

**Images of Race over Time at British Airways:  
A Case Study**

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## **Abstract**

### **Images of Race over Time at British Airways: A Case Study**

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This research project examines the ways in which race is presented through photographs taken from British Airways newsletters, located in the British Airways Archives, during the period of 1932-1946. The purpose of the study is to consider the predominant themes of those images, how the images change over time, and the various ways that discrimination seems to be reproduced and recreated at the organization through the images. The content analysis of how race is shown in the organization's materials over the fourteen year time period provides a case for how images are reproduced and subtly altered over time to maintain a dominant stereotype of non-white individuals as a means of exclusion or discrimination within the organization.

The content analysis reveals three main themes over time that act as categorizations for the way in which race is admitted into the organization in the materials studied. These three themes are primitivism, exoticism, and superiority, and together these different themes demonstrate a change over time in the way that race is shown in the organization.

The significance of this study lies in the need for more considerations of racial discrimination within organizations, as evidence suggests that historical treatment of certain groups, such as those of non-white races, can impact the treatment that such groups receive today in organizations (Acker, 2006; Nkomo, 1992; Cox & Nkomo,

1992). The study will contribute to the existing literature as a case study by attempting to show how discrimination was enacted during one timeframe at the organization through images in the organizational newsletters, and how that discrimination changed over time. The study takes into consideration previous work on British Airways (Mills, 1995; Mills, 2006) and draws its timeframe from Mills' (1995; 2006) identification of junctures (Mills, 2010) within the organization. The study also considers Nkomo's (1992) theory of race-neutrality, which asserts that organizations often fail to sufficiently consider the impacts of race and racial discrimination, and calls for greater investigation into past experiences of minority workers.

## **Chapter 1 – An Overview**

### CHAPTER OUTLINE

In this chapter I will discuss my reason for engaging in this study and the direction it will take. I will then provide an overview of my research methodology and address the significance and relevance of this topic as an area of study.

### RESEARCH DIRECTION

This study examines the ways in which race is imaged in organizational materials from British Airways archival materials, and how those images change over time, within the timeframe of 1932-1946. The purpose of this study is to examine how discrimination was portrayed through images and their accompanying text at one case study organization, over a focused period of time. This time period is significant due to consistent materials available for analysis, and because it represents a time when the organization was operating its own airports in many different countries, and therefore interacting directly with many different non-white populations outside of the United Kingdom. Following World War II, these operations were modified as colonial territories emerged from British rule and developed their own national airlines (Louis, 2006). As well, the organization underwent significant change due to a merger in 1939, and I was interested in reviewing the materials for changes to the images of race within this context.

Using content analysis to organize the images, three themes, namely primitivism, exoticism, and superiority, emerged from the material that related to presentation of race in British Airways. The study considers i) the reasons for the changing modes of

discrimination, and how the three themes are connected, through the reproduction of stereotypes of non-white groups to maintain an exclusion of these groups from the organization and, ii) how this reproduction of stereotypes was both a means of exclusion, and a means of keeping legitimacy from non-white members of the organization. The study emphasizes the nuances of that discrimination, as it was subtly altered over time, such that three clear themes can now be identified in the materials under study.

## REASONING FOR STUDY

Ultimately, there are three reasons for this study: 1) to understand how non-white racial groups are portrayed in the organizational material over time and what different themes are visible in these portrayals; 2) to reflect on the implications of the various meanings of the portrayals and the ways in which the prevailing themes provide insight into changes over time; and 3) to examine the complexity of time and context for the ways in which these factors affect and influence the portrayals of non-white individuals at the case study organization, to ultimately show the complexity of discrimination in this case study as an alternative to organizations as race-neutral (Nkomo, 1992). Race-neutral organizations are those that do not admit the impact of race as a source of inequality or a systemic issue to be addressed. This is significant because racial discrimination has not been adequately resolved within organizations, but rather is still a source of inequality in workplaces (Offerman et al., 2014). According to Nkomo (1992), there is a need to consider the history of minority workers to better understand their current position in the workplace, and thereby move to resolve the

current sources of racial discrimination. This is echoed by Acker (2006) in her delineation of inequality regimes, which similarly calls for studies of the past to better understand the persistence of inequality in organizations today.

I was motivated to study this topic for several reasons. First, I was drawn to a study that allowed me to engage with archival materials and reveal the experiences and stories of the non-white groups that were traditionally kept silent at this time in the organization. Specifically, I was interested in British Airways because of my work as a research assistant on a SSHRC grant with Jean Helms Mills and Albert Mills, and I was interested in this time period primarily because of the high number of operations throughout Africa and the Middle East that British Airways had during this time, which made interactions and representations of non-white workers significant. Second, I was interested in the nuance of discrimination as something in flux over time, because I feel this nuance is not often addressed in discussions of discrimination. I wanted to examine race and the means of discrimination at British Airways in the specific time period to further my own understanding of discrimination as occurring over time and in context. Third, I wanted to build on existing work on discrimination in the airline industry (Mills, 1995, Mills, 2006; Mills & Helms Mills, 2006; Durepos, Mills & Helms Mills, 2008) and focus on two junctures of gender in the organization as identified by Mills (2006); the introduction and growth of female employment and the rapid growth and disbursement of female employment, but doing so by looking at images that included or excluded race during these periods.



## METHOD AND ORGANIZATION OF STUDY

This study is conducted through archival research. Much of the archival material that I will work with in this paper has been collected as part of a larger project from the British Airways archive over twenty or more years by Albert Mills and Jean Helms-Mills, with the support of multiple SSHRC grants. For the purposes of this study, I use monthly organizational newsletters, the Imperial Airways Gazette, and the BOAC News Letter, also called Speedbird. These newsletters were written for the employees of British Airways, from this period. These newsletters are reviewed for images that show non-white individuals or groups, and the context of those images is considered, leading to the emergence of the three themes discussed previously. The impact and meaning of these themes are then considered.

In chapter two I will review the literature on race and organizations, and consider the existing work on discrimination at airlines. Chapter three discusses my methodology and provides the background for British Airways as the case study organization. In chapter four, I provide a detailed review of the three themes that emerge from the materials. Chapter five is a discussion of the impact of those themes and considers their greater meaning. The final chapter, Chapter 6, is a reflection of my choices throughout this study and what I may do differently in future research. I also consider the limitations of this study, and the implications of my findings for other organizations.

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, I have discussed the topic to be studied in this project. I have provided some theoretical and methodological frameworks that will guide my study, and

I have explained my personal motivation. The following chapter will discuss, in more detail, the relevant literature for this study, and will consider the gaps and limitations of that literature that has led me to my topic and research positioning.

## Chapter 2 – Theoretical Background

### CHAPTER OUTLINE

This chapter focuses on the literature that is relevant to my study. Specifically, I explore theories concerned with race in organizations, including race neutrality, everyday racism, and Acker's framework of inequality (Nkomo, 1992; Essed, 1991; Acker, 2006). Each of these theories ultimately points to a gap in the study of race and organizations, namely that the experiences of minorities today are influenced by the experiences of the past, and that those past experiences are worthy of closer study. I also consider intersectionality as a theory for its relevance to the study of race and organizations (McCall, 2005). Following an overview of these main theories, I review the literature that uses organizations as case studies to reveal race and other bases for inequality, and specifically address literature that is concerned with British Airways in this context.

### RACE NEUTRALITY

According to Nkomo (1992), the study of race in organizations over the twentieth century has been inadequate in many ways: the voice of the racial other has not been heard by dominant groups, but rather added into white-dominant organizational study, creating the illusion of essentially race-neutral organizations. To consider organizations as race-neutral, however, is problematic, for “the silencing of the importance of race in organizations is mostly subterfuge because of the overwhelming role of race and ethnicity in every aspect of society” (Nkomo, 1992, p. 488). Based on this assertion, it is clear that there is relevance for studying race and organizations from

a variety of viewpoints due to the role that race has as a major source of domination and power in society and work. Nkomo (1992) argues that the study of race in organizations has often been within a Eurocentric construction of racial ideology and history, a fact which contributes to the view of organizations as race-neutral or race-less. Nkomo's argument is against this concept of organizations as being race-neutral, and is a call for research that chafes against that predominant view by considering discrimination historically in order to legitimize and understand the experience of racial minorities in organizations both in the past and the present. Nkomo's theory of race-neutral organizations indicates that race is a predominant but largely ignored factor in organizations. This theory gives credence to my study of the presentation of race as, by studying these past presentations and experiences of minority workers, it is possible to better understand the nuances of how that discrimination has persisted over time.

## EVERYDAY RACISM

Essed's everyday racism theory (1991) can be seen as explanatory for how race-neutrality can be seen as occurring in organizations, because it addresses how daily practices within organizations occur to reinforce race relations that keep non-white groups dominant, aiding in the appearance of neutrality (Essed, 1991; Nkomo, 1992). This theory complements Nkomo's theory of race neutrality by further explaining how it is possible for race relations to be reinforced, such that minority workers are kept silent about discrimination. Essed (1991) presents three practices that reproduce white-dominant race relations in everyday organizational contexts: marginalization, containment, and problematization. These three practices effectively reproduce the

existing race relations within organizations, ensuring that the experiences of non-dominant groups are kept silent (Essed, 1991). This silence then creates the illusion of neutrality, both within organizations and the study of them, as the existing racial relations are normalized by the dominant (white) groups (Essed, 1991; Nkomo, 1992).

These two theories are important to my study because they reveal a complexity of race in organizations, and the need for study that questions and attempts to overcome the predominant understanding of race as it reproduced and kept neutral by dominant groups in organizations. My study is focused on a time period during which the treatment of non-white workers was impacted by contextual factors, but there has been an ongoing failure to explore the implications of past experience within the context of how discrimination occurs and is reproduced, which is what my paper aims to address. Nkomo (1992) also emphasizes the need for deeper understanding of the historical context that has reproduced race in organizations as it is today, stating that, “revisiting the early history of...minority workers...can inform our understanding of their present status” (Nkomo, 1992, p.505). Essed (1991) and Nkomo (1992) indicate a lack in the literature of studies of race in organizations that reconsider the status quo of race neutrality. By undertaking research in this vein, it is possible to “contribute toward building theories and knowledge about both how race is produced and how it is a core feature of organizations” (Nkomo, 1992, p. 506).

#### ACKER’S INEQUALITY REGIMES

A third theory that complements Nkomo (1992) and Essed (1991) is Acker’s framework of inequality regimes (2000; 2006). This theory asserts that race, gender, and

class are inextricably linked in an organizational context (Acker, 2006). Like Nkomo (1992) and Essed (1991), Acker advocates for the study of race in organizations, arguing that although laws exist to prevent racial discrimination, the existence of laws does not preclude the existence of inequality (Acker, 2006). However, Acker (2006) goes further than Nkomo and Essed, emphasizing that there are other bases for discrimination that are linked to race, and that these other bases, gender and class, impact one another and race in significant ways.

Acker's theory links race inextricably with other bases for discrimination, and is important for my study because it indicates the degree of complexity that exists when studying race as a topic. This complexity comes out of the fact that race is tied up with gender and class, and is often combined with barriers to equality such as questions of visibility and legitimacy of discrimination (Acker, 2006). Acker's work raises the question whether it is even possible to study race without simultaneously studying gender and class. Additionally, while I am primarily concerned the portrayal of race at British Airways, the relations of race can be seen as formed through the same processes that form and reinforce class and gender relations in organizations (Acker, 2006). Acker shares similar views with Nkomo (1992) that studying organizations in history can help reveal the ways in which current relations have been formed, saying "class, race, and gender patterns are not just the shards of history, but are continually created and recreated in today's organizations" (Acker, 2006, p. 198). This process of creation and recreation can be traced in an organization's history, and my study takes up Acker's idea in this way to explore the patterns and themes of race that can be revealed at British Airways.

## INTERSECTIONALITY

Acker's perspective is taken further in the feminist framework of intersectionality that considers the ways in which class, race, gender, age, and other group identifiers overlap to create unique intersections of individuals or groups that are otherwise identified by one predominant identifier, such as race or gender (Walby, Armstrong & Strid, 2012). For example, Latin American female executives nearing retirement may represent an intersection of gender, race, age, and class. The theory is complex and intersectionality itself has multiple definitions and approaches. Crenshaw (1989) asserts these multiple intersections as acting together simultaneously to reinforce oppression, while McCall (2005) is concerned with the relationships of inequality. For this study, I consider intersectionality in the context of the definition above and McCall's intercategory approach (2005).

As a theory, intersectionality is significant for this study, because it may be seen as a necessary means of confronting race in organizations. That is, intersectionality may suggest that it is impossible to address race alone, but rather indicate the need for exploration on multiple factors. Intersectionality can be seen as concerned with an intercategory approach, which looks at the relationships of inequality and how those relationships change and shift throughout duelling and varied dimensions of inequality; for example, gender, race, and class (McCall, 2005). Using the intercategory approach, it would suggest that what I uncover about race is likely related to other sources of inequality, such as class, age, and gender. This can potentially be seen as an advancement of studies that simply reveal the impact of race in organizations, without

addressing those further intersectional relationships. However, when taking the three theories discussed so far together with the theory of intersectionality, it is possible to see a gap that exists in studying race sufficiently to consider it intercategoryally with other means of discrimination. There is value in studying race more singularly, for it helps reveal the experiences of a non-dominant group. Often, these experiences are difficult to access due to the processes posited by Essed (1991) of marginalization, containment, and problematization, and by accessing or revealing the experiences of non-dominant groups based on one identifier alone, in this case, race, it is possible then to further identify the discrimination occurring across different categorical bases, such as gender, class, and age.

The theories discussed above help to inform my position for studying race in organizations, and taken together form my framework for interacting with the materials, as the theories point to the need for exploration of the past, the need to search for varying viewpoints (Nkomo, 1992) and to consider how discrimination can be created and reproduced over time (Acker, 2006). Additionally, I am informed by the need for an alternative to race-neutrality study (Nkomo, 1992) and the concept of everyday racism (Essed, 1991) as a means for understanding how non-dominant race is kept invisible by organizations. Intersectionality is relevant because it points to the need for an advancement of the study of race as a silo to a consideration of intercategoryal relationships (McCall, 2005), however it also informs my need to use race as a starting point in this paper with the hope for uncovering further relationships of inequality in future research.



## DISCRIMINATION LITERATURE IN THE AIRLINE INDUSTRY

In addition to the theoretical background of race and organizations, it is important to reflect on the existing literature on discrimination in the airline industry and how my study relates to it. There is extensive literature focused on race, gender, and intersectionality and social categorizations in the airline industry (Mills, 1995; Mills, 1998; Mills & Helms Mills, 2006; Durepos, Helms Mills & Mills, 2008; Durepos, Mills & Helms Mills, 2008). Mills (1995) brings together discrimination and airlines in his work on British Airways, emphasizing that there has been an increasing amount of research into the idea that discrimination does not occur solely as overt or obvious individual actions, but rather as deeply entrenched practices in organizations (Mills, 1995). The consequence of this research is that "...we need to tackle not only the overtly racist or sexist act of the individual but, more especially, the manifold and mundane acts of the many" (Mills, 1995, p. 243). It is argued that it is the mundane nature of the discrimination within organizational constraints that are controlled by a set of individuals with power in the organization that allows discrimination to be perpetuated with such ease (Mills, 1995; Alvesson & Berg, 1992). Therefore, examining an organization over time for the ways in which this replication of discrimination occurs, and the different ways in which it manifests in various contexts of time and place within that recurrence, allows for insights into the extent of power that organizations have in reinforcing widespread discriminatory practices.

In addressing race in this context, Mills (1995) considers the images of race at various points of time at British Airways, and concludes that there are a number of ways

in which those of non-white race are imaged in company materials. These ways change over time, and can be broken down to been seen as exotic, as primitive or inferior to the dominant race, and as distant (Mills, 1995). The themes are similar to those that emerge from my consideration of the materials. Furthermore, though these categorizations of images change over time, the images do not significantly depart from deeper stereotypes around race, despite increasing workplace diversity (Mills, 1995, p. 262). Significantly, this emphasizes that there is a distinct white/non-white categorization constructed by the organization through the organizational imagery. Mills takes up not only race, but also gender and age in his research, underscoring the relational aspect of these various social identifiers. Ultimately, this demonstrates the outcomes that a hegemonic group can foist on those who are non-dominant, connecting the dichotomy of same and otherness to its exclusionary power from organizational control and the ways in which such exclusion limits visible diversity within the organization. That is, it is possible to see how discrimination is created and reproduced over time through various relationships of inequality. This gives credit to the idea posited above (Acker, 2006; Walby & Strid, 2012; McCall, 2005) that a study of the relationships of gender, class, race, and other social categorizations considered historically provides meaning to the current relationships of inequality along these lines. Additionally, Mills and others demonstrate the feasibility of inquiry through the historical lens using an organization such as British Airways; a feasibility that is again legitimized in further literature focusing on race, gender and other categorizations at British Airways and other airlines (Mills, 1998; Mills & Helms Mills, 2006; Durepos, Helms Mills & Mills, 2008; Durepos, Mills & Helms Mills, 2008). Mills (2006) uses this historical lens to identify significant

junctures over the airline's history. The junctures are distinct periods of time that are impacted by varying contexts and socioeconomic discourses, which leads to having "a series of images, impressions, and experiences come together, giving the appearance of a coherent whole that influences how an organization is understood" (Mills, 2010, p.510). This is relevant to my research as Mills' work identifies junctures at British Airways over the organization's history (Mills, 1995; Mills, 2006). The junctures that are relevant for my paper include the growth of female employment (1924-1939) and the rapid growth and disbursement of female employment (1940-1945). These junctures focus on gender, but are also intersectional in that they include considerations of race as well as gender. I position my study of race within these junctures as they are significant timeframes identified by the existing work. (Mills, 2006).

Airlines represent a unique opportunity to study race in organizations over time. Their suitability for study is legitimized by the literature produced in the past twenty years that gives insights into intersectionality, the construction of history, and meaning-making, all topics that deal on some level with the discussion of race (Mills, 1995; Mills, 1998; Mills & Helms Mills, 2006; Durepos, Helms Mills & Mills, 2008; Durepos, Mills & Helms Mills, 2008). Additionally, airlines have typically been organizations bound by strict gendered norms (Mills, 1998; Myrden, Helms Mills & Mills, 2011). As well, the airlines that have been previously studied have one key feature: duration. In order to study race over time, an organization needs to exist for an extended length of time, and there are a number of airlines around the world that fit this requirement, such as British Airways, Air Canada, Qantas, KLM and others. Another feature that has made airlines significant for study is the existence of extensive archives. These archives have

contributed to the study of airlines including British Airways, Air Canada and Pan American Airways (Mills, 1995; Myrden, Helms Mills & Mills, 2011; Durepos, Helms Mills & Mills, 2008). The literature that has been developed using both airlines and archival research as means for researching race and gender, and applying theories such as intersectionality, helps legitimize my research direction of using archival materials to study the images of race over time

#### CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has provided a review of the theories and literature that inform my research position (Nkomo, 1992; Essed, 1991; Acker, 2000; 2006; McCall, 2005). I have explained how these theories have influenced my research. Additionally, I have provided an overview of the literature that has taken up issues of discrimination using airlines as a case study, and I have discussed the role of the archival method as a precedent from the existing literature (Mills, 1995; Myrden, Helms Mills & Mills, 2011; Durepos, Helms Mills & Mills, 2008). In the next chapter, I will discuss my methodology for engaging with the materials and provide a background of British Airways as the research case in this study.

## **Chapter 3 – Methodology and the Case of British Airways**

### CHAPTER OUTLINE

This chapter provides an overview of the research case, British Airways 1932-1946; and discusses the methodology used to engage with the material considered in this study. First, I provide a “history” of British Airways, acknowledging that this history is a reconstruction of the past based on a number of different histories of the organization (Fear, 2014). Then I discuss my methodology. The archival process is discussed, with a focus on how the material was accessed and recorded. Then I address my process for analyzing the material using thematic content analysis to access predominant themes.

### THE CASE OF BRITISH AIRWAYS

British Airways is a British airline carrier that has existed in various incarnations since early in the twentieth century. With the advent of flight following the First World War, a number of small, independent companies were established throughout Britain in an attempt to exploit commercial air travel. British Airways first came into existence under the name of Imperial Airways in 1924, when four separate airline companies were merged into one organization. Following this merger, Imperial Airways rapidly expanded their traffic and routes throughout Europe, and the colonial territories, including Africa, the Middle East, India and Australia (Bluffield, 2009). This expansion depended on partner airlines throughout the British Empire, and Imperial Airways negotiated ownership deals with those partner airlines such as Qantas, in Australia, in order to deliver some of the more distant routes. Through this practice, Imperial Airways

soon developed an extensive network of routes, which were serviced using both land and sea planes to provide maximum penetration into global territories (History and Heritage, 2015). In this way, Imperial Airways grew rapidly from a smaller operation in 1924 to a significant and dominant national carrier by the late 1930s (Bluffield, 2009).

However due to government regulation of civil aviation, Imperial Airways experienced significant change prior to the Second World War. In 1939, Imperial Airways was merged with another airline and brought under control of the military due to wartime conditions. This other airline was British Airways Ltd., an organization that had been formed in 1935 from an amalgamation of two private and one public airline carriers, and primarily served routes throughout Europe. Due to the wartime conditions, as civil aviation operators, British Airways Ltd. and Imperial Airways were merged to become British Overseas Airways Corporation, or BOAC, which was run as a nationalized or state operation during the Second World War and regulated by a military-ordered government ministry. (History and Heritage, 2015). Despite this heavy regulation, the newly formed BOAC managed to continue operating a number of its routes with special permission. The organization adjusted as required away from enemy zones so that supplies, information and people could be carried throughout both the British territories and the rest of the world during the war. (British Overseas Airways Corporation, 2015). Many of the routes throughout Africa in particular persisted during this time (British Overseas Airways Corporation, 2015).

Following World War II, the structure of BOAC was modified again by a civil aviation act passed in 1946. This act dissolved European and South American routes out of the organization's control, creating three separate entities to operate three different

sets of routes. British European Airways operated throughout Europe, British South American Airways operated throughout South America, and BOAC operated the remaining global routes, throughout Africa, the Middle East, Australia, and the Atlantic. By 1949, British South American Airways was reabsorbed by BOAC, but BOAC and British European Airways continued to operate separately until 1971. (British Overseas Airways Corporation, 2015).

In 1971, an act of parliament ordered a new arrangement of the airline, which went into effect in 1974. This new company was called British Airways, and saw the merger of BOAC and BEA together with two domestic airlines. These domestic airlines, Cambrian Airways and Northeast Airlines, operated within the United Kingdom and, with the merger, these four airlines came to be known as British Airways as it exists today (British Airways, 2015). This new airline brought the different national route operators together under one banner, and ensured a cohesive British company as the main government-supported flag carrier of the United Kingdom. (History and Heritage, 2015).

This organizational history of British Airways also includes its people, and this is a significant piece for the purposes of this study. According to Mills (1995), British Airways in the pre-war years (at which point the organization was known as Imperial Airways) favoured “...men over women, whites over people of colour, heterosexuality over homosexuality and, to some extent, upper- and middle class over working class people” (p. 249). This is indicative of whiteness inherent in the organization during the time period under study in this paper; although the organization employed non-white individuals along its international routes, that employment was less prestigious and

largely invisible in the organization, and there was a clear preference for white males to be in positions of power and visibility in the organization. According to Mills (2006), the staff at Imperial Airways and BOAC was largely white and British, and the organization actively aimed to maintain this demographic makeup through its recruitment practices.

For the purposes of this study, both Imperial Airways and BOAC are considered as entities of the one greater organization of British Airways. There is an assumed continuity that exists because of the consistency of organizational materials in the form of company newsletters throughout this time, despite the changes in name.

During this time period, Imperial Airways, and subsequently BOAC, served a significant number of countries throughout the world, many in Africa and the Middle East. This is reflected in the organizational materials that provide much mention of the various outpost bases and their events. During the Second World War, the focus on these areas was significant because of their distance from the front lines, and for the fact that BOAC was operating routes almost primarily overseas. The scope of this research is situated within a timeframe that provides ample contact with geographical areas that were home to many non-white individuals. This adds a dimension of interest to their inclusion or lack thereof in the organizational materials that I reviewed.

## METHODOLOGY

While the material for this study emerged as part of a larger study under the direction of Jean Helms Mills and Albert Mills, I collected much of the materials that I have selected for this particular study. Also, the precise topic for this study was not



determined at the time of my collection, but there were several factors that I considered which contributed to the selection of the materials that I have considered.

First, I was interested in intersectionality, specifically race, gender, age, class, and ability and curious to investigate how these factors were visible or invisible when going through the organizational materials. I was also interested in which individuals were given credibility and legitimacy through the images and texts of the organization, and, similarly, who was not, based on the treatment different groups received in the material. As I worked through the process of collecting the materials, I became more focused on race above the other factors, as I was able to see changes emerging in how credibility or legitimacy was kept from non-white groups. An example of this lack of legitimacy is how the images would mock the appearance or work of non-white workers, while praising any white workers who may be pictured. Second, I made the decision to focus on the 1930s and 1940s. My initial reasoning for selecting these decades was based on an interest in how World War II impacted the organization, but in working with the materials, I realized that there were differences emerging in how race in particular was being portrayed in the organizational images.

The collection process that I undertook involved reviewing physical copies of monthly organizational newsletters for images and text that revealed the subjects of race, gender, class, age, ability, or some combination of all of the above. In particular, the newsletters that I used were the Imperial Airways Gazette, and the British Overseas Airways Corporation News Letter [sic], also called Speedbird. The Imperial Airways Gazette was a publication for external and internal audiences, while the BOAC News Letter was focused more particularly on internal audiences.

I worked through these newsletters chronologically, beginning in 1932, and ending in 1946. The beginning point was chosen because the newsletters shifted to a more consistent and formalized form at this time in the organization. Over the course of five days, I worked through as many years as possible, with the goal of ending post-war so that I could potentially conduct analysis on pre and post-war materials.

I used two different methods to collect the material. The first method involved photographing the cover of each newsletter to achieve a record of dates, and then photographing any images and/or articles that were relevant to the factors discussed above. One negative of this process is that it takes time to assess the material for relevance, so it is a slower process that may result in some relevant information being missed. To ensure that I covered a significant period of time during my archival collection, I then began to use a second process, which involved photographing the newsletters in their entirety. In this case, I then went over the newsletters in electronic form at a later point in time, and selected the relevant images and articles to analyze. The advantage of this method is that it allowed me to collect the material at a faster pace, but it also entailed a lot of work to later review the material for relevance, because of the sheer number of photographs and information. Although I used two distinct methods of collection, I treated all the material to a similar review for relevance. I also made notes on anything that I noticed as significant during the collection process, regardless of which method I was using at the time.

Following the archival visit, I systematically reviewed and named all the photographs taken, assigning a unique identifier to each photo, which included information that identified me as the collector, the organization from which it was

collected, and the date of collection. Following this cataloguing process, I went over the materials that had been reviewed and selected for relevance based on race, gender, class, age, or ability, and made detailed notes on the photographs and articles and what they contained, and which factor they were related to. I then reviewed my notes for files that indicated race as the subject in some way, and refined these files into their own collection, making sure to note the date and newsletter each file was taken from.

Next, I printed all of the images and articles, labelled them with dates, and spent several days reviewing and sorting the physical materials as a form of thematic content analysis. During this process, I looked for similarities and dissimilarities of the photos to assess the existence of any major themes. I also assessed the actual amount of content over time, to see if the occurrence of the images increased or decreased significantly according to years or periods of time. Through this process, the three main themes of primitivism, exoticism and superiority emerged, which are similar to the themes identified by Mills (1995). Upon completing this entire collection and analysis process, I was able to feel confident in my engagement and interpretation of the materials to begin discussing my findings in this study.

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, I have provided a “history” of British Airways to give context to the research as it emerges from this company. I have discussed the methods that I used to engage with the materials in this study and I detailed the research process that led to the emergence of the main themes from the materials. In chapter Four, I will provide a

full discussion of the main themes of images of race at the organization: primitivism, exoticism, and superiority.

## Chapter 4 – Making Sense of the Materials

### CHAPTER OUTLINE

In this chapter, I discuss my analysis of images I collected and the general themes that emerged from the analysis of them. For each theme, I will consider the process whereby they emerged and describe examples from the archival material that help to explain that emergence.

### THEMES OF MATERIAL

As mentioned, the general themes that emerged mirror the findings of portrayals of race in the organization by Mills (1995) in his work on British Airways. While his work covers a more extensive timeframe, my study does fall within his parameters. For example, the themes explored by Mills (1995) include exoticism, superiority, and the outposts, an interpretation of superiority which sees non-white employees limited in their representation as legitimate workers. In my study, I did not seek to replicate these themes; rather they emerged through my consideration of the materials in a more limited time frame that there were some similarities to the existing work (Mills, 1995).

#### *Primitivism:*

One form of imaging of race that reoccurs at many different points in the materials is an image that juxtaposes the idea of primitivism with that of modernity, with primitive being defined as unmodern and indicated by traditional non-white dress. This theme began to emerge in my thematic content analysis as I noticed a number of images

that pictured non-white individuals in traditional dress together with images of modern airplanes. It became clear through the amount of images that played on this variation that there was a theme emerging.

The juxtaposition of modern and primitive is often done through placing a non-white individual in traditional dress in stark contrast to an airplane. For example, an image from the November, 1935 issue of the Imperial Airways Gazette shows a group of five African men in front of an Imperial Airways plane. The African men are dressed in traditional garments, and the picture is captioned “natives of the Shiluk tribe, Malakal” (Imperial Airways Gazette, 1935, November). Although this picture does not specifically use the words primitive and modern, the intended contrast of the past versus the present, or primitive versus modern, is inherent. The accompanying text of this picture is an article entitled “Guide to Imperial Airways’ Africa Route”, which does not explain the context of this picture, making it unclear if the African men work for the organization. However, this lack of clarity further emphasizes the contrast between the subjects of the photo and their airplane backdrop; they are apparently separate from one another, representing different and irreconcilable eras.

This emphasis on primitivism reoccurs in the next month of the Imperial Airways Gazette, this time with even more focus on the contrast between the past and the present. The image shows a traditionally dressed Arab man on a camel, his face turned away from the camera towards a modern airplane in the background. The caption for this photo, one of a series spread on two pages is simply: “past and present” (Imperial Airways Gazette, 1935, December). This caption makes clear what the photos juxtaposing non-white individuals against the dominating background of an airplane are

meant to show: the difference between then and now, past and present, what is primitive and what is modern.

Variations of this same image continue in the next year as well. For example, the Imperial Airways Gazette, May 1936 contains a picture of six Shiluk men, traditionally dressed, posing in front of another Imperial Airways plane, together with its Captain. (Imperial Airways Gazette, 1936, May). The inclusion of a white man in the group gives a new nuance to the traditional juxtaposition: it is possible that the image is meant to show the relationship between the two groups, one of which is the Shiluk men, and the other being the white captain and his plane. However, because the arrangement of non-white African men in front of airplanes is so prevalent within the context of the primitive versus modern theme, it is difficult to take this image as containing another meaning. In particular, the image is used in the same context as the image from November 1935, discussed above, as foil for an article under the “Guide to Imperial Airways’ Africa Route” (Imperial Airways Gazette, 1936, May). There seems to be some predilection for photographs that emphasize the contrast between non-white individuals and the modern airplanes as a means to represent the experience of those flying an Imperial Airways plane through Africa.

The same arrangement is used again in the June, 1936 issue of the Gazette. There is an image of two African men in traditional dress, and holding spears, standing with their backs to the lens and looking up at an Imperial Airways plane. This photo is captioned “Natives of Central Africa interested in the Andromeda” (Imperial Airways Gazette, 1936, June). Again, the photo appears in conjunction with the column “Guide to Imperial Airways’ Africa Route” (Imperial Airways Gazette, 1936, June). Like the

other images, there is no accompanying text explaining the relationship of the subjects in the image to the airline. Instead, the photographs seem intentionally staged to provide a sense of the contrast between what is designated primitive and what is designated modern.

This emphasis, which seems to suggest that Imperial Airways represents a modern world, while the images of African and Arab individuals represent a primitive world, seems to reveal the role that those belonging to non-white races served at this time for the company, namely as foil to the modernity of the organization. Individuals belonging to these groups are positioned as primitive; they serve as a convenient contrast to the organization's goal to appear to its "at-home" audiences as a modern company. In analyzing these images of primitivism, it is important to remember those audiences, and the goal of the organizational newsletters. The company is trying to promote air travel and its routes into Africa, and juxtaposing the modernity of the aircraft and the company against the backdrop of the primitive and wild people and lands may have served dual purposes. For one, it may have helped the organization advertise the modernity of its planes and, for two, images such as those described above may have been enticing to external audiences considering travel and employees. The composition of the photos seems careful to represent the separation between the two worlds; the aircrafts appear to be admired by the non-white individuals, but are simultaneously out of reach, creating a buffer of comfort between the two worlds, while emphasizing their differences.

Overall, there is an emphasis in the newsletter materials on non-white African and Arabian individuals in traditional dress as representing a primitivism throughout the



empire and flying routes of Imperial Airways. There are a number of variations even on one similarly composed image that emphasize the past versus the present, or primitive versus modern positioning of racial groups by the organization. This positioning serves to keep those of non-white race as outsiders, and there is no acknowledgement in the organizational materials of whether these individuals work within the company. Rather, they are kept ambiguous, and their images serve to enforce a particular white stereotype of non-white races as primitive. This stereotype then allows the company to reinforce their own image as modern, and advertise to various audiences using this contrast.

### *Exoticism*

The emphasis on non-white individuals as primitive outsiders gives way relatively quickly to a new theme, which I see as similar to Mills' (1995) notion of exoticism. As Mills described, exoticism can be seen as both mysterious and something to be viewed as interesting, but inconsequential to a white individual (1995). Beginning in 1937, the juxtaposition of old and new is reinvented, and images of non-white individuals seem to be no longer shown primarily as primitive, but rather, exotic. This theme emerged as I began to notice an increasing number of images of non-white individuals overall, but also that those who were shown were often in traditional dress and engaged in activities such as traditional cultural ceremonies. This was a clear departure from the prior images present in the newsletters, and the repetitious appearance of these types of images signaled to me a distinct theme.

This distinction from primitivism is clear as individuals are shown not against a background of modernity, but rather in their own environments, or 'natural states'. This

shift to exoticism comes as the organization begins to promote a series of films taken on its routes, and many of the images shown at this time are stills from those films. Those of non-white race appear to be given a new prestige: their difference is valued not against the background of modernity, but for interest's sake. They are positioned as different from the 'at-home' audiences, but in a way that shows the difference as being interesting, and worth viewing. This introduces an element of objectification.

An example of this trend towards exoticism can be seen in the February, 1937 issue of the Imperial Airways Gazette. On the cover of this newsletter is a smiling Arab man, dressed traditionally, with a bird on his arm. There is no text accompanying his picture on the cover, and no visible background. Rather, the subject takes up the whole cover, his difference in race and dress from the at-home audience seeming to be made very intentionally obvious (Imperial Airways Gazette, 1937, February). The point of his position on the cover is not clear, however, until an accompanying blurb on the following page that informs the reader of a series of films being produced by Strand Film Company that will follow the England-India-Australia and England-India Hong Kong routes. The purpose of these films is described as "...depicting aspects of the organization of Imperial Airways", and the note states will be entitled *The Future is in the Air* (Imperial Airways Gazette, 1937, February). The title harkens back to the theme of primitivism; in light of this as a prevailing theme in previous Imperial Airways Gazettes, it is possible to see it still embedded in the identity of Imperial Airways, in that the organization is represented as the future in opposition to a past that is represented by non-British or non-white individuals. However, there is a nuance beyond primitivism that emerges at this point in time, which brings the materials into a more exotic identity.

This exoticism is evident in the ways that the non-white and hence non-British individuals are presented in opposition to the white and British workers in the Gazette materials. The non-white individuals are presented not as members of the organization, but as attractions; as features of the foreign landscape. For example, a spread of film stills from the February, 1937 Gazette shows a number of Arab men, but limits their identifications with the organization (Imperial Airways Gazette, 1937, February). The accompanying captions of the images make the roles of the non-white individuals ambiguous; for example, a picture showing a group of men with guns walking towards a plane is captioned: "...in the foreground, the Arab guard which is supplied by the Sheikh of Sharjah, Sultan Ibn Saghir al Qasim" (Imperial Airways Gazette, 1937, February). It is unclear whether the men are solely in the employ of the Sheikh, or if they also have a role in the organization. Similarly, another image shows an Arab man in close up, looking away from the camera (Imperial Airways Gazette, 1937, February). He is not shown at work, and his role is not clear from the image. The caption for his photo is "one of the guards of the resthouse at Sharjah" (Imperial Airways Gazette, 1937, February). Again, there is ambiguity as to his role within the organization, and it seems intentional that whatever his role, it is not emphasized in the article. Rather, what is emphasized is his look, his dress; ultimately, his foreignness. This essentially serves to undermine the legitimacy of non-white workers within this organization, as it makes their role unclear and emphasizes their existence outside of their value to the organization as employees.

This emphasis on the foreignness of individuals continues throughout 1937, as many film stills are being produced by Imperial Airways at this time. Some of the stills

are not of employees, but show the foreign nature of the country. For example, a still from March, 1937, shows Australian aboriginals in various stages of undress and with painted faces; similarly, the April, 1937 issue of the Gazette contains stills of Bali nationals in their natural state – that is to say, in non-British clothing and scenery (Imperial Airways Gazette, 1937, March; April). Continuing throughout 1937, there are many images of non-white people that are featured in the Gazette, but their inclusion seems primarily for the purpose of emphasizing the foreign aspect of the world outside of Britain. There are virtually no images of non-white individuals at work for the organization, save for some pictures that are ambiguous on that matter (Imperial Airways Gazette, 1937, February). Instead, race is depicted as foreign, and images apparently chosen for their exoticness. For example, there are topless Balinese women (Imperial Airways Gazette, 1937, April), people with heavily painted faces (Imperial Airways Gazette, 1937, March), and many elephants (Imperial Airways Gazette, 1937, May). There is a sense that the more different or foreign a scene or a person is, the more likely it is to be included in the images.

This is a significant indication of how the images of race are portrayed during this timeframe, as, according to the organization, the films are “...depicting aspects of the organization of Imperial Airways” (Imperial Airways Gazette, 1937, February). So while race is depicted through the reproduction of the film stills in the Imperial Airways Gazettes, it is necessary to consider just what aspect of the organization race can be considered as with the given images. There is very little legitimacy provided by the images chosen. The non-white individuals who appear in the stills are not part of the organization, but rather form an inconsequential background while the organization

functions around them. Their work within the organization is not addressed; instead the foreignness of native tribes and customs are emphasized. This means that while race is shown in the Gazettes at this time, the way it is shown keeps those of non-white race outside of the functioning of the organization. Their contributions as workers are not acknowledged or shown, and the focus seems largely on how exotic the non-white individuals can be made to look and seem to the at-home audiences.

Interestingly, this focus on the exotic seems to be a choice of Imperial Airways. The films that the stills are drawn from were made with the cooperation of Imperial Airways, but done by the Strand Film Company (Imperial Airways Gazette, 1937, December). One of the films, *Air Outpost*, which is available to the public on Youtube (FraserMac74, 2010), does not maintain the same emphasis on showing non-white individuals as exotic features. Rather, the film shows many non-white individuals at work for the organization, and discusses their roles as labourers, porters, mechanics, and meteorological assistants (FraserMac74, 2010). However, the film stills that Imperial Airways chooses to publish in their Gazette are those that create ambiguity about the legitimacy of the non-white individual's role as worker, or those that show individuals in a more exotic setting or state.

Overall, there is an emphasis on showing race as exotic that can be seen as a prevailing theme at the organization, even if only for a relatively short time. The film still images provide inflection to the value that Imperial Airways seems to place on its non-white workers at this point in time, showing them as exotic and maintaining an ambiguity for at-home audiences as to the legitimacy of their roles in the organization. The reasons for this limitation are difficult to speculate, but the film still images provide

important evidence for how the treatment of race in the organizational materials changes over time. Additionally, the existence of the Air Outpost film provides a valuable opportunity for comparison, and it is possible to see a difference in the way Imperial Airways presents race compared with how it is presented by the Strand Film Company, which gives further evidence for the fact that Imperial Airways may have had intentions behind their representations of non-white workers at this time.

### *Superiority*

The final theme that emerged from the materials is superiority, and it seems to be the prevailing theme of the next nine years at the organization. This theme emerged as I noticed the sheer number of non-white individuals being imaged in the materials began to increase, but that the context around this increase was primarily the emphasis of white over non-white, or superiority. There is a distinct shift from non-white individuals as primitive or exotic; they are instead ignored or subject to mockery that emphasises their lack of status in comparison with white individuals.

The increase in the images of non-white individuals begins with the Imperial Airways Gazettes in 1938, and continues as the organization transitions to the British Overseas Airways Corporation through 1939 and 1940. However, the ways in which non-white workers are included in the organization are limited by representations of racial superiority throughout many of the images and accompanying texts. These representations of superiority take a number of different forms, with the prominent forms of this racism including ignoring non-white individuals in images, and the mockery of non-white individuals in various organizational texts, in addition to a

general lack of acknowledgement of the legitimacy of the organizational roles held by non-white individuals.

Ignoring the presence of non-white individuals or groups in organizational images is a theme identified by Mills (1995), and is thus well-documented as a means of reproducing the superiority of the white man in the organization. This relates to intersectionality in that the strength of this superiority of the white male may also serve to subjugate women in the organization. There is also an intersection of gender and race present here, but the gender intersection is male. This can be seen in the materials as it frequently occurs that the images produced in the Imperial Airways Gazettes either ignore the presence of the non-white workers through the means of a caption focusing on the physical landscape; or, in the cases when a white male or males are present in the images, a caption which acknowledges their presence alone. For example, a photospread of some East African bases in the August, 1938 Imperial Airways Gazette contains three pictures that depict non-white workers. In one, three men are standing at the end of a jetty, one holding a hose. In another, three men are standing on a boat. The third picture shows a boat pulled up to the flying boat. The captions for these three pictures are: 1) The passengers' embarkation jetty at Khartoum; 2) Passenger launch at Malakal, Port Bell; and 3) Refuelling at Kisumu (Imperial Airways Gazette, 1938, August). None of these captions, meant to give "a pictorial survey of the 'ground' organization along the Empire Air Routes" (Imperial Airways Gazette, 1938, August) acknowledge the presence of the non-white workers or their role in the organization. Further pictorials in this vein in the following months follow the same formula. For example, in the September, 1938 issue, a picture of a black man cleaning the side of a flying boat, his

face in full and up-close view, is accompanied by the caption “cleaning the hull of an Imperial flying-boat at Durban” (Imperial Airways Gazette, 1938, September). The individual is not named, nor his role acknowledged. Instead, he is dehumanized simply by the structure of the sentence, which is constructed in such a way that it lacks a subject, despite the man’s very clear role as the cleaner of the flying boat. This maintains the anonymity of non-whites at the organization; so while they are shown, they are not identified as individuals, as employees, or obviously, as equals. In contrast, the white men and women are named and identified, indicating their organizational superiority.

This method of reproducing superiority – which suggests the continued superiority of men over women as well – is replicated again and again in the following years, continuing when the Imperial Airways Gazette gives way to the British Overseas Airways News Letter (sic). A photograph from November, 1940 depicts ten people in two rows: four white men standing and six black men kneeling in front. The photo is captioned “Traffic Staff at Kisumu. Left to right: J. Patterson (Vittualing Steward), R. Rowe (Aerodrome Superintendent), D.C.B. Hurrell (Station Superintendent), A.P. Moller (Traffic Assistant). For both the photographs we are indebted to Mr. B.C.H. Cross, R.D.C.A” (BOAC News Letter, 1940, November). This picture is revealing in that it seems to show just how intentional the ignorance of non-white individuals was at the organization. The black men in the photograph are treated as if they are simply not there. They are not acknowledged, not legitimized, not worthy of being assigned names. Other examples in which black and white men are intermingled in photos show this intention more starkly. In the August, 1942 edition of the News Letter, a picture of staff



at Bathurst identifies the names of the white men, left to right, who are standing amidst a number of black men (BOAC News Letter, 1942, August). However, there is no acknowledgement that the names are of the white men, simply an assumption that the reader will understand that it could only be the white men that the caption is identifying. This intentional lack of acknowledgement of the black men in the organizational images serves to continually replicate the superiority of white over non-white, and is a major part of the superiority theme that can be identified at the organization during the time under consideration. The first time that non-white individuals are identified in captions is 1943, and even following that date, the captioning is sporadic (BOAC News Letter, 1943, January).

The second way that non-white groups and individuals are kept inferior, despite a growing admittance into the organizational material by means of images and stories, is through mockery. This too is identified by Mills (1995) as he describes a letter from a young hangar boy that is reproduced, mockingly, in the Staff News to emphasize the contrast between the whites and non-whites as a means of maintaining superiority. This sort of mockery is prevailing in the organizational materials in the time I assess, and particularly so in the latter half, during which the BOAC News Letter made a point of collecting and printing first-hand accounts of news from overseas, a feature called the "Overseas Bulletin". The news from overseas would often contain humorous stories or photographs from the outpost bases that would make non-whites the butt of the joke. For example, a photo published in the January 1941 edition of the BOAC Newsletter shows a widely smiling white man holding a fishing pole next to a deeply frowning young black teen holding a fish and a net. The caption reads:

“Mr. E. P. Bilborough...is Traffic Superintendent in the Central African Region... It seems, however, that even a 3-lb trout (caught 90 miles from Nairobi) does not make a man a hero to his “boy” (BOAC News Letter, 1941, January, p. 7).

This example shows both the way in which whites relied on non-whites as servants, and how derogatory terminology was used as part of the organizational vernacular while simultaneously making use of non-whites for humour. Another example of this superior attitude and mockery as humour can be seen in a frankly tragic letter from a man at Lagos, a mechanic by trade, who pleads with the station manager for a job. “I have been hearing of you, that you are a kind and generous man, I beg of you, master, to pity my condition...” (BOAC News Letter, 1945, August). The station manager sends the letter in as humour, due to its “philosophical strain,” but the condition of the writer, is not relevant, only his flamboyant and exaggerated philosophical style of writing (BOAC News Letter, 1945, August). That the sad situation described by the writer is a source of humour and mockery for the organization can be seen as indicative of the extent of the superiority felt by the white members of the organization.

Alternatively, notes from the various outposts contain a number of disturbing accounts of the imperial mindset, such as this snippet from the Sudan outpost published in March 1941: “In contrast to most other parts of the Sudan, the natives have not yet been trained to the standard of efficiency required of them by the white man, and consequently, it is necessary to obtain servants from Khartoum. The Masalit have no monetary ambition...” (BOAC News Letter, 1941, March, p. 3). This example shows that while non-whites may have been working and gaining access to roles within the

organization, their legitimacy is still not recognized by the organization, which condones their description as servants.

Overall, superiority is a predominant theme that exists throughout much of the organizational material. Those of non-white race are admitted in ways that replicate the superiority of white over non-white, creating a distinction between the groups that ensures the non-whites do not gain legitimacy as members of the organization. It is significant that while over the time period in question, there are more images of non-whites included in the organizational materials, this inclusion does not guarantee their legitimacy. They are still discriminated against in various ways, and that discrimination is obvious in the organizational materials.

#### CONCLUSION OF THEMES

The three themes discussed – primitivism, exoticism, and superiority – reveal the dominant means of discrimination against non-white individuals in the organization's newsletters. Although they have been discussed so far as independent, it is important to note as well that the themes do overlap with one another to some degree. Amongst all the materials, there is evidence of these three ways of showing race in the organization; the themes are not linear with time. Additionally, the themes address the intersection of non-white males in the organization, but may also be relevant for explaining further intersections within the organization, such as the position of women as inferior to men. Moreover, the themes discussed do suggest that the ways in which race was imaged by the organizational materials does vary and, further, that the themes are connected by the commonality of maintaining the image of non-white workers at the organization as

illegitimate. There was no way that non-white groups or individuals were shown that legitimized their role as employees of British Airways like those of the white race. According to Mills (1995), the normalization of black men did not begin to occur in the organization until 1958, and gender is conspicuously absent in this discussion as well. The lack of non-white women in the materials may suggest that there is more dominant discrimination of this intersection at play during this time at the organization, which kept this group largely invisible.

This analysis has revealed that there are three main themes when considering the ways in which race was shown in organizational imagery at British Airways between 1932 and 1946. Although the themes did not exist as linear silos, the material suggests that the theme of superiority gradually gained dominance as the means through which non-white individuals and groups were exhibited in organizational materials, meaning that there was a change over time. These three themes are connected by their main effect, which was to keep legitimacy from non-white employees of the organization, a trend that is clear despite the fact that there are more images of non-white groups shown in the organizational materials in the latter eight years of the materials analyzed. The themes and how they change over time show the different ways that discrimination was reproduced by the organization to influence a continued exclusion and illegitimacy of non-white individuals within the company.

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter discusses the emergence of three themes from the consideration of the archival materials. The process of how they each emerged is discussed, and

examples from the materials are provided and described to support the existence of the themes. The themes are considered for how they each serve to keep legitimacy from non-white workers at the organization, and as indicative of how the discrimination of non-white workers at British Airways changed and was reproduced over time. In Chapter Five, the implications of the themes are discussed in more detail.

## Chapter 5 – Meaning and Implications

### CHAPTER OUTLINE

In this chapter I discuss the implication of the three themes in relation to the race theories discussed. These implications include: i) superiority as an increasingly dominant theme in the materials; ii) how race changes over time in organizational materials; iii) the multiple methods of discrimination that non-white workers must contend with at one time, and iv) the increase of images of race in the organizational materials over time, while at the same time, there is no decrease in the discrimination face by non-white workers at the organization.

### MEANINGS FROM THE THEMES

Although three distinct themes emerged, I feel that the theme of superiority was dominant in the images observed. That is, in most of the images that I examined, it is possible to see that the majority of images and accompanying captions or stories that involve a non-white person or persons contain some indication of white superiority. This is important because it reveals a main form of discrimination that was reproduced by the organization to prevent non-white workers from becoming normalized as legitimate employees at the company.

Another important observation that I noted pertains to how that portrayal of race does change over time. This is important because it indicates that discrimination does not occur consistently in one way; rather, it changes over time in ways that are visible in

an analysis of the organizational materials. This indicates that it is important to view racial discrimination as fluid, not simply recognizable in one form.

Although it is clear that the way in which race is shown in the organization materials does change over time, the changes are not absolutely linear. For example, while superiority becomes the prominent theme for race beginning in about 1938, there are still images in which the themes of primitivism or exoticism can be seen instead. This is important because it emphasizes that there were multiple ways that discrimination occurred at the organization, despite the existence of one prevailing or visible method. While white superiority was the main theme in the images of non-white workers, there were other and multiple ways that these groups and individuals were represented that served as discriminatory.

Another element to consider is the increasing number of images and mentions of non-white individuals in the organizational materials in this timeframe. This is significant because it indicates that although images of race were being incorporated into the organizational materials more and more, the act of inclusion did not guarantee a legitimacy or acceptance for non-white individuals as employees of the organization. In fact, it seems at times that the inclusion was precisely for the purpose of exhibiting superiority. The discrimination against non-white workers continued even though their images were appearing more frequently in the organizational materials.

That the increased inclusion of images of non-white individuals in the materials did not impact the degree of discrimination that these groups were subjected to is significant. For example, just the fact that non-whites were being included in the images at British Airways is inadequate as a means for legitimizing non-white workers; their

increasing inclusion in the materials did not seem to normalize them as employees, but rather served to perpetuate the discrimination and enforce their roles as prescribed by the organization. This may be relevant for diversity policies in western organizations today that consider the inclusion of racial minorities sufficient to protect themselves against accusations of discrimination.

## IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

As stated earlier, this study has used British Airways archival materials to provide a case study to explore the ways in which images of race in organizational materials change over time, in order to reveal how racial discrimination was enacted and maintained during a specific timeframe, in a specific organization, which had employees throughout the world. This study helps contribute to claims (Nkomo, 1992; Acker, 2006) that say it is necessary to explore the nature of past discrimination against non-white individuals and groups in organizations in order to understand how discrimination is reproduced and recreated over time. By surfacing themes and their interplay, we can start to understand the multiple ways that discrimination, both systematic and overt, can be carried out by an organization, and how images reveal that ways this discrimination occurs. By considering the ways that images of race in the organizational materials contribute to the reproduction of discrimination, I argue that it is possible to gain an understanding of how it is possible for inequality to persist in an organization.

Ultimately, the three themes that emerge help us make some sense of the discriminatory experiences of non-white individuals at British Airways during the period of 1932-1946. This can be used as a grounding for examining the impact of other bases of inequality



and, further, to consider inequality from an intercategorical approach using intersectionality (McCall, 2005) in future research that may seek to consider the relationships of intersections of race, gender, and other categories in more detail.

Additionally, in using the case study organization to examine race in detail, there is an alignment with the need for research that does not reinforce race-neutrality (Nkomo, 1992), and provides context for how discrimination is reproduced by organizations to persist today through means such as everyday racism (Essed, 1991). The study also builds on existing work that seeks to identify and find meaning in the experiences of those traditionally subject to discrimination from some basis of inequality at organizations, and reinforces the idea that these methods of discrimination change over time (Mills, 1995; Mills, 2006).

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, I have tried to make sense of themes and implication of this understanding in terms of racial discrimination, then and now. In the next chapter, I will reflect on the study. I will also discuss the limitations of my research and the opportunities for future research.

## **Chapter 6 – Conclusion**

### CHAPTER OUTLINE

In this chapter, I reflect on the study, including what I have learned from undertaking this project, the limitations of my research, and the opportunities for future research.

### REFLECTIONS ON THE STUDY

With this paper, I wanted to expand my experience with archival materials and pursue a topic that I was passionate to learn about in greater detail. Keeping these two factors in mind, I was able to develop the idea for this study to look at the images of race over time at British Airways to try to better understand the possible ways that discrimination was created and reproduced at the organization for non-white workers. In the course of this paper, I consider the images of race over time between 1932 and 1946, make sense of the main themes that emerge from the materials, and consider the significance of this meaning-making and its broader application. The goal of this paper is to provide a case study for looking at discrimination as it occurs through organizational materials, recognizing that materials such as newsletters are one way to access the discriminatory experiences of individuals and groups in the organization. The significance of this study comes from identifying the modes of discrimination at British Airways through the themes that emerged, and identifying how the discrimination was reproduced but changed over time.

This study provides an empirical example that supports the calls by Nkomo (1992) and Acker (2006) who suggest that we look to the past in order to better understand the persistence of discrimination in organizations today. By revisiting the past, it may be possible to better understand the experiences of minority groups. This is significant given the ongoing issue of discrimination in our organizations and society. Racial discrimination persists in organizations, whether through the systematic or subtle means of everyday racism, and there are ongoing concerns for racial minorities to achieve visibility and legitimacy for their complaints (Acker, 2006).

Content analysis of images, over time, and the notion of junctures (Mills, 2006; Mills, 2010) could be a useful way to reveal inequality and the experiences of minority groups in organizations, especially if they have a long history and have an accessible archive. British Airways provided a good example for this type of research because of contextual factors that include the imperial heritage of Britain, the country's presence in a number of colonized territories, and the airline's existence as a flag carrier, or national airline. These contextual factors impact the organization's relationship to race and discrimination, and are important to consider for this and other organizations.

Personally, I gained a great deal of experience in conducting archival research, and engaging with the archival materials in my efforts to complete this project. Undertaking this project allowed me the space to explore issues that are less discussed in the classroom, while also allowing me the opportunity to consider the experiences of individuals who were kept largely in the shadows of the organization. The archives are the source of these experiences: they are written but also in the case of racial and gender

minorities, largely unwritten and contained in images. Unveiling the experiences that the images show has been a tremendous learning opportunity.

## LIMITATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

There are some limitations to this study that should be acknowledged. The study was conducted within the constraints of the Master's Research Project format, and hence the scope is somewhat limited. This is a preliminary, exploratory study through which I was able to familiarize myself with the materials and research methods, and I hope to complete more detailed research in the future. Some of the choices that I made for the purposes of this study's scope included working with a relatively short (ie., fourteen year) timeframe, as well as drawing primarily from two sources of organizational materials. I also chose to focus specifically on race, though in the future I hope to do further studies of this material that consider intersectionality more centrally by looking at gender and other bases for discrimination. The consideration of the materials is a subjective process, and there is certainly still a wealth of materials to consider more fully in the future.

In connection to the limitations, there are some clear opportunities for future research. For example, this project was concerned primarily with images of race, and it may be interesting to expand that focus to gender more broadly than I have done in this study. Another opportunity for research may be to examine the images of race over a greater period of time, and using more organizational materials. This could potentially reveal further experiences of minority workers that are helpful for understanding the discrimination at the organization. Additionally, due to the mergers and changes that

British Airways has experienced over its history, it might also be possible to review the materials of each company individually to assess if a change in the images is related to a change in the company's structure, such as a merger.

## PROJECT SUMMARY

In this project, I have considered British Airways' incorporation of race in its organizational materials, and uncovered the main themes of the images of race at the organization during 1932-1946. I also discussed the ways in which these images and themes change over time, and the potential impact the discrimination faced by non-white individuals and groups at the organization had on further discrimination against these groups within my timeframe. This study is meant to contribute to literature that considers past discrimination as significant for understanding the experiences of non-white groups in organizations today, and to act as a case study for considering how discrimination has been enacted and reproduced at an organization in the past as a means of exclusion.

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