**University of Leicester**

**Future 50 PhD Scholarship**

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| **Project Reference** | MUS Fowler |

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**Section 2 – *Project Information***

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| **Project Title** | Race and Rurality: Rural Racism, Rural Museums and Representations of Britain’s Rural Past.  |
| **Project Highlights:** | 1. | An opportunity for an original, timely and evidence-based response to representations of the British countryside in relation to rural racism, rural museums and representations of Britain’s rural past.  |
| 2. | A methodology which embeds minority perspectives as its research design.  |
| 3. | Vital focus on representations of rurality by rural museums.  |
| **Project Summary**  |
| Rural studies scholars have shown that Britain’s countryside traditionally embodies potent expressions of nationhood and belonging (Chakraborti and Garland 2004; Fowler 2020; Shirley 2015 and Matless 2016). Walking groups like Black Men Walking, Black Girls Hike and Muslim Hikers have been subjected to sustained hostility, characterised by a sense – both spoken and implied - that the countryside has been, and remains, a place for white Britons to enjoy. This is a dynamic rural context in which there is a sustained and growing challenge to such views. April 2022 saw the largest mass-gathering of Black and Asian Britons that rural Britain has ever seen. The gathering aimed to promote a more inclusive culture in Britain’s countryside and reflects a growing movement by people of colour to enjoy the countryside, and also to live in rural places. Three interrelated strands of investigation reflect the expertise of its three supervisors: rural racism, rural museums and changing perceptions of Britain’s rural past. The study will address the following overarching research questions: Which social attitudes and cultural representations of rural Britain have prevailed and how are these changing? How do minoritised groups perceive rural Britain and why? How do perceptions of the countryside vary regionally, historically and across specific heritages and identities? How do rural museums represent the British countryside and how do minoritised people perceive these representations? Ongoing debates about rurality lack the systematic study of changing social attitudes to race and representations of Britain’s rural past. There is limited up-to-date literature on rural racism and very little work which embeds minoritised perspectives in its research design. This investigation will focus on both official and unofficial representations of British rurality. The supervisory team’s expertise in rural museums will support new readings of their changing representations of the British countryside, also considering how and why minoritised communities, rural residents and tourists perceive, use or stay away from them. The research necessarily incorporates an historical dimension. A growing evidence-base shows that perceptions of rural Britain as an historically white space are misplaced, with important recent studies about the historical presence of African, Caribbean, Chinese and South Asian people who lived and worked in the countryside. Expertise in this historical black presence and the countryside’s colonial connections will be offered by the lead supervisor. |