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### **The Sick Men of Perpetuity**

I remember going to Canada for the first time when I was 6. I remember the first few days clearly. Many things were strange for me. For example, when going to Costco for the first time, I saw air conditioners on full strength in front of open doors and wondered how Canadians could stand wasting this much electricity, I ate the food there and wondered how Canadians could survive Canadian food. It actually turned out I'm just lactose intolerant but that's not important.

What's important is what I did not find strange.

The first people I interacted with on our first day in the country were our new neighbours, an immigrant family from Taiwan. The matriarch of the family, who wouldn't tell us her full name and insisted we call her Mrs.\_\_\_\_, upon learning we were moving in next door asked "how did people like you come to live in a house as nice as this?" in a conversation which ended with her saying "if I had known this house was going to be sold to you, I would have bought it myself."

Despite how young I was, the honey in her voice was not enough to distract me from the poison of her words. Yet, for years, I thought nothing of it. Prejudice and hate between people who are different is common after all, normal even. Obviously, I did not see it as good or preferable, but to me, what happened was a fact of life and an unchanging rule of nature far beyond me.

As time has passed and I have learnt more of the world I inhabit, I finally see the problem in my thinking almost twenty years ago: my interpretation of 'people who are different.' I was blissfully ignorant, foolishly hopeful, to think I had the luxury of perceiving 'different kinds of Asians' in Canada.

As time has passed and I have experienced more racially motivated actions against me and my family in Canada, from something as harmless and abstract as a random person saying I'm a gook ass zipperhead pussy and they were going to kill me in a Facebook message when I was 12 to something as direct and physical as when someone spit on my mom and yelled at her to go back to China in our neighbourhood when I was 22.

Regarding the perpetrators of those two events and other similar events beyond my personal experience, there was no such thing as ‘different kinds of Asians’ in their eyes. In their eyes, we are all squinty-eyed, flat-faced, yellow-skinned, dog-eating, virus-spewing subhuman scum who should be exterminated like the pests we are.

On what basis can we afford prejudice amongst ourselves based on differences others do not perceive?

We are a weak and divided people, two traits which exist in a mutualistic relationship with each other. Weakness is the lack of unity. Division is the lack of strength. In the same vein as how the rich have class solidarity and wield animosity amongst the oppressed social classes to keep their power, the same concept occurs in the racial hierarchy. Usually, only one perceived race is targeted at a certain time and other oppressed races are encouraged to target them as well.

In North America, slavery and the Jim Crow laws of the United States targeted racism towards black people, the Chinese-Exclusion Act, Red Scare and propaganda during the Vietnam War targeted racism towards Asians, the propaganda during the War on Terror following 9/11 targeted racism towards Muslims in theory but all brown people in practice.

In South Africa during Apartheid, when the laws distinguished little beyond white and coloured, people from Japan, Hong Kong and Taiwan were legally white while the local Chinese populace were legally coloured though the enforcers of apartheid laws had limited ability to distinguish between them.

In British-controlled India, native ethnic Indians were banned from certain spaces and events on account of their race. Meanwhile in British-controlled Hong Kong, a police force which included ethnic Indians enforced the ban of native ethnic Chinese people from certain spaces and events on account of their race.

This is why I specifically used the Facebook message and incident in our neighbourhood as my anecdotal examples. The person who sent me the death threat on Facebook was a black American. The person who spat on my mom was a South Asian Canadian.

The neighbour from when we first moved to Canada saw us as the kind of Asian which was lesser than her, while these two saw us as East Asian in general and therefore lesser than

them. In actuality, in the racial hierarchy of our white-dominated society, there is no such thing as Han, Hui, Hakka or Yue, there is no such thing as Chinese, Taiwanese, Vietnamese or Japanese, there is no such thing as Yellow, Black, Red or Brown, there is only the dominating racial group and the oppressed racial group.

There is only human and subhuman.

The Turkish were first called the Sick Men of Europe due to the division of the Ottoman Empire in the years nearing its collapse and its land being split among colonial powers. The Chinese were first called the Sick Men of Asia due to the division of the Qing Dynasty nearing its collapse and its land being split among colonial powers.

All of us are the Sick Men of the Modern Age and the order of the racial hierarchies established during the colonial age has never been overturned, destroyed, changed or affected in any meaningful way. Though I originally wanted to dedicate this part of the paper to the future and the ways in which we can approach this issue, I have found no example of this problem being solved in history and, as a result, can offer no suggestions in ways of solutions. Perhaps it is because the racial hierarchy we exist in today is still young, perhaps it is because there are those who do not want this problem to see a solution or perhaps it is simply a result of my personal lack of experience and ability.

What I do know is too many of our people subscribe to the idea of a superior minority. It may be true the current coronavirus pandemic was an excuse for racism to be directed against Asians through sinophobic narratives but history has proven something might happen tomorrow which will act as an excuse for racism to target a different group of people. This speculative racism to which I refer, like all racism, will be designed by people who wish for us to remain weak, therefore divided and therefore easy to conquer.

What I do know is if racism continues amongst the oppressed racial class, we will be and continue to remain the Sick Men of Perpetuity.