Article

Racial Microaggressions and Ontological Security: Exploring the Narratives of Young Adult Migrants in Glasgow, UK

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Abstract

This study investigates the lived experiences of racial microaggressions faced by young adult migrants in everyday life in Glasgow, UK. The personal stories reported in this study are a direct challenge to the dominant political narrative that Scotland does not have a racism problem. When faced with this discord between narrative and reality, young adult migrants in Scotland must negotiate both their own lived experiences and biographical narratives to achieve a sense of security. A narrative enquiry methodology is used to explore mundane and everyday interactions for four young adult migrants who have settled in Glasgow over the last 10 years. These accounts of daily life offer a unique view into the everyday racism and racial microaggressions faced by this group. Additionally, the opinions of selected Scottish politicians have been collected to gather an additional viewpoint on racism in Scotland. A theoretical perspective stemming from ontological security theory contributes to the racial microaggressions literature in unpacking how individual migrants negotiate traumatic experiences of racism and manage their identities. The analysis explores how migrant individuals may employ coping mechanisms and adopt distinct behaviours to minimise the daily trauma of racism and microaggressions experienced in Scotland. This study, therefore, highlights the potential for interdisciplinary research on racism, narrative, and security studies, and the opportunities for bringing together these distinct perspectives.

Issue

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1. Introduction

How can the experiences of young adult migrants in Glasgow deepen our understanding of racial microaggressions and processes of social inclusion? What are the mechanisms used by individual migrants to establish a sense of security in the local environment? How may ontological security theory contribute to scholarly debates on racial microaggressions? These are the key research questions that this study will address.

This article explores the narratives of four young adult migrants living in Glasgow, UK. The study unpacks how everyday experiences of racial discrimination and microaggressions impact individual young adult migrants in this setting. While one would expect these traumatic experiences to lead to feelings of social exclusion, I dis-

sect the processes through which these lived experiences are re-evaluated, re-told, and negotiated in a manner that seeks to deflect the significance of the discrimination faced. I argue that this is part of an on-going effort, on the part of the study participants, to establish an individual sense of (ontological) security which places a strong emphasis on social trust, routines, and the predictability of everyday interactions.

2. Context

2.1. Scotland and Immigration

Scotland is a small nation, and the total population was estimated to be 5,479,900 in mid-2021 (National Records of Scotland, 2021). In the year ending June 2021,

there were around 397,000 non-British nationals living in Scotland (National Records of Scotland, 2021). Of all non-British nationals in Scotland, 231,000 (58%) were EU nationals and 165,000 (42%) were non-EU nationals. Of all non-UK-born people living in Scotland, 258,000 (49%) were born in the EU and 265,000 (51%) were born outside the EU. Polish was the most common non-British nationality (62,000). The council areas with the largest proportion of residents born outside of the UK were the City of Edinburgh (24%), Aberdeen City (22%), Glasgow City (14%), and Dundee City (12%). Glasgow is the largest city in Scotland with a population of 635,130. It has the highest percentage of non-white ethnic minority population of all of Scotland's urban areas. Walsh (2017) predicts that by 2031, one-fifth of Glasgow's total population (and one-quarter of children under 16 years) will belong to a non-white minority group.

Political actors and elites have helped to frame Scotland as an open nation-state which welcomes migrants (Bechhofer & McCrone, 2009). The governing Scottish National Party (SNP) has often described Scotland as "open, welcoming and outward-looking" (SNP, 2019) and has stressed that a Scottish civic national identity is open to anyone moving to the country. Scottish Government public campaigns, including One Scotland, Many Cultures, are exemplar of a civic nationalist ideology that seeks to promote diversity and cultural understanding in Scotland while furthering nationalist political sentiment (Penrose & Howard, 2008). In Glasgow, the slogan "People Make Glasgow" has been adopted to promote a city-level narrative of tolerance and inclusion. Scotland's perceived pro-immigration stance is often compared with England and other parts of the UK to construct a narrative of Scottish distinctiveness (Nicolson & Korkut, 2022). The Scottish Government (SNP and Scottish Greens coalition) have also been successful in gaining electoral backing from some ethnic minority groups, specifically from Scottish Pakistanis and young Scottish Muslims (Finlay et al., 2017). However, research (Leith, 2012) has also shown a discrepancy between the civic nationalist vision of Scotland shared by politicians and the views of Scottishness shared by the majority (white) population.

Ethno-centric attitudes continue to guide public perceptions of national belonging and Scottishness, with a focus on birthplace and ancestry guiding public opinion on Scottish identity (Leith & Soule, 2011). Furthermore, everyday racism and islamophobia have been found to destabilise the Scottish government's attempts to establish a civic Scottish national identity (Davidson et al., 2018). These findings suggest that the Scottish public does not have such a welcoming attitude towards migrants, or relaxed approach to national identity, as the political rhetoric would suggest. The present study investigates the individual narratives of young adult migrants who have settled in Scotland to understand the challenges and daily realities they face from a first-hand, bottom-up perspective. The study is informed by the extant literature on racism in Scotland.

Davidson et al. (2018) have described everyday racism as a debilitating structural force on people of colour in Scotland. Nonetheless, racism in Scotland is often "downplayed as banter" and understood as a less critical social concern when contrasted with England (Botterill et al., 2016, p. 128). Ethnic minorities in Scotland face discrimination in all aspects of life, including in education, healthcare provision, and in searching for accommodation and employment (Netto, 2018). While Hussain and Miller (2006, p. 49) found that "Islamophobia is significantly lower in Scotland than in England," Hopkins (2016) has identified an increase in islamophobia in Scotland, particularly in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York. Young males who displayed characteristics of Muslimness through clothing choice or having a beard were most likely to face persecution.

On-going comparisons with England and Anglophobia also play an important part in Scottish national identity constructions and have been shown to reflect in the social inclusion processes of migrant groups in Scotland. Hussain and Miller (2006, p. 198) reported that racialised minorities in Scotland "adopt Scottish identities, Scottish attitudes, Scottish Nationalism and even some degree of Anglophobia…as tools of integration." Furthermore, the vis-à-vis relationship with England has been identified as integral to Scottish national identity ascriptions (McCrone & Bechhofer, 2015). Comparisons with England and the English therefore carry significant weight in Scottish identity constructions and have been found to play a role in shaping the experiences of migrants in Scotland. There is, however, debate in the academic literature over whether negative Scottish attitudes towards England and the wider English population should be construed as racism (Liinpää, 2020).

3. Theoretical Considerations

3.1. Racial Microaggressions

Within this study, racism is conceptualised following Essed's (1991, p. 11) definition as the "attribution of inferiority to a particular racial or ethnic group and the use of this principle to propagate and justify the unequal treatment of this group." Racism scholars have expanded on this definition to consider the social systems and categorisations that have been used to implement racial hierarchies and produce inequalities in life opportunities (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). Racism is often manifested through small-scale actions, termed racial microaggressions, in everyday life which often help to reproduce systemic and institutional inequalities.

The literature on racial microaggressions has been developed most prominently in the United States. The term was first used by psychiatrist Chester Pierce to describe covert forms of racist aggression that are "subtle and stunning" yet unimaginably harmful (Pierce, 1970). Pierce made a distinction between covert,

micro-actions, and overt, macro-structures, of racism. Solórzano and Huber (2020, p. 2) have described racial microaggressions as forms of "systemic, everyday racism used to keep those at the racial margins in their place." Sue et al. (2007) proposed a nine-category framework for analysing racial microaggressions and how these may be categorised. Williams et al. (2021) examined the existing racial microaggressions literature and expanded on the taxonomy by identifying sixteen variables of microaggressions. These perspectives and themes of analysis are helpful as anti-racism scholars continue to develop the microaggressions framework and foreground the testimonies of individual victims to better understand how both everyday racism and racial microaggressions operate in everyday life.

There are significant overlaps between scholarly work on racial microaggressions and the literature on everyday racism. Essed (2008) has stated that everyday racism is not about large-scale incidents but rather incorporates mundane, routine events that enable structural or institutional racism. These small, micro-level, disruptions to everyday life have a detrimental impact on the sense of belonging and security of individual victims, particularly migrants. Racism and racial microaggressions negatively impact individual-level feelings of security and undermine efforts to achieve a sense of belonging. The present study adopts a theoretical perspective analysing the processes through which individuals attempt to securitise their own identities considering these instances of racial microaggressions. Explicitly, ontological security theory is used to trace the subjective process of security-seeking for a marginalised social group, young adult migrants living in Glasgow, UK.

3.2. Ontological Security Theory

Ontological security was first developed by Scots psychiatrist R. D. Laing to detail how his patients lost touch with reality through an absence of social trust and routine social interactions. While Laing was predominantly interested in the analysis of individual, micro-level, ontological insecurity in his seminal book *The Divided Self* (1960), it has latterly most frequently been used in the field of international relations to analyse macro-level, inter-state, relations and conflicts. Giddens (1991) incorporated a sociological perspective in his reconfiguration of the theory, whereby he described ontological security as a person's sense of existential safety in society. He argued that this sense of safety is dependent upon feelings of social trust and the predictability of everyday routines. Being able to predict the outcome of everyday social interactions and having a strong self-narrative, knowing where you are from and the story you have, are important prerequisites for ontological security. Furthermore, the ability to predict the outcome of banal social interactions, such as small conversations with a local shopkeeper or taxi driver, can help to provide a sense of security to individuals. Conversely, disruptive,

or unexpected interruptions to daily routines would have an adverse effect on ontological security.

Giddens suggested that a breach of daily routines and social interactions would give rise to an individual-level existential crisis and result in the experience of ontological insecurity, an unbearable condition of anxiety. Racial microaggressions are an example of a disruptive event which can undermine the sense of social trust and ontological security for individual victims. Following this perspective, I believe there is potential for examining the influence of racial microaggressions on ontological security-seeking subjects and the potential impact that these have on individual victims. For Giddens, security-seeking strategies are used by individuals to "bracket out" the existential anxieties that would lead to ontological insecurity. These security-seeking strategies are conceptualised in the literature as coping mechanisms.

Giddens (1991, p. 46) stated: "Since anxiety, trust and everyday routines of social interaction are so closely bound up with one another, we can readily understand the rituals of day-to-day life as coping mechanisms." Coping mechanisms can include the adoption of new routines, negotiated self-narratives, and behaviours which reduce the possibility of such a disruption. Following the ontological security literature, this study analyses everyday routines and mundane actions as detailed by participants, paying close attention to disruptive events which put social trust in jeopardy. This makes it possible to identify instances of racial microaggressions and any resulting coping mechanism(s) which may be used to deflect the significance of these disruptions. Another key requirement for ontological security at an individual level is a strong conceptualisation of home and feelings of comfort in one's social environment.

Kinnvall (2004) has stressed that a strong sense of home is the starting point from which all identities are developed. When there is confusion over where one feels at home or a threat to the home environment, anxieties and insecurities will come to the fore. One example of a group experiencing a loss of home is asylum seekers or undocumented migrants whose biographical self-narratives have been transformed through the, often distressing, events through which they have lived (Vaquera et al., 2017). Feelings of comfort in everyday life form another key component of the ontologically secure individual. However, as Noble (2005, p. 108) states, "the capacity to be comfortable is unevenly distributed amongst the population." This means that migrant groups are more likely to experience ontological insecurity than other sections of the population.

Taking the example of migrant groups in Australia, Noble (2005) explains that not only do migrant groups face social stigmatization and political persecution but they are also prevented from feeling at ease in the new home environment because of the perceived threat they are seen to pose to the nation-state. Croft (2012) has highlighted how ontological security is reliant on a sense of belonging, in terms of group alignment and

nationality, feelings of comfort and, also, how perceived threats can work towards eroding feelings of security. While feelings of being at home and comfortable may be taken for granted by the majority population, those who are excluded from these feelings are left in a state of perpetual insecurity. Harris and Karimshah (2019) report that Australian Muslims have expressed that they feel the need to perform their normalness, and qualities of good citizenship in public spaces and during routine social interactions, to mitigate their perceived difference. Additionally, scholars have highlighted that sub-state nationalist political contexts, including Scotland, UK, and South Tyrol, Italy, present their own challenges for young adult migrants seeking to establish ontological security (Carlà & Nicolson, 2023).

Following the perspective of Kinnvall (2004), I subscribe to the idea that ontological security is a fundamentally unachievable state and that individuals engage in on-going security-seeking practices to deflect existential anxieties (Krickel-Choi, 2022). Through this theoretical perspective, it becomes possible to unpack the coping mechanisms which individual migrants may employ when faced with disruptive everyday events, including instances of racial microaggressions. Due to its focus on social trust, everyday routines, and social interactions, this study argues that there is scope for using ontological security theory to deepen our understanding of the everyday lives of young adult migrants and how individual victims respond to instances of racial microaggressions. This is explored through a narrative enquiry research design.

4. Methodology

The methodology used in the study builds on narrative enquiry interviews conducted with four young adult migrants in Glasgow and four elected Scottish politicians. It was decided to interview politicians to gain an additional, macro-level, perspective on issues of diversity and racism in Scotland. This adds a further dimension of analysis to the study and allows for comparison between data sets. Young adult migrant participants were selected through involvement in the EU AMIF-funded research project VOLPOWER. They were aged between 18–27 years old at the time of interview and comprised both EU and third-country nationals. Participants had lived in Glasgow between two (shortest period) and 10 (longest period) years. A gender balance between interviewees was established. Pseudonyms have been used for all young adult migrant participants, and all identifying data has been removed to protect anonymity. Interviewed politicians represented the three largest political parties in Scotland: SNP, Scottish Labour, and the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party (politicians gave formal consent for their names and data to feature in the study; full interview transcripts were reviewed and approved by all study participants, in acknowledgement of the risk of identifica-

tion, before their inclusion). Interviews were conducted between September 2019 and April 2020.

4.1. Narrative Enquiry

Clandinin and Connelly (2004) explain how stories can act as a portal through which to enter the social world of research participants, with a focus on lived experience and interpretation, to examine a particular phenomenon. Narrative enquiry has been used to study identity through an analysis of how storytellers position themselves and others (Chase, 2005; Davies & Harré, 1990). Through the "new narrative turn" (Bamberg, 2006; Freeman, 2006), researchers have shifted the focus to concentrate on the small stories that narrators share. This has been conceptualised as experience-centred research (Squire, 2013). A narrative enquiry technique works best with small participant numbers, as interviews are typically lengthy and in-depth. In episodic-narrative interviews, narrators share the details and their interpretation of everyday life events to explore a specific phenomenon (Mueller, 2019). In my study, the interviews took on an episodic style whereby both experiential and semantic knowledge is shared through the recounting of events (Flick, 2007, p. 181).

Episodic narrative interviews are based on an interview guide in which the researcher asks the narrator to reflect on personal lived experience, provide concrete examples, and describe how these have influenced the narrator's worldview (Flick, 2007, p. 182). Mueller (2019) sets out a nested approach to episodic narrative interviews in a three-step process. This involves asking for a description of the phenomenon, e.g.: Have you ever experienced racial discrimination during your time in Scotland? Second, there is the request for stories using probes and prompts to encourage the sharing of longer narratives, e.g.: Can you give me an example of a time that you felt excluded in your social environment? Finally, in concluding the interview, the interviewee should be asked if they would like to add or amend anything in the narratives they have shared. Wrapping up the interview, the original definition of the phenomenon should be revisited to check if their views have altered or if they would like to add anything to their statements.

4.2. Data Analysis

I applied a mixed process of thematic analysis when analysing the interview data. Nvivo software was employed to code the gathered data in a systematic manner, which allowed for comparison between transcripts and establishing recurring themes in the dataset. A deductive thematic analysis was then carried out to group findings under the themes of racial microaggressions, belonging, and identity negotiations. Finally, interview data were coded under the themes of racial microaggressions and negotiated biographical narratives. Reports were generated in Nvivo whereby it was possible

to view the collected results from all interviews under these thematic categorisations, before their inclusion in the project. An ethics application was made prior to commencing the study (as per Glasgow Caledonian University guidelines, an ethics application for this study was submitted and approved in advance of commencing the investigation; ethics approval was granted by Glasgow Caledonian University Ethics Committee in 2020 and a risk assessment of the project was also carried out and approved prior to starting the investigation; no data was collected before the approval of the ethics application and risk assessment was complete).

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. Racial Microaggressions

Scottish Labour leader Anas Sarwar, who grew up in the south side of Glasgow (in the 1980s and 1990s) described how racism in Scotland has taken a shift in its characteristics during his lifetime, from an outwardly violent physical racism to one that is more systemic and insidious in nature. In the following extract, he details the everyday threat of violence he faced growing up as an ethnic minority teenager in Glasgow:

> I went through a period where I thought we'd turned a corner [and] that our political discourse, our society, was changing in a way where I thought my kids would grow up in a world where people saw past race, ethnicity, and religion…but I don't believe that any more. I think now racism has changed to become a much more insidious form of racism which is a lot more behind the scenes….When we were growing up racism was a lot more in your face, confrontational….You would get shouted P*** B*****d on the streets….My friends and I had glass bottles thrown at us in the city centre…there were streets that you knew you couldn't go down if you were not white…because you would be assaulted.

Following this example of the physical racial violence he witnessed in his youth Sarwar went on to detail an example of a microaggression he had faced as an ethnic minority MSP in the Scottish parliament. In the interview extract below he describes how a colleague suggested that he consider debating non-race related issues:

> Myself and Humza [Yousaf, Scottish Cabinet Minister for Health and Social Care, currently in the running for leadership of the SNP] would probably agree on this. Talking about race and our faith was a really difficult thing to do. I was elected for the first time in 2010, him in 2011. In that time, we probably spent the first five years avoiding talking about race because we wanted to be accepted in mainstream politics. Now we've done it….I'll give you an example of isolation. I published a report about the percentage of eth-

nic minorities in the public sector. I'd asked a series of questions in parliament about islamophobia and racism. After the session one of my colleagues in the parliament came to me and said: "You maybe want to think about asking some other questions? You don't want to get pigeon-holed." See, whilst I've got to be the one that always asks the question about brown-folk [people of colour], we're always going to have a problem. So, it is isolating.

The above can be viewed as an example of a microaggression at the elite level of Scottish political life and illustrates how ethnic minority politicians are subject to silencing tactics when attempting to confront issues of racism in parliament. Silencing has been described as a form of racial microaggression, whether conscious or unconscious in the mind of the perpetrator (Williams et al., 2021). Glasgow City Councillor Graham Campbell, who is a British national with Jamaican heritage, also spoke of his frustration with everyday racism:

> I suppose my daily experience of racism is a bit more along the lines of the Bob Marley thing [being labelled Bob Marley in public] that annoys the hell out me. It's something I don't get when I'm not in Glasgow. In Glasgow it's bloody annoying.

While describing incidents of racism, the politicians interviewed did not offer any attempt to divert attention away from the incident or detract from the seriousness of these microaggressions. When analysing from an ontological security theory perspective, the racism these politicians are subjected to is not negated or bracketed out through coping mechanisms (Giddens, 1991). Rather, there is an acceptance of the prevalence of racism in Scotland, which is manifested through microaggressions, such as the advice given to Sarwar from his party member colleague. The lived reality for both Sarwar and Campbell is a Scotland where racism and racial microaggressions permeate everyday life. However, these instances do not appear to disrupt their individual sense of ontological security. The findings from the politician interviews helped to form a question guide and line of enquiry to be used with the young adult migrant participants in the study. It served to guide the line of questioning towards exploring mundane social interactions which included experiences of travelling on public transport in Glasgow.

During narrative interviews, many participants discussed their experiences of using the bus while moving around Glasgow. Abina detailed the everyday experiences of exclusion she faces when travelling by bus in the city:

> I've been in the situation where I'm sitting next to an empty seat and that's, like, the only empty seat on the bus and no one comes. People would rather stand than sit next to you which is a shame because

you're just wondering….I had other people of colour who said to me that they gave up their seat, but no one would take it. (Abina, 26, Ghana)

While the situation may not appear an overt example of racism, it is nonetheless an isolating incident for the narrator which gives rise to the experience of heightened anxiety and ontological insecurity. This situation highlights tactics of avoidance and distancing from racial minorities which is a racial microaggression (Williams et al., 2021). Abina went on to give a further example of a microaggression, which a colleague had experienced when traveling by bus in the city:

> There was also one instance where I was getting on the bus with a colleague, and they had a [travel] card, and they placed it on the top thing [travel card reader] and the bus driver goes [says]: "That's not you!" My colleague said: "It's me, I used this card in the morning." They took it upon themself to take the driver on [challenge the behaviour] but you know that sort of thing shouldn't happen.

The bus driver, in stopping access to people of colour in these mundane public spaces, is reinforcing racist attitudes. In this example, it can be seen how young adult migrants are subject to a greater deal of scrutiny and suspicion in daily interactions than their white counterparts in Glasgow (Peterson, 2020). From an application of ontological security theory, these everyday experiences of microaggressions can be seen to undermine efforts to achieve a sense of security for migrants living in Glasgow as they erode social trust and present a disruption to daily routine. Furthermore, the refusal on the part of the bus driver to allow travel gives rise to anxieties which can lead to ontological insecurity, an incapacitating sense of perpetual dread, which would make everyday existence impossible (Steele, 2008). However, when recounting their lived experiences, the study participants would often discount the significance of the racism they had suffered.

One study participant, Ali, told me that he had been stopped from travelling on a bus and had his identity verified by the police when the driver did not believe that he was entitled to a discounted child fare:

> I don't know [if] it [is] because of my skin colour, or I don't know what it is….I put money [paid the fare]. The look that he [the bus driver] gives me, like, you know it's not pleasant, I would say….When the police came, I just told them my age and my details, and then the driver had to let me be on the bus….That happened more than once, like, you know, when I go on the bus, like, bus drivers are nice. Some of them know me, they just let me go. But sometimes, when I pay money, they go: "Nope, you're not a child, you have to pay extra money," but I never pay extra money, so the driver would stop the bus or phone

the police….I was just…trying to go on the bus, trying to go home, but gives it some kind of notion of the scary looks…ah, feel like drivers, they give more hassle to more, like, coloured people…that's what, ah, [I] think. But not all of them, just only some of them. It's good and bad, at the same time y'get nice drivers that won't even look at you sticky! (Ali, 19, Somalia)

While his older-looking friend boarded the bus without issue, Ali was stopped, and he reflects on whether it was his skin colour that had contributed to the bus driver's reaction. The bus driver does not have the legal permission to demand identity documentation and so calls the police to verify Ali's identity. His narrative draws attention to the suspicion and perceived threat he is seen to pose when he describes how the bus driver viewed him with scary looks. Perceived threats prevent individuals from achieving a sense of ontological security as it is a breach of trust and provokes anxiety (Croft, 2012). However, at the end of his narrative, Ali makes an assertion that not all bus drivers are bad, and not all eye him with suspicion. Ali summarised his view of racism in Glasgow in the following short extract:

> Like, of course you get some bad people that don't like, y'know, my colour and stuff, but most people are like absolutely nice.

In the example above it can be seen how the participants seek to minimise the significance of the racism experienced. Ellefsen et al. (2022) have emphasised that denying the significance of traumatic life events can be used as a form of resistance and countering the debilitating effects of racism and racial microaggressions. This strategy can include the downplaying of the seriousness of disruptive or hostile events and can be seen as a coping mechanism for mitigating feelings of ontological insecurity (Giddens, 1991). As illustrated in the example above, the preparators of racist attitudes in Scotland are often attributed to a small minority of actors. However, police records on race hate crimes present contradicting evidence for this claim. In the year 2021–2022, a total of 3,107 charges relating to race hate crimes were reported to the Crown Office in Scotland (Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, 2022). These figures suggest that Scotland has a significant problem with racism, particularly as most race hate speech encounters go unreported.

During an interview with Esther, I asked about her life experiences since arriving in Scotland four years prior. She told me about her time spent attending a college course in Glasgow, where she was the only person of colour. Esther detailed how she was able to overcome the initial exclusion she felt in the classroom. Her choice of language offers a revealing insight into her own position in relation to her peer group:

It was basically, like, an all-white room, and I had no problems with that, but the only problem I had was actually making friends....I just found it difficult because I felt like they didn't actually want to speak to me because of my skin colour or whatever....Not everyone will be open to a foreigner, not everyone will be open to *aliens*....But as long as they realise that you're no harm, you're not threatening them, or take anything from them, they're one hundred percent open. (Esther, 20, Nigeria)

Esther draws on the perceived threat she was seen to pose to her college coursemates and positions herself, a migrant, as an alien that stands out in the Scottish environment. Belonging in Scotland, for Esther, is contingent on not posing a threat to the wider population. Her use of the word alien is exemplary of the exclusion she is made to feel as a person of colour in her majority-white college class. This is another experience of a racial microaggression, which Esther attempts to minimise "as simple cultural missteps or racial *faux pas*" (Williams et al., 2021, p. 992). Coping mechanisms are employed to deflect the seriousness of disruptive or unexpected events, including instances of racism and discrimination.

Through these coping mechanisms, young adult migrants can confirm the macro-narrative of Scottish openness and fulfil the expectations that the narrative places upon them. For young adult migrants not to adhere to the macro-narrative, alluding to the prevalence of racism in the country may position these individuals as "disloyal" to the nation-state as scholars, as Botterill et al. (2019) have highlighted. This confirmation of the macro-narrative allows the participants to stabilise their on-going process of becoming secure and establish both their sense of place and space in Scotland with enhanced feelings of ontological security. Giddens (1986, p. 218) has stated that "nationalist sentiments rise up when the sense of ontological security is put in jeopardy by the disruption of routines." In other words, when people face extreme doubts about their existence and right to exist, they turn to a collective sense of belonging to overcome their anxieties.

Ontological security scholars, including Kinnvall (2004) and Mitzen (2006), have stressed how the state-level use of shared narratives is often intertwined with movements for national self-determination and/or the political ambitions of the ruling class. This is particularly the case in Scotland where a pro-immigration macro-narrative has been adopted within the discourse of the governing SNP party (Nicolson & Korkut, 2022). Through an invocation of the open Scotland narrative, the participants were able to deflect some of the existential anxieties they are faced with in their daily lives. Narrative interviews also considered how participants described their self-narratives and how these were negotiated in reference to accent, appearance, and expectations.

5.2. Negotiated Biographical Narratives

Another of the fundamental prerequisites for ontological security is a continuous biographical self-narrative. As Croft (2012, p. 250) states, "to be ontologically secure an individual must have a sense of biographical coherence, a sense that the individual can comprehend and communicate." In interviews, I explored the theme of biographical self-identity through the narratives shared by my participants, their conceptualisations of self, and how they position themselves in wider societal framings. Self-narratives can reveal the everyday pressures and identity negotiations that are often more complex than may first be anticipated.

A distinct Scottish accent was considered essential to make claims to a Scottish national identity. Ahmed outlined the importance of accent to his observation of being perceived as a newcomer, or outsider, in daily interactions:

When you have a Scottish accent, people think that you've lived in Scotland for [a] very long [time compared to when you don't have [an] accent. For me, people assume [I] am new to the country, you know...like, I don't have a Glasgow accent, so I think people think I'm a bit weird as well, they ask me where I'm from. They know that I'm not from here. (Ahmed, 23, Sudan)

I know from my own constituents and individual cases that people miss out on job opportunities down to their accent. (Anas Sarwar MSP, Scottish Labour)

For Ahmed, having a distinct Scottish accent is associated with having lived in the country for a long time and his lack of an accent identified him as different or other. Being identified as "the other" prevented participants from identifying as Scottish and therefore led to a negotiation of biographical self-narratives to establish security. Again, Esther described how she, as a person of colour, would feel uncomfortable claiming a Scottish national identity because of her appearance:

Legally, you can identify as Scottish, but, you know, obviously racially or whatever you can't identify as Scottish, you know....There are some people that are actually Scottish and they might get offended that someone from another country is, themselves, Scottish....People are not going to say: "Why are you calling yourself Scottish? You know, you're black!" That's very offensive! People might not want to say that. But I'm that kinda person, I'm very cautious of wherever I am.

Esther highlights her interpretation of an unspoken intolerance even if people would not be forthcoming in their attitudes toward her perceived difference. Esther has significant anxieties in relation to her appearance and her

narrative reveals how she continuously negotiates her identity dilemma in relation to how she is perceived by others. As a young person of colour, Esther describes herself as an "internal other" (Koefoed & Simonsen, 2011) in the Scottish environment. Her internal dialogue stands in contrast to the current Scottish government's civic nationalist political ideology and publicity campaigns such as One Scotland, Many Cultures which have sought to promote a civic Scottish national identity and promote the inclusion of migrants in Scotland. Furthermore, this is also an example of shame management, which is another strategy that has been identified in ontological security-seeking practices. Steele (2005) has stated that individuals will go to great lengths to circumvent undesirable attributes or characteristics which would give rise to disapproval or the condemnation of others.

Anas Sarwar detailed his history in politics and the challenges faced by individual ethnic minority MSPs in Scotland:

> There is a stigma, people say oh there he goes again playing the race card. Undoubtedly there is a stigma. There is also a stigma on individuals. It's easier for people to pay more attention to someone of a particular faith talking about religious hatred or someone of a specific race speaking about racism. But actually leaving it to those individuals is not going to solve the problem….At the moment I feel like it's left to those individual groups. People just say: "Oh, he would say that.''
>
> Interviewer: Scotland has only had four ethnic minority MSPs, why is that?
>
> Yes, all male, all from Glasgow. We [Scottish society] are great at talking the good game but not following through. We've had those four by personal perseverance, it's not down to political parties. I don't credit it to either political party. If we left it to the Labour party, it would never have happened. We don't have a single ethnic minority MP in Scotland.

Stereotypes and the acceptance or refusal of the expectations that wider society puts upon migrants in Scotland were another important consideration in the identity negotiations of the participants. These perceived expectations led to participants facing an obligation to perform as what has been termed "the good migrant" in earlier research (Findlay et al., 2013). This gives rise to the phenomenon of constantly feeling under surveillance during routine daily interactions and activities, including in the sphere of Scottish politics. Harris and Karimshah (2019) have described this process of "being on," acting out and displaying qualities of supernormalness to the wider society. Esther describes how she felt a pressure to act in a certain way based on preconceived notions of how society interprets her:

> I try not to follow, you know, the norms and stuff because, like, they think as like a black person you're like more reserved, or like you have more manners or something like that, which obviously, like, older generation of Africans that's what they would expect in the first place. But *I'm trying not to follow those norms*, and trying to let them [society] know that I'm not like that, I'm not like what you think I am. *I am African, that doesn't necessarily mean I am like every African*. Do you understand me?

Esther explains how she tries to reject the stereotyped notions of "African" behaviour. In this example she is taking on the identity of the African continent, rather than her country of origin. This could suggest that the label of African is one she has been confronted with in Scotland and is another example of microaggression in the local context. From analysing Esther's case, her reflection of stereotypical characteristics leads her to assert that she has a different mentality from other migrants. She is therefore negotiating a precarious space between identities, unable to adopt either a Scottish or African identity. However, despite her attempts to reject stereotyped notions of African behaviours, Esther believes that she, as a person of colour, is under an obligation to represent the wider migrant community in a positive light. As she goes on to explain:

> If I wasn't exactly like a good person, if I was a bad person…they [the wider Scottish population] would think, you know, all people with my skin colour, you know, are the same thing. Because, like I said, you know, people are ignorant at first, but until you let them know that you're not the person they think you are, then that's when they're obviously open to you becoming friends with them, you know, all that stuff. So, I obviously had to make them understand that.

This example illustrates how migrant individuals, who are perceived as threatening, are under pressure to adjust their behaviours to uphold feelings of ontological security which illustrates how insecurities are typically borne by migrants (Botterill et al., 2019). Furthermore, as Croft (2012, p. 252) has described: "The ontologically secure individual seeks to behave in accordance with the sense of what is acceptable and appropriate in his or her ontological security structure." In the above extract, it appears that Esther is using reductionist categorisations of race and is emphasising the distinction between the Scottish general population and the migrant "other" that she claims to represent. Esther's own ontological security structure is shaped by other people's preconceptions surrounding people of her perceived skin colour. If she were to behave inappropriately this would work against the foundations of her ontological security-seeking structure, to present migrants of colour in Scotland in a positive light.

6. Concluding Remarks

The data presented in this article highlights the everyday racial microaggressions faced by young adult migrants in Glasgow, UK. The article is complemented by perspectives from leading ethnic minority politicians in Scotland who highlight that racism has changed from overt to covert, practices of racial microaggressions, in the last decades. Overall, the participant testimonies contradict the dominant political narrative that Scotland does not have a racism problem. When analysing the participant narratives through an application of ontological security theory it becomes possible to detect specific coping mechanisms which are employed to deflect the seriousness of these instances, maintain stable identities, and continue with the process of security-seeking in the new environment.

An individual's construction of ontological security is dependent upon societal trust and the predictability of everyday routines. When these are disrupted, through racial microaggressions, there is potential for greater existential anxieties, and ontological insecurity would be the resulting condition. It is argued that individual migrants are more likely to face ontological insecurities than the wider, majority-white population. One way in which these anxieties can be countered or minimised is through the adoption of specific coping mechanisms and modified behaviours.

One of the main coping mechanisms identified in the study is the downplaying of the seriousness of racism and everyday racial microaggressions in the re-telling of experiences of discrimination. I argue that acknowledging the wider existence of racism in Scotland would be debilitating to participants and lead to an untenable state of ontological insecurity. Second, the evidence suggests that migrant individuals may adopt certain social behaviours and negotiate their own biographical narratives to meet societal expectations and reduce the risk of causing offence. Finally, participants have highlighted the potential for resisting damaging stereotypes and performing good citizenship as tools of social inclusion. While this study has been conducted with a small sample size, it has illustrated the potential for interdisciplinary research in the field of racism studies which can help to shed light on complex processes of social inclusion.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Marcus Nicolson is a final year PhD candidate in social sciences at Glasgow Caledonian University, UK. Marcus' study investigates the lived experiences of young adult migrants in Glasgow, UK, using a narrative enquiry research design which incorporates creative arts research methods. He uses ontological security theory to analyse processes of identity formation and (im)migration politics.