

# **Chinese Among Others in Europe: Thematic Workshop**

**16th October 2020**  
**Budapest, Hungary**

*Interethnic prejudice and racial discrimination towards  
Chinese children in Portugal*

**Sofia Gaspar**  
**ISCTE-IUL/CIES-IUL**  
**[sofia.gaspar@iscte-iul.pt](mailto:sofia.gaspar@iscte-iul.pt)**

# Introduction

- Aim of the Paper: to analyze the narratives and experiences of interethnic prejudice and racial discrimination towards Chinese descendants during their school education in Portugal, using the concept of microaggression.
- Chinese migrants in Portugal 2019 (stock): 27.839 (4.7% from a total 590.348).

# Methodology and Participants

- Research Project - *Social integration of Chinese descendants immigrants in Portugal* – funded by FCT, and developed between 2014-17.
- In-depth interviews to 22 Chinese descendants living in Lisbon, contacted through snow-ball technique.
- Ages ranged between 18 and 24.
- 18 informants were 1.5 generation (born in China); and 4 were second generation migrants (born in Portugal).
- Interviews focused on personal trajectories since a young age (from pre-schooling until basic school education).

# Concept of 'Racial Microaggression' as a Theoretical Tool

-Racial discrimination towards Chinese and Asian migrants had been developed in North America (Benner & Kim, 2009; Sue *et al.*, 2007, 2006; Tsai and Wei, 2018), Australia (Chiang *et al.*, 2013; Dunn et al., 2018; Li, 2019) and in South America (Armony & Velásquez).

- **'Racial microaggressions'**: “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative racial slights and insults that potentially have harmful or unpleasant psychological impact on the target person or group.” (Sue *et al.*, 2007:72)  
As such, racial microaggressions are insults or jokes about race or ethnicity affecting the social interactions of everyday life.

**Microassaults:** “explicit racial derogations that are verbal (i.e., racial epithets), nonverbal (behavioral discrimination), or environmental (offensive visual displays) attacks meant to hurt the person of color. It is generally deliberate and conscious” (Sue *et al.*, 2007: 73).

**Microinsults:** “It is a behavioral action or verbal remark that conveys rudeness, insensitivity, or humiliates a person’s racial identity or heritage”. (Sue et al, 2007: 73)

**Microinvalidations:** “actions or comments that exclude, negate or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings or experiential reality of a person of color”. (Sue et al., 2007: 73)

Contrary to microassaults that are conscious, microinsults and microinvalidations are often unconsciously made by the offenders.

- Racial microaggressions are particularly harmful at young ages;
- School relationships and interactions can then be a privileged site for racial microaggressions' manifestations between different ethnic groups, and can reinforce racial differences and stereotypes.
- How are microaggressions manifested in school contexts? How can they contribute to isolate or exclude children of migrant-origin?

# Discourses on Microassaults

*Children are a bit cruel... They called me 'chinoca' [chink] all the time at school. It was terrible. And I did not understand the difference in Portuguese between the 'r' and the 'l', and I changed them when I was speaking. And I tried to look invisible... Every time someone saw me at school they called me 'chinoca' [chink], they said I had slanted eyes and they teased me a lot... They started to imitate Chinese people. I was ashamed of my Chinese name, of my Chinese look...*

(Miri, woman, Chinese 1.5 generation)

*I am foreigner... And my Portuguese peers are racist, that's normal. It's normal to hear people call me 'chinoca' [chink] ... That happens a lot in public schools. I didn't like when teachers said I was a 'Chinese'. I felt excluded. But I learnt to live with that and to find a way to cope.*

(Xing, woman, 1.5 generation)

## Discourses on Microassaults

*Some children from my neighborhood used to shout at me when I was passing by: 'go home, Chinoca [chink], go to your land!' Once, I got so furious that I replied: 'You shut up, you asshole! My parents do a lot more for this country than you will ever do! Shut up!' [His parents have several Chinese restaurants]*

(Bin, man, second generation)

*Yes, I also discriminated other students... She was a girl from my class, I was on my 5<sup>th</sup> grade, and she was fat, and we all teased her. She was from Africa, but then, with time, we became very good friends.*

(Xing, woman, 1.5 generation)



# Discourses on Microinsults

*My school integration was a trauma. I became stupid, because I need to go back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade and I was 11... I became depth and voiceless because I could not communicate in Portuguese. And I was not good at Maths, as everyone expected... My teachers, my schoolmates and specially my family. There was a lot of pressure to be a good student, but I simply did not understand a word of Portuguese. How could I? I felt an enormous pressure on me and constant anxiety.*

(Chyuan, women, 1.5 generation)

*When my Portuguese teacher asked something in class, she never looked at me... She constantly asked to Portuguese students the answer. And she frequently forgot that I was born here and that Portuguese was also my mother tongue...*

(Lihua, women, second generation)

*I remember to go out for a meal with my Portuguese schoolmates, and when we got to the restaurant, I took my Chinese sticks to eat and they told me: "What are you doing? You should be able by now to eat with fork and knife! You are not in China!"*

(Sue, women, 1.5 generation)

# Discourses on Microinvalidations

*People are always surprised to see how a Chinese girl speaks Portuguese so well! They are always asking me this: “where are you from? You speak so well Portuguese!”*

(Lihua, women, second generation)

*I liked to be at school and I had some good friends there... It was very common that my friends would say to me: “We are all Portuguese, and you are one of us! We don’t see you as a Chinese, as a foreigner... You are one of us!” Even if those comments were intended to be positive and make me feel well-integrated, somehow, I thought they were only reinforcing the idea that my face wasn’t White, my Chineseness was evident to their look and I did not belong there! That seems contradictory, but it was what I felt!*

(Lan, woman, second generation)

# Discussion/Further Research

- These forms of microaggressions caused tension and distress on school context to Chinese descendants, reinforcing their feelings of 'not belonging' to that social environment. However, these verbal microaggressions were viewed as unintended and 'excused' by Chinese descendants.
- Future Research should include:
  - a) Strategies adopted by Chinese people to respond, react or adapt to those microaggressions.
  - b) Different manifestations of microaggressions apart from microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations in Chinese descendants or adults.

# Discussion/Further Research

c) Comparison of racial microaggressions between Chinese with other ethnic minority groups, like students and children of African descendent.

d) Intersectionality approach in order to examine whether race, gender and social class might determine manifestations of microaggressions directed to ethnic minority groups.

## REFERENCES (i)

- Araújo, Marta; Maeso, Silvia (2016), *Os contornos do eurocentrismo: raça, história e textos políticos*. Coimbra: CES/Almedina.
- Armony, Ariel C. & Velásquez, Nicolás (2015). Anti-Chinese Sentiment in Latin America: An Analysis of Online Discourse, *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 20, 319-346. DOI 10.1007/s11366-015-9365-z
- Benner, Aprile D. & Kim, Su Yeong (2009). Experiences of Discrimination Among Chinese American Adolescents and the Consequences for Socioemotional and Academic Development. *Developmental Psychology*, 45 (6), 1682–1694.
- Chiang, Frances K., Low, Angeline and Collins, Sydney Jock (2013). Two Sets of Business Cards: Responses of Chinese Immigrant Women Entrepreneurs in Canada and Australia to Sexism and Racism, *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies Journal*, 5 (2), 63-83.
- Dunn, Kevin M., Blair, Kathleen, Bliuc, Ana-Maria and Kamp, Alanna (2018). Land and housing as crucibles of racist nationalism: Asian Australians' experiences, *Geographical Research*, 56(4), 465–478 doi:10.1111/1745-5871.12313
- Kim, J. G. S. (2002). Racial perceptions and psychological well being in Asian and Hispanic Americans. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 63(2-B), 1033B.

## REFERENCES (ii)

- Li, Yao-Tai (2019). “It’s Not Discrimination”: Chinese Migrant Workers’ Perceptions of and Reactions to Racial Microaggressions in Australia, *Sociological Perspectives*, 1-18, doi/10.1177/0731121419826583
- Sue, Derald Wing. (2010). *Microaggressions in everyday life : race, gender, and sexual orientation*, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Sue, Derald Wing, Bucceri, Jennifer, Lin, Annie I., Nadal, Kevin L., and Torino, Gina C. (2007), *Racial Microaggressions and the Asian American Experience*, *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* Copyright 2007 by the American Psychological Association 2007, Vol. 13, No. 1, 72– 81.
- Tsai, Pei-Chun & Wei, Meifen (2018). Racial Discrimination and Experience of New Possibilities Among Chinese International Students. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 46(3), 351–378.
- Vale de Almeida, Miguel (2006), *On the Lusophone Postcolony: ‘Culture’, ‘Race’, ‘Language’*, 18 de abril, Department of Spanish and Portuguese Studies, Rutgers University.