



Chi Dao

‘...just a normal part of life’. Interviews with foreign students who have experienced xenophobic or racist incidents in Poland

Nhat

Nhat is an international student in Poland, who has experienced racism. It was not a huge incident, but, nevertheless distressing. On 29 June 2020, Nhat was on public transport, and trying to find an empty seat. She finally found one next to a Polish woman. However, after Nhat sat down, the Polish woman immediately covered her nose, mouth and face, and tried to move as far away from Nhat as possible. A few minutes later, the woman told Nhat to let her get out and then shouted something about Coronavirus. This is an example of an act of racism, not really a big incident, but it shows that racism does exist here.

Kim

Kim has been studying in Poland for the last 3 years. In this time, she has experienced many different kinds of racism, especially hate speech. She doesn't remember the exact days or months of individual incidents, however, she said that it happened to her almost every week in her first and second year in Poland. Kim experienced hate speech mostly from teenagers and on public transport. She doesn't speak Polish, so it was difficult for her to understand all the words people said to her. Nonetheless, she knew they were pointing and looking straight at her as they said *'k...wa'*. Sometimes, they also spoke in English, and said things like *'f...cking Chinese, get back to your country; you are useless; we don't need you here'* even though she is from Vietnam. These words may seem like something little, which cause no harm, but they actually hurt her, and caused her fear. As a result, Kim had a really hard time going out and using public transport, because she was scared that someone would mock or stare at her. She often felt like she did not belong here in Poland.

Linh

Linh experienced the most harmful act of racism among those who I have interviewed. She told me that she wasn't doing anything besides walking around the park and drinking a cup of coffee, when a group of children approached her and suddenly started shouting, mocking and insulting her. It happened at the end of April 2020, and the group of children were young, aged around 10-15 years old, which really surprised her. The children started to shout at her more and more loudly, and she didn't know how to respond to them. After seeing that she wasn't reacting to their words, the children began throwing sticks and branches at Linh, and kept saying that she was idiot. She was helpless, motionless and standing still. After a few minutes, one of the children's mothers

appeared. Linh thought that the mother was going to talk to her child and stop the group from what they were doing. However, the woman instead joined in with the children, and also shouted at Linh. Even more surprisingly, the mother threw an unfinished ice-cream at Linh. That act was obviously racist, but no one seemed to notice it. Linh was scared to tell anyone and said that even though she talked to the police, they will not do anything or cannot do anything because the children were underage. She believes that she experienced a stronger act of racism because she is not living in a big city such as Wroclaw, Krakow or Warsaw, so the situation is worse. Linh lives in a small city, which is 100 km from Warsaw.

Chi Dao

This story is about my own experience of racism. It happened when the Coronavirus had just arrived in Poland, a few days after Poland had recorded its first case of Coronavirus, around 10th March. I was trying to catch an Uber from my workplace to my home. However, after connecting with an Uber driver, he kept driving and driving around, and tried to avoid picking me up. I knew from that moment, that he was definitely not planning to pick me up, but was also not going to cancel the ride (by cancelling it himself, he would not be paid). Therefore, I would need to cancel it myself. The problem did not stop there. I then tried to connect with two more drivers, and the same thing happened. From that moment, I realised that when a driver accepts the ride I have booked, my name will appear on their screen, and they just basically don't want to pick me because I am Asian and have an Asian name. On this occasions, I was waiting for around 45 minutes outside, in temperatures below -1 Celcius until one driver accepted the booking to pick me. This act did not cause me emotional harm, but it did cost me money and wasted a lot of time. I reported this to Uber and received the fee cancellation fees I had been charged back from the company. However, I am not aware if any action was taken against the drivers who refused to pick me up.

Ngoc

Ngoc and her friend experienced a form of racism from an Uber driver. It happened in early May 2020, around 15 km from the center of Warsaw. At that time, Uber had imposed a rule whereby passengers were only allowed to sit in the back of their vehicles. However, when the driver arrived and saw two Asian girls, he refused to pick them up. After negotiating, he considered taking only one person, saying it was because of Uber's rules at the time. Ngoc knew it wasn't because of the rule, as there was no rule specifically about that. She knew has was just being racist. But because she is a relaxed and free spirited person, she did not care about it that much. She also did not report the incident to Uber because she accepted it as just a normal part of life...