am the only one to have this identity and this allows me to connect with other people like me.

*Helen Knowler (University of Exeter, UK)*

**Question:** What were the practical challenges of making the film - what advice could you give to young people who want to use arts based and creative approaches to activism?

*Pravini:* One of the most practical challenges is funding. You need resources to make this film. I applied for funding and the funding was denied. I did not have the funding. But I was raised in a family of entrepreneurs, so I was used to taking risks- so funding did not prevent me from making this film. I turned towards my community and asked if they would be willing to contribute to the film. So, the advice I would give, is be aware of your own social capital. Everyone in this film, from cameraman to speakers on the film all had a common goal to challenge colonial legacy and I was able to call on their support. So, turn to people that you know in your network and visualise what you want to do. So, when you explain to your network, they also have a clear idea. It is a learning process. I did a lot of the work myself. I took courses to edit films. So, challenge yourself and believe in yourself.

*Malcolm Richards (University of Exeter, UK)*

**Question:** You have referenced the tensions of being anti-racist, [commercial] appeal and creating ‘brave’ spaces for de/colonial dialogue - could you speak more about this?

*Pravini:* BLM movement is a good example of this where a few years ago it was considered something in the margins and something radical. Now because of their work, it occupies centre stage. It does not say all lives matter. BLM has been critical of commercialisation and industries want to support BLM. So, we now have power to influence change. For me it is liberating to be unapologetic.
**Mette Toft Neilson (correspondence from the Netherlands)**

**Question:** I absolutely loved the film AND the music that so strongly accompanied the points made in such a powerful way. Thank you so much for that! I am curious to know; how has the movie been received, and has it created a dialogue towards structural change in broader society in the Netherlands?

**Pravini:** This is very interesting because it depends on where you position the reception of the film. For instance, I submitted this film to film festival, and it has not received that much attention. However, a lot of educational institutions have embraced this film, particularly HEI. It is interesting because HE is part of the problem, so we need to challenge knowledge production and it is a good thing that they are beginning to engage in these conversations. So, there are a lot of conversations taking place within HE that are using this film to start talking about decolonising. The film allows people to reflect analytically and theoretically.

**Carol Ann Dixon (University of Sheffield, UK)**

**Question:** Was it always your intention to discuss decolonial activism and racial justice beyond the Netherlands and make The Uprising an internationally focused documentary - especially in light of what is discussed throughout the narrative about resisting the structural constraints and conceptual conceits of the nation-state. Thank you.

**Pravini:** Yes, I always had the intention to make an internationally focused documentary - that is why I included people from different contexts- however I want it to focus on European history of colonisation. Currently we have resources on USA based films, and I wanted to offer a European analysis within the UK, The Netherlands and French context. In Europe, we have a legacy of colour-evasiveness, what we are trying to do is be color-brave. I grew up with this idea that the only way to evolve is through a nation state ideology and this film forces us to challenge this narrative.

**Mette Toft Neilson (correspondence from the Netherlands)**

**Question:** How did you decide which people to include? I mean also, which countries to include or exclude if there have been some specific thoughts on that. Do you have any thoughts on how to create this anti-racist resistance across borders in Europe?

**Pravini:** I wanted to focus on France and the UK because I was familiar with this context. I also knew some speakers from this context because their work inspires me. The message that people in this film carry however resonates with a lot of people in different contexts. The people in this film are part of anti-racist resistance movement and alliance. Link to Decolonial International Network that Pravini mentioned: [https://din.today](https://din.today). They are thinking of making this alliance outside Europe, creating solidarity within Global North and Global South.
**Riadh Ghemmour (University of Exeter, UK)**

**Question:** As a student at The Graduate School of Education here at Exeter, how could we connect those movements outside the university and bring them inside the university to have dialogue to avoid fragmentation of dialogues.

**Pravini:** There are two ways to go about it: Digital technology allows us to join and mobilise around certain protests. What I did was to actually go back into my own community and attend community events where we focus on our history- so there you connect with people who are not in academia but people who are engaged in these conversations. People want to contribute and if you can include the community spirit.

**Carol Ann Dixon (University of Sheffield, UK)**

**Question:** If you have time to answer this: In the same way that the scholars featured in the film shared examples of key luminaries throughout the struggle who have inspired their own activism, please can you share a few of your own inspirations. As I recall, the list of figures detailed in the film included (among others) Angela Davis, Hadj Ali Abdelkadir, bell hooks, Malama Najima, Malcolm X, etc.

**Pravini:** Actually, one of my inspiration is Muhammad Ali- he is known as a boxer, but I find what is inspiring is that he used his sports career to advocate for social justice. The fact that he refused to go to Vietnam as they were not the enemy. His sacrifice was so important, he found solace in Islam. He seemed to genuinely care for people. He took on that role with dignity and pride.

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**Activity 1 (15 min, plus 15 min feedback) done through breakout rooms**

*Share a moment in the film that was challenging and disrupting for you (think of a quote, image or perspective presented in the film), and discuss how this might resonate with your own experience in terms of teaching, research and/or activism.*

**Some discussions captured during the breakout session...**

**Ursula Crickmay (University of Exeter, UK):** Whilst it is not central to my research, so this opened our eyes. I am wondering what does this mean for us now?. For me, my background is in classical music-and that is contextualised in the enlightenment era- so now we need to discuss within music education.

**Room3**

**Kerry Chappell (University of Exeter, UK):** Are you scared yet? It felt quite threatening. Why did she leave on a note on threat or fear in the colonial mindset. I couldn’t sleep. It was a definite moment of ahhhh and not end on a caring note.
**Sam Pulman:** I agree. There were strong messages to really challenge the superiority of western knowledge—because it is entrenched in our mind and we need to learn it.

**Kerry Chappell:** It does have that affect

**Room 5**

**Ramzi Merabet (University of Leeds, UK):** I grew up with this—so I am more aware of this. It did not disrupt me that much. But in terms of scholars, it disrupts your thinking what they had to say.

**Andrea Jimenez (University of Sheffield, UK):** I think in the film some woman said that people of color have learned to hate ourselves—and that stuck with me...it is colonisation of mind. For instance, in Beirut, there is elite group that have colonialist thinking.

**Room 4**

**Salma (undergraduate student, University of Vienna, Austria); Nikki (MA student in education, University of Exeter, UK), Pravini:** Enlightenment should be changed to an age of darkness. We need to critically challenge traditional European thinkers who held racist ideology. There is dehumanisation of communities and celebrating oppressors and not holding them accountable. You can’t ignore and deny this.

**Commentary after the first activity:**

**Carol Ann Dixon (University of Sheffield, UK)**

All three of us in room 2 are based in HE, Ursula, Carlette, and myself—we found the whole Black European experience interesting. It was different to USA-based context—we were inspired to learn more. From a personal perspective, it gave me a sense of home.

**Malcolm Richards (University of Exeter, UK)**

We were in Room 1; the film sparks a dialogue that transcends borders. We very quickly talked about how John Harvey showed this with his students and how angry the students were of not knowing this history. A moment that was challenging, I think the Blackface in the Netherlands was really infuriating to know that such practices exist today. Students were surprised and angry that such practices are celebrated. From a personal perspective, in the South West of England, we have similar practices with a toy that has Black face and is mocked/derided. The film was really able to highlight how such practices are normalised.

**Pravini**

Whether it is a confederate flag or golliwog, how do we challenge this and challenge the system. The system is very invisible, you don’t see it. It is abstract and hidden and yet the symbols are explicit—so to challenge the symbol, you are challenging the system. You are scratching the surface of iceberg, there is a whole history behind it. We need to understand what are we fighting for? Transform your anger to strategy—Don’t stay angry but channel your anger and energy to think how you can change the system. We are changing reality; we need to stay driven. There are a lot of people who are tired and feel burnt out.
Activity 2 (15 min, plus 15 min feedback) done through breakout rooms

Share a moment in the film that was inspiring and empowering for you (think of a quote, image, or perspective, presented in the film) - and which has encouraged you to engage with decolonisation to shape your own praxis.

Some discussions captured during the breakout sessions..

Room 1

Malcolm Richards (University of Exeter, UK): I was blown away by voices of leading academics who offered on decoloniality. To hear these voices in 90 minutes, in dialogue with imagery and Pravini, it was offering different perspectives on liberation.

Kiel Ramos Suarez (University of Linnaeus, Sweden): I was struck by the music- I took notes. I was very much interested in how speakers were mainly males- there was lack of representation of queers and women of color.

Malcolm Richards: That is important- we have to be intentional about intersectionality and recognise that within our Blackness and I mean that within a political sense, that we include diverse voices.

Susannah: In USA there is myth of democracy. We need to be mindful of intersectionality

John: What was inspiring was to hear this dialogue on history. History is so important. Our understanding of history is distorted and very euro-centric- we were socialised into thinking about this and so this dialogue was very interesting.

Room 3

Kerry Chappell (University of Exeter, UK): Loving the enemy. Houria Bouteldja’s call to love our enemies and how we might do that

Sophia Hayat Taha (University of Keele, UK): It was helpful to know we have resources that we can use.

Mette Toft Neilson (correspondence from the Netherlands): We have a tendency to talk about pain and less about resistance.

Room 4

Nikki (University of Exeter, UK): Fight the enemy with love because hate is a coloniser’s tactics. How do we use our privilege and be activists and not wanting to dominate spaces?
Salma (University of Vienna, Austria): You have the choice of being non-white...what does it mean by to be a white person in alliance and solidarity? Forgot to also mention that we briefly talked about the idea of fighting hate with love and the growth Malcom X has went through since Nation of Islam up to him saying that he "no longer hates white people", a very good reminder for me personally to not perpetuate the same colonising strategies in educating and conversing with each other :)

Room2

Carol Ann Dixon (University of Sheffield, UK): The film crossed many contexts, and many generations too. We all had to be mindful about learning about each other’s histories. Both of the people in my room, shared their individual histories. The film is a catalyst for further dialogue, and we are all in state of becoming.

Commentary after the second activity...

Kiel Ramos Suarez (University of Linnaeus, Sweden): In Group 1, we spoke about the lack of intersectional representation among the scholars who were interviewed in the film. Mostly male scholars were interviewed, and we agreed that there is a need to highlight the voices of women of color scholars/LGBTQ scholars of color since gender and sexuality are intricately part of colonialism as well as the process of decolonization.

Pravini: We need to have a conversation about intersectionality. I really made a conscious effort to focus on race. I tried to maintain a balance. There is a risk that if focus too much on intersectionality, we might erase race and I speak from The Netherland context- there is a risk of excluding or minimising race.

Concluding thoughts

Riadh Ghemmour (University of Exeter, UK): Decoloniality remains a choice- it should come from a place of love, respect and ethics. We need to learn each other’s history. Decolonising is walking and asking questions always. It is about unpacking certain taken-for-granted assumptions.

Further resources:

Decolonial Dialogues: https://decolonialdialogue.wordpress.com

Decolonial International Network: https://din.today/about-decolonial-international-network

Pravini music: https://www.pravinimusic.com | @spotify: https://open.spotify.com/artist/5kCCWww2xzH5AYDoxMSP1q?autoplay=true

Race, Ethnicity and Education Network: https://reenexeter.wordpress.com

The Uprising (the movie): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8GjRMQrJ2ig
The Uprising Educational Toolkit: a guide for educators to engage students in decolonising the mind: [https://www.pravinimusic.com/educational-toolkit/](https://www.pravinimusic.com/educational-toolkit/)