

The Ongoing Struggle of Everyday Racism

On her way to school on a rainy day, 13-year old Shelika is holding on to her umbrella on the bus stop. Without warning and unprovoked, a white woman in her mid-50s starts shouting racist remarks and threatens to beat her up.

– It was so embarrassing because the bus stop was full of people and they all heard her shouting. I just ignored her. And because I didn't give the woman any attention, she decided to spit on me. When I came to school, I had to check my clothes but luckily her spit hit my umbrella.

Prejudice against Muslims and people of colour are still relevant in today's modern society. The media, for instance, can be blamed for this. When there has been a terrorist attack, the first conclusion drawn is that it might be a Muslim. Even if the news channels speculate about the nationality, people secretly (or maybe not so secretly) think that a Muslim terrorist is behind it. But can white people really be blamed for having such viewpoints? When all things bad is happening in the world, wouldn't it just be easier to point the finger at the usual suspects?

The news bombards us with the threat of mass immigration into the Western countries, and how 'they' will steal our country and identity. The aggressive woman who spit on Shelika, for example, might have felt threatened by her, as if the girl personally would invade her home after school and take away the things that made her feel Western. Because of the media's angle and frequency in showing the negatives of a multicultural society, it's not surprising that some people have this viewpoint and reacts by being xenophobic and low-key racists.

According to [encyclopedia.com](https://www.encyclopedia.com), everyday racism is 'a process of smaller and bigger day-to-day violations of the civil rights of ethnic minorities'. The incident Shelika experienced would be an example of this. The woman could have verbally attacked anyone on the bus stop but chose to target the only coloured person who also happened to be a defenceless school child.

Everyday occurrences of racism are unfortunately still happening in the 21st century. It doesn't need to be as dramatic as Shelika's incident, but small gestures, body language, or small remarks are forms of racism. Often, the children going to school in a Western country

The contents of this article were produced as part of Liverpool World Centre's 'Counter Narratives' project and do not necessarily represent the views of Liverpool World Centre.

have lived here their whole lives, grown up here and are well integrated in the 'Western' way of living. Still, because some people look a certain way or practice a different religion than them, others find themselves the right to insult people based on what should be insignificant characteristics.



Illustration by Coralie Dapice/ BDN Maine

Shelika thinks multiculturalism generally makes society more open and exciting, but also a source of knowledge. – In today's society, I think it's important to have a general understanding of the different cultures of the world. Now that everyone's travelling it comes in handy to know different religions so that you can respect people and not accidentally offend them. And I also think that having that sort of knowledge can make you a better person and you might be happier about yourself as well. Multiculturalism makes society more exciting!

When asked about the effects of multi-culturalism, Shelika thinks it can both have positive and negative consequences. – To have knowledge about other religions and cultures can make you respect them more. But some people might also find it a bit daunting, that there are too many different cultures to cope with. And instead of trying to learn, they kind of back away from it all. It's sad because life is about learning and when they're not willing to learn, these barriers of hate are made.

Shelika has some suggestions when it comes to things we can do to help extremists better understand other cultures or open up a bit more. – I think it's a difficult question because I don't know how extremists think. But if we want them to be open, we have to show them that we are open too. Maybe instead of saying, 'oh they're extremists', we can try to listen to what they have to say, understand how they think and why they think that way. Maybe that will make them listen to us as well. Because I think listening and trying to understand each other is the best way to learn, and it's so important in today's society to do that.

The contents of this article were produced as part of Liverpool World Centre's 'Counter Narratives' project and do not necessarily represent the views of Liverpool World Centre.