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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the discursive construction of race in Malaysian international schools and its relationship with postcolonialism. In response to the expansion of international schooling, it analyses data from a study of international school leadership in Malaysia, a former colony, through a postcolonial lens. It draws on face-to-face interviews with twelve international school leaders, and discourse analysis of sample websites from Malaysian international schools. Malaysia is an ethnocracy, with three distinct racial groups, and ethnicity affects many aspects of life, including education, and it is suggested that international schools offer no exception to this. The data indicate four emergent themes, these being constructions of: school identity; educational expertise; leadership; and Malaysia itself. The authors posit that international schools in Malaysia operate as postcolonial sites. Despite the origins of international schools lying within a movement committed to equality, these institutions are implicated in the construction and replication of racial divisions.

Introduction

The number of international schools globally has increased by almost 40% between 2012 and 2018, and projections are that the number of students in such schools will reach 7 million by 2023 (ISC Research 2019). This rise has been primarily in Asia and the Middle East (Machin 2017), and the driving force of such growth has been local population demand (Chuck 2015). Previously, international schools predominately served the children of expatriate families whilst now they contain a higher proportion of local host nation children (Hayden 2011), though the balance varies greatly between schools. However, the relationship between expatriate and host country cultures in this evolving landscape have received insufficient research consideration.

This article analyses the construction of race in international schools in Malaysia. We follow other scholarly work on education in Malaysia (Joseph 2018c; Koh 2017; Samuel, Tee, and Symaco 2017a), in using the term 'race', which is in common parlance in Malaysia. The number of international schools in Malaysia increased by 44% over the period 2014–2019 and the majority of their students by 2019 were host nationals (Malay Mail 2019). Here, international schools are defined as those that teach a foreign curriculum (predominately British), the language of instruction being foreign (mainly English). They are usually fee-paying and are staffed, certainly at senior levels, by foreign nationals.

Malaysia, a former British colony, is a South East Asian country whose citizens are required to categorize themselves at birth into racial groups, Malays, Chinese, Indians and 'others'. These categories are then constantly used within official documentation (Joseph 2018b). Politically it has been described as a ethnocracy, whereby the state itself is founded on ethnic politics (Wade 2009; Samuel and Tee 2013); Malays and other indigenous groups are defined as 'Bumiputera' (people of the soil), and are given preferential consideration in many areas of life, such as university scholarships and banking. This ethnoscape is a legacy of colonialism and manifests itself in many aspects of life including education, Joseph (2014) pointing out that 'contemporary postcolonial Malaysia, including its education system, is highly stratified, ethnicized, and politicized' (Joseph 2014, 162).

There is a small but growing literature on the racialization of education in Malaysia (Joseph 2018c; Samuel, Tee, and Symaco 2017a) suggesting that its education system can be viewed as postcolonial (Joseph and Matthews 2014; Koh 2017; Koh and Sin 2021). Rizvi, Lingard, and Lavia (2006) define postcolonialism as 'the residual, persistent, and ongoing effects of European colonization' (Rizvi, Lingard, and Lavia 2006, 249). Education is a site where postcolonial effects of knowledge and power are directly linked. During the British colonial rule, schooling in the then Malaya was based around racial segregation with different schools for different races (Joseph 2014) and this division was directly to create a demarcated workforce for the colonialists (Noor and Symaco 2017). These racial differences still exist today and can be described in Rizvi et al.'s terms as residual and persistent ongoing effects of colonialism.

However, the literature to date has not explored the role of international schools in this postcolonial landscape; this article seeks to address this literature gap. It sees international schools in Malaysia as postcolonial sites, arguing that these sites are racialized, for example in their staffing structures and how they market themselves. The article draws upon a research study of leadership in Malaysian international schools, including interviews with international school principals, analysis of staffing structures and school web sites.

Literature review

This review has three sections. Following an initial exploration of the racial make-up of postcolonial Malaysia, we consider postcolonialism in education and its relationship with present day Malaysia, and finally the relationship between postcolonialism and international schools is addressed. Following Go (2018), we use the term 'postcolonial' to refer to the ways in which the legacy of colonialism continues to shape multiple aspects of contemporary societies.

Malaysia and its racial postcolonial legacy

European colonisers of Malaya (the predecessor of modern Malaysia) were the Portuguese, the Dutch, and the British, while the Japanese ruled during much of the Second World War. The British (1824–1942 and 1945–1957) developed a division of labour among the different ethnic groups; Malays were employed as agricultural workers and the British imported Tamils from South India to work on the rubber plantations. Entrepreneurial Chinese were encouraged to come to Malaya in relatively large numbers to develop urban and commercial centres. These different groups were residentially segregation by their colonists. This racial stratification and attendant socio-economic inequalities are a major legacy of the colonial period from 1511 to 1957.

The 2010 Malaysian census reports a population of 30.2 million of whom 91.8% are Malaysian citizens with three distinct racial groups: Bumiputera (67.4%); Chinese (24.6%), and Indian (7.3%) (Samuel, Tee, and Symaco 2017b). These racial groups predominately use distinct languages, Malay for Malays, Mandarin for Chinese, and Tamil for Indians; following independence in 1957 Malay became the official national language (Brown 2007). The wealth gap is also reflected racially with the average Chinese household having 1.9 times as much wealth as the Bumiputera in 2014. In 2014,

60% of the adults in the top 1% income group were Chinese, with 33% Bumiputera, and 6% Indian (Khalid and Yang 2019).

Malaysia's education system, race, and postcolonialism

During the colonial period, English schools were established by Christian Missionaries (today these schools, still with their Christian names, are frequently high-status institutions). The schools were in urban areas and were frequently attended by the Chinese. Most of the Tamil schools were in the plantations and the colonial government's participation was minimal with no provision beyond primary education. Mandarin-medium schools had wealthy patrons for the growing number of locally born children of Chinese ethnicity. In addition, there were English speaking schools, such as the so called 'Eton of the East', the Malay College, catering for the upper class Malays who would run the colonial civil service (Andaya and Andaya 2017). So the country was separated by race economically, educationally, and geographically (Joseph 2014). The differences in the medium of education further entrenched racial separation, as basic education in their mother tongue was seen as sufficient to prepare each child for their allotted place in the colonial economy (Noor & Symaco 2017). The so-called 'Free' schools, first established by colonialists in 1816, were originally planned for the children of Europeans and government officials only, but later opened to any children whose parents could afford to send them there. These were exclusive fee-paying establishments, denoted 'Free' only in the sense that they were free of any racial bar on entry (O'Brien 1980).

Malaysia's present state-funded education system is highly centralized with the government at the centre (Noor and Symaco 2017) with a multilingual primary and monolingual secondary school system. Primary education covers age 6–12. There are two types of primary schools, National Primary schools, where the language of instruction is Bahasa Malaysia and National Type Primary schools, the so called vernacular schools, where it is either Chinese (Mandarin) or Tamil. The majority of each race attends their 'own' vernacular schools (Loo 2009). In secondary education, ages 12–17, the medium of instruction is Bahasa Malaysia. In summary, the postcolonial legacy of racial divides in education continues; segregation is a deep seated problem in Malaysia's education system and 'manifests itself in an ethnically polarized society' (Raman and Sua 2010, 117).

Following the 'race riots' of 1969 the Malaysian government followed a path of affirmative action in favour of the Bumiputera (Lee 2012; Sua and Santhiram. 2017). Education became used as a social tool with which to strengthen the political and social dominance of the Malay majority (Joseph 2018a), an approach enacted primarily in tertiary education. Discriminatory education policies including ethnic quotas were introduced. Policies include pre university matriculation programmes, elitist residential schools and scholarships reserved for Malays. For example, 64% of spaces in public universities are reserved for Malays; entrance into public universities is based on ethnic quotas rather than merit (Joseph 2014).

While Adams & Velarde (2020) ascribe the growth of international schools in Malaysia partly to the 2012 governmental removal of the 40% cap of Malaysian citizens within a school, for Kim (2019) the expansion of international schools in Malaysia needs to be understood in the broader context of racial politics. In the same year that the cap was removed, national schools ended their policy of teaching mathematics, and science in English, this resulted in national schools' language of instruction being entirely in Malay; the schools were becoming more Malay/Muslim (all Malays are legally designated Muslim, and this is reflected on their identity cards). The effect was immediate, within one year the number of Malaysians attending international schools was over 50% of the total, although the proportion varies significantly between schools. Kim & Mobrand (2019) argue that in postcolonial Malaysia 'the state made racial difference a foundational point of education policy' (320), and argue that international school policy is one way in which the government has managed ethnic diversity and inequality.

In summary, the politics of difference based around race, which was established during the colonial era, still dominates contemporary Malaysian education policy and has contributed to the

expansion of international schooling. However postcolonial theory shows how educational, political, and economic practices continue, not in a chronological linear fashion but meshed with globalization to produce new social inequalities and to challenge others. The effects of colonialism are negotiated and reconstructed in contemporary societies; as Koh & Sin (2021) note, 'the enduring legacy of colonial racism is carried into the transnational education workplace and immigration, legitimizing, and equating Western countries and whiteness to expertise and internationality' (16).

Postcolonialism and international schooling

There is a limited but expanding literature that addresses ethnicity and culture in international schools worldwide. It has been noted that Western, male, Anglophones are over-represented amongst international school principals (Slough-Kuss 2014). Tarc & Mishra Tarc (2015) analyse the experiences of a small number of Anglo-Western teachers to conclude that the international school is 'a dense transnational space of gendered, racialized inter-class relations' (48) suggesting that such schools may be perceived as 'an incubator for Anglo Christian values' (Gardner-McTaggart 2019, 458). Wettewa (2016) examines international school choice in Sri Lanka, suggesting that English language fluency and overseas credentials are seen by parents as offering students competitive advantage in the job market, but with English continuing to being perceived as a 'reminder of colonial rule, a driver of social stratification' (66). Tanu (2014, 2017) argues that becoming 'international' at her case-study international school in Indonesia in fact equates to becoming Westernized, and specifically Anglophone, and is a way for local elites in Indonesia to reinforce their elite status; she demonstrates that whilst the school is ostensibly multi-cultural, in fact it distances itself from the local and is largely Eurocentric, engaging with local culture as an 'other'. Tanu sees practices at the school as a continuation of colonialism.

However, there remains a lack of academic literature on international schools in Malaysia and few theorists refer to Malaysia's multi-racial society as a specific context. Velarde & Ghani (2019) and Adams & Velarde (2020) both concentrate on international school leadership in this 'multicultural' and 'culturally diverse' environment, yet there is a lack of criticality of the racial context in these papers. The authors refer to celebration of different faith festivals, and argue that multicultural education is fostering an ethos that promotes value sets such as tolerance and respect in a culturally diverse environment, yet there are racial inequalities of pay operating between Asian and Western teachers within their case-study school. Although noted, the paradox of a school promoting racial equality, yet simultaneously operating race based pay differentials, is not explored in these works. The practice of racial differentials is also corroborated by Bailey (2015) who finds that international school staffrooms in Malaysia can be highly stratified between Western and local teachers, with Western teachers feeling that they are more highly skilled than their local counterparts, implicitly de-skilling the latter.

This article addresses this specific research gap, and also contributes to the wider literature concerning postcolonialism and international schooling, by exploring international schools in Malaysia through a postcolonial lens. There is one research question:

How does the discursive construction of race in Malaysia reflect postcolonialism?

Methods

The research that this article reports upon was from revisiting of a multiple case study based around leadership of international schools in Malaysia undertaken in 2018 (Bailey and Gibson 2020; Gibson and Bailey 2021). Twelve face-to-face interviews with international school principals from this study have been complemented by visual discourse analysis of international school web sites; and leadership ethnicity data of 100 international schools in Malaysia.

The sample of principals interviewed was selected by a combination of opportunistic and purposeful sampling. A professional association of international school principals was approached to circulate the call for participants and snowballing was used to increase the sample. There is variation in ethnic composition of international school in Malaysia as discussed earlier and, although not a strictly representative sample, that variation is represented in the study. There are international schools included in the study that cater primarily for host nationals and those that have a larger amount of expatriate children. The sample includes for-profit and not-for profit schools, single owner schools, a parental cooperative, schools in Malaysian only chains, and a school that is part of a chain with its HQ based outside of Malaysia. Hour long face to face interviews were held, transcribed, and analysed for emergent themes. None of the participating principals were Malaysian nationals. All of the sample, apart from one, had English as their mother tongue, were white and from Western countries such as the UK, Australia, and the US. The language of instruction of all the schools was English and whilst the curriculum varied, it was exclusively from Western or Anglophone countries. Each participant was given a pseudonym to preserve anonymity, although gender is preserved.

A revisit of the initial data has provided the opportunity to re-analyse the original data through a postcolonial lens. Revisiting qualitative work is becoming more commonplace, such reuse allows for greater insights than would have been proposed initially (Bishop and Kuula-Luumi 2017) as McLeod and Thomson (2009) indicate, 'the richness and value of qualitative studies is not exhausted or fully captured in one reading or telling, or in one time' (McLeod and Thomson 2009, 121). This study re conceptualises the original data by a process of 'contextual reflexivity' (Temple, Edwards, and Alexander 2006, 3). The original transcriptions were re-analysed to address the research question, using Critical Discourse Analysis.

In addition to the revisiting of interview transcripts, two new data sets were obtained about international schools in Malaysia, firstly an analysis of the ethnicity of senior leadership teams, followed by critical discourse analysis of various international school web sites in Malaysia. In order to establish the ethnicity of the senior leadership teams a contemporary spreadsheet of international schools in Malaysia was built from an online commercial database of 103 (https://educationdestinationasia.com/schools/malaysia). In addition to the 12 participating schools, the web sites of a further 18 sites were viewed making a total of 30. These 18 were selected by using a stratified randomized sample from every 5th one on the list of the remaining 91 schools. The ethnicity of each principal was not self-declared and was on a rudimentary basis: white/ non-white, Malaysian national/ expatriate. Information from school web sites used to allocate this included names, photographs, and personal biographies.

The data are further triangulated by a postcolonial multimodal critical discourse analysis (CDA) in terms of text (Fairclough 2013) and visual images (Jancsary, Höllerer, and Meyer 2015). Critical discourse analysis is undertaken at the level of the individual image and text and of the institution that holds that information. It explores the values of such media and the intended and unintended consequences of the image, Cohen et al (2018) noting that 'the home of the image may be giving messages about the institution and its values and, indeed, the intended message behind the institution's selection and use of the image, not least because institutions are sites of the operations of power' (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2018, 734). It is important to note the CDA of web sites does not include the interviewees' schools; this is important for the protection of anonymity as such information could well make schools identifiable. Although the data in these analyses are in the public domain nonetheless the schools are not named in this study as this also becomes a distraction and could compromise the participating principals' anonymity; the use of this data are in corroborating our argument of such schools being postcolonial sites. The CDA is not a systematic review of a large proportion of school web sites but rather an 'essence' of the messages that the schools' discourse gives to (potential) consumers.

The research had ethical clearance from a British university. The key ethical issues involved were protection of anonymity, for participants and their schools. This also restricts some of the data and

analysis as schools, and subsequently their leaders, could be identifiable by 'jigsaw' matching from people who are knowledgeable about the area. Both researchers were academic staff at the time at a British university campus in Malaysia and were resident in the country.

One of the disadvantages of case study is the lack of generalisation. The interview sample was less than ten per cent of the population and was not randomly chosen, so there is caution about the findings being applied to all international schools in Malaysia. However there is a relatedness to other situations and we agree with Pring (2015) that case studies 'alert one to similar possibilities in other situations. They, as it were, 'ring bells' (56); we ask other researchers to address this area too.

Findings and discussion

The analysis of the data gave four distinct, although sometimes overlapping, themes from viewing international schools in Malaysia through a postcolonial lens: constructions of school identity; constructions of educational expertise; constructions of leadership, and constructions of Malaysia. Each of these will be explored in this section.

Constructions of school identity

All schools in the sample and additional schools' websites projected identities through various marketing; frequently these had racial overtones, either implied, or overt. There were differences within the sample but common occurrences across international schools in Malaysia, the most obvious of which was they predominately have white principals and although this will be addressed later it is important for the creation of these schools' identities; it sets an initial scene (Slough-Kuss 2014).

Many of the schools' websites rooted their identity in the UK. Such overt identity icons as uniform were very similar to the type of uniform that school children would wear in the UK, not the ones in Malaysia. The main curriculum that the schools offered was referred to as the British curriculum [*sic*], with students sitting 'internationally recognised British qualifications' (in fact, the curriculum offered is around the English national curriculum). This was not merely a semantic difference; the schools were marketing 'British*ness*'. The principals of two schools in our sample specifically referred to their links with Britain, in relating stories of their Asian owners being educated in Britain and wishing to create something similar in Malaysia. These stories were well known by the principals and were on their school web sites. Liam retold the story: two of the children from the family

> have been to boarding school in the UK and they wanted to create something similar in Malaysia. Whilst acknowledging that it will be the same as a UK boarding school, it has to have that sort of an Asian influence because of where it is situated.

The other school web site proclaimed that 'the founder was so impressed by the operation and management methods of that school in London that she decided she would consider establishing a similar school on returning [to Asia]'. Another school website, in a section aimed at potential foreign staff, referred to the school's location of Kuala Lumpur being 'a modern city with a strong regional and colonial history', whilst another described the school as being 'housed in a couple of old, beautiful colonial buildings'. This reference to the Colonial past is not dissimilar to the 19th century English-medium 'free schools' in Malaysia (O'Brien 1980; Andaya and Andaya 2017).

The initial international schools in Malaysia were created for expatriates only, being a school from home, away from home. It is not surprising that these schools were founded by British expatriates. Like most international schools in Malaysia all of our sample were English-medium schools, this was clearly market-driven but it was unclear if parental demand was due to English being the *lingua franca* of globalisation or, as Wettewa (2016) observed in postcolonial Sri Lanka, it retained a residual postcolonial status. One school website demonstrated links with Britain by using black and

white photographs of the founder and early teaching staff, once again indicating heritage links with a colonial past. This school site also portrayed links with other British colonies such as Australia and New Zealand, i.e. predominately white colonies. Another principal described their school identity by saying, 'We feel we are true Brit. We want to be a British school', a second observed, 'our mission was always quite clear, it was about an excellent British education for kids'. Web sites indicated that The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award, a non-formal award which celebrates non-scholastic achievement, was offered by some schools too, displaying a link with the British monarchy.

It is important to note that all of these schools contained large proportions of Malaysian students, and that many of the schools in our sample controlled the ethnic composition of their student population. Sometimes this was with an explicit cap; in one instance the school reserved 35% of places for students who carry passports from the (Anglophone) 'founding nations'. All the principals referred to their schools being international in having students from many countries, although most had a majority from Malaysia. Every principal was aware of the racial breakdown of their schools, each being able to give approximate percentage breakdown, and some linked this to their curriculum. For instance, Judy referred to her school proudly, 'Our school is mainly Malaysian Chinese … 70% Chinese, that's why we offer Mandarin almost as another core subject … and that was really so that anyone that came from Chinese schools didn't necessarily lose their cultural context'. Although his school had a different racial composition, Michael's response was similar to Judy, explaining that as

> Malaysian school, we have the Muslim friendly bit built in already, that is built in so we already have the uniform for girls, we have the Surau, the provision for the Friday afternoon prayer, and so … we're seen as an easy accessible school for Muslim students.

In such ways, school identities were built along racial lines, echoing the colonial development and stratification of Malaysia's education system explored above (Joseph 2014; Koh 2017; Samuel, Tee, and Symaco 2017b).

Each principal described their school's target market, which was frequently based around race too. Judy explained that the owners of her school were Chinese Malaysian, and they sought to serve that community. She explained the school's origin, 'It was because there was a need, a growing need that people had lost faith in the local government schools. Secondary schools for Chinese vernacular, there just are not enough secondary schools'. Paul explained how his school's colonial past was part of its marketing strategy, 'We do actively manage the demographics. That is quite a key part of the mission of the school; we look to actively market to those families through the connections with our trustee organizations'. This was not just a school-based decision. One organization operating a group of schools had targeted specific ethnic markets for each of its schools; one of their principals, William, explained that a school targeting the Malay community needed to have lower fees.

To summarise, these international schools were constructed by operating racial quotas, used racial-based markets and sought to offer an aspirational schooling that frequently identified with Malaysia's colonial past. In some cases, they appeared to be replicating the racial divisions inherent to colonial Malaysian society, both between Western and Malaysian, and also ghettoisation within Malaysia to facilitate divide and rule (Noor and Symaco, 2017).

Constructions of educational expertise

The staffing of international schools is also an area that assists in promoting a given school's identity. Frequently web sites showed pictures of white staff with a predominately Asian student cohort. There were also staffing quotas and policies that operated within a school that reflected racial lines. Most of the schools in our sample had expatriate and local staffing, though in differing proportions.

Some of the schools set a specific quota of expatriate staff as part of the school identity or for financial reasons. Samantha stated that for her school, 'every teacher who is not a language teacher has to be British trained. They may not be British; most of us actually happen to be British, but they have to have the British qualification and experience teaching in a British curriculum'. Many of the

principals indicated that salary differentials by nationality were operating in their schools, as referred to both Bailey (2015) and by Velarde & Ghani (2019). Some principals referred to the proportion of expatriate staff impacting on fees such as when Oliver asserted that the 95% of his staff who were 'expat [are] far more expensive', whilst at the other end of the spectrum Michael stated that his school had 'currently, 16% expats, a very low per cent to keep costs down'. These staffing quotas were sometimes imposed to retain the school's (white) identity, sometimes to ensure the staffs was an international mix with no single dominant group. Schools which aimed at a lower fee market seemingly had fewer expatriate staff and controlling this was a salient issue for some principals, Judy pointing out that 'the reason we can charge the fees we're charging is because half the staff are local'.

Jeremy noted the potential for staff apprehension due to these differentials. His school had exclusively expatriate teachers, ostensibly to avoid this, but in practice excluding Malaysian staff completely, 'But in other schools when you have got a local teaching population and you have got a local expat population and the salaries are not the same, which creates some tensions'. Such pay differentials may unintentionally imply differentials in skill (Bailey, 2015) or worth.

The post that a local teacher holds was also significant, and several comments from principals made it clear that Malaysian staff held more junior roles or were only assigned to specific areas of the curriculum; Paul's observation of 'local teachers who are Malaysian, teaching our language programme' was typical. Some of the principals made it clear that they felt that the skill-set of qualified Malaysian teachers were not up to standard, Alex saying that

> we have about 6 of our teachers that joined us as a classroom assistant, the fact that they were already qualified teachers, that was great on paper, but they would not have been up to scratch when they have joined us.

and Michael observing

> When you talk about CPD as continuing professional development we have been doing it weekly for 10 years, to turn Malaysian teachers, teaching in an old fashion way, through to international school teachers who are teaching in a way we wish.

This discourse had a feel of colonial rulers developing the local population.

International schools' web sites and other marketing materials frequently supported this discourse, showing a disproportionate number of white staff faces or even proudly proclaiming the high percentage of their staff that is British. Although British does not equate to white, in some schools it seemed to serve as a proxy. Judy was acutely aware of this,

> But a lot of my staff including my current key stage coordinator who is British but of extraction [turban wearing Sheikh], could not get a job in another international school. He was trying. He was excellent on paper but could not even get to interview stage. And he knows why ... Because international schools want white faces and that's it. It is a travesty really.

Judy had challenged her governors over the marketing of the school as a white institution, saying that in 'the first couple of years I got upset with them because of the marketing ... they were just showing the good-looking, young British teachers, the white faces'.

To summarise, international schools predominantly represented educational expertise as white and Western. Non-white educators were kept hidden, received lower remuneration, and occupied lower status positions within the organization.

Constructions of leadership

Such differentials were not simply reflected in pay but in management structures; non-teaching staff in all the schools were predominantly Malaysian. Our principal sample were all Western (Slough-Kuss 2014) apart from one, which reflected our website analysis. Frequently web pages opened with a greeting from the principal, almost invariably white, along with the photographs and often personal biographies that emphasised their Western background. The senior management teams were

also often shown, either in group pictures or individually; their western whiteness being clear. Further to this, the imagery was colonial, with local children physically looking upwards to British leaders. Expatriate teachers were frequently employed in leadership positions throughout the schools. Michael clarified the use of the expatriate teachers, 'expat teachers tend to be in leadership positions so in primary schools we've got expats as year leaders … in the secondary school they are heads of department in subject areas'. The middle leadership role extended to 'using the expats as role models and coach mentors'. In addition to the professional expatriate-local tensions generated by such practice, the [not so] hidden curriculum for local children is clear; Western adults lead. Liam pointed out that his school had 'always appointed an expat principal'.

The one non-white interviewee in our sample, Debra, was an Indian national who perceived racial overtones to leadership of international schools in Malaysia. Debra's voice in retelling her story was powerful; her experiences reflected this racial disparity at the heart of international schooling in Malaysia. She described the first meeting she attended with a professional organisation for international school principals in Malaysia:

> I was the only dark-skinned person. And there were 200 of them. And I really stuck out like a sore-thumb. And they didn't know what to do with me! They didn't know how to interact with me. Some were very crude and rude, unfortunately, … They would "So. Which. School. Are. You. From?" [speaks slowly, phonetically, imitating other principals].

> I wanted to tell them "I'm sorry are you trying to be funny? Because I don't think any of what you are saying to me or the tone you are talking to me is, but y'know what, that's your problem. If you think that's what makes you a good international head then so be it". It was very, very strange. And I came back thinking … .. "Oh my God. How sad for you all". …

> It was very condescending it's like- the eyebrows went up if I said something that was actually sensible, like "Oh my God, she's got a brain". It was really poor handling of me.

Debra also referred to the challenges within her own school, from the owner and from parents. The single owner who as then principal, had 'talent spotted' Debra within the school staff and promoted her but conditions appear to have been attached,

> I used to wear the saris to school. Every single day for the first three years. And as I moved up the ladder, [owner] just gently said to me one day, she said, "You do not want to be – y'know, judged because of how you look. You want to be-" And I was not like – it was not like I was dangling bangles.

She felt she was seen as less authoritative because of her race, and as a consequence parents would openly challenge her decisions and wish to speak to the owner.

Slough-Kuss (2014) calls for international schools to be more culturally diverse in their appointment of principals; Debra's story indicates the pressing need in this area.

Constructions of Malaysia

The interviews held with participants were primarily around school leadership; however, the data analysis also explored the principals' construction of social Malaysia, one based around race. During the interviews, some participants made racially-stereotyped comments on Malaysian nationals who may work, own or be parents within the school including 'Malaysians being lazy', 'tiger moms' and 'Chinese-shrouded finances'. Many of our participants saw the growth of International Schools in Malaysia being due to the local system being of poor quality and parents wishing to have something 'better'.

Judy referenced the owner's race in referring to finances, 'they [owners] are Chinese. They've got some very funny ideas about finance, the school budgets, and not disclosing information about numbers', William endorsed this view too, 'sometimes it still goes back to that kind of Chinese way of doing things'. Judy also referenced the famous book about Chinese parenting practices (Chua 2011) when she commented: 'I've got real tiger mothers'. Jeremy echoed this view:

our Chinese mums, who are largely unemployed, will gather at the school … . I'm sure you will understand the Chinese have been brought up in an education system that is very traditional, very demanding and very focused, and that's not the way we do things in teaching and learning anymore … .after school activities, which for many of our parents are nothing more than child minding, allowing them to get themselves another latte before they come and get their kids, or get their maids to come and get their kids, or put them on a bus and cart them for 45 minutes across the other side of town. And I'm being cynical, but it's true.

The stereotype of Malaysians, particularly Malays, being lazy was used by Oliver when describing the problems he was having in gaining site work undertaken,

I've run into few people here that are proactive and not just reactive. Facility managers, contractors, people showing up on time, it's not laid back, it's not a laid back Hawaii vibe, it's "I don't give a shit". You know, something's gotta get done. "Can you as a contractor get it done by this date? Yes, yes boss". But nothing, people don't show up, people just disappear. They're running out of people. Nothing happens on time.

The indiscretion in such comments is interesting, all of the participants in this section were not known to the interviewers and had met those minutes before the interview, yet they were ready to express these stereotypes. It is unclear whether this was because the interviewers were both white expatriates, who may have been seen as 'one of us', or whether the unconscious stereotyping would have been expressed to non-white interviewers. The principals' construction of Malaysia was one built on Race.

The analysed data indicate a concept of international schooling in Malaysia as postcolonial; the schools built on the Colonial past, had racial overtones in how their staffing operated, their leadership reflected colonial ties and leaders themselves appeared to have racially stereotyped views of the host nation. Alike Tanu (2014, 2017), the 'international' education offered by such schools appears to be Western in practical effect.

Conclusion

Postcolonial theory addresses the residual effects of colonialism in former colonies. This article has analysed empirical data on international schools in Malaysia, building on the work of Joseph (2009, 2014, 2018b) and Koh (2017). Based around interviews with international school principals in Malaysia four constructions have been generated, those of school identity, of educational expertise, of leadership, and of Malaysia itself. It has been suggested that these schools may contribute to racial division and replicate, if not enhance, social inequality based on race. As such, we postulate that they are postcolonial sites.

This analysis raises further questions for research into international schooling in Malaysia. In particular, we suggest that additional work needs to be undertaken to explore host nation parental views. They are not simply passive recipients of this education, but are actively selecting schools and paying for the privilege. One of our participants spoke at length how the owners had undertaken extensive market research prior to building; the school was a reflection of (potential) parental requests. In this way, via private market systems, the schools have become a co-construction built primarily by private entrepreneurs with markets in mind. This co-construction creates a fluidity of what international schools are in Malaysia, their growth in numbers now making the sector dominated by host nation children. We have no data to inform us of the racial make-up of the children in international schools in Malaysia; however, our small sample was disproportionally Malaysian Chinese. It is unclear to what extent these parents are actively embracing postcolonial education as a means to resist/ reject Malay-dominated government schooling. This disproportion of Malaysian Chinese would also reflect the wealth division within the country and may create a new racial privilege.

Hayden (2011) notes that

it is ironic, then, that schools that developed originally to promote greater social harmony and understanding between different peoples, as well as to facilitate mobility, seem to be contributing to a growing educational gap between social groups and thus to growing inequality in societies. (221)

International schools in Malaysia are part of a complex racial based schooling system that is a legacy of its colonial past. Different races attend different types of schools and have different funding arrangements replicating social divisions in the country. Paradoxically, despite the commitment to equality that powered the origins of the international school movement, international schools are now embedded in an educational system whose day-to-day operations are constructed around racial division.

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