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**FOUNDINGS IN ANTI-RACISM:  
RACIST VIOLENCE AND THE 'WAR-ON-TERROR' IN EAST  
LONDON**

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**FOUNDINGS IN ANTI-RACISM:  
RACIST VIOLENCE AND THE 'WAR-ON-TERROR' IN EAST  
LONDON**

**by**

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## **Dedication**

**Ambikaipaker Arunasalam, 1937-2008**

*In remembrance of your love and your legacy of courageous struggle*

*and for*

**Mallika Isabel Mohan, born February 7, 2009**

*our future*

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**FOUNDINGS IN ANTI-RACISM:  
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IN EAST LONDON**

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Mohan Ambikaipaker, PhD

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Supervisor: João H. Costa Vargas

The interlocked social struggles waged by overlapping and diverse Britons of color for racial and social equality and everyday survival is the dynamic corollary of the contradictions engendered by the ruling relations of racial differentiation and racism in Britain. Grassroots struggles against routine racist violence and state violence, conceptualized as politically interlinked, are the critical sites that contribute to the recursive racial domination experienced by Britons of color in contemporary Britain, and forms the key ethnographic research focus of this study. Prior studies have already critiqued the dominant state framework of viewing racist violence as random, de-racialized and nonpolitical events – as individual incidents, neighborhood disputes, inter-

personal conflict, and robberies gone wrong. These studies have alternately identified the social dehumanizing functions of racist violence, the possessive local white territorialism that they materially support and their relationship with macro-level socio-economic crises and changing racial exclusion ideologies of the liberal democratic nation.

What I add to these studies is the argument that the racial subordination and ruling relations inherent in the social processes of racist violence and, by formal extension, state violence are not only derivative of broader ideological forces or local social relations but are in fact constitutive of white racial state formation in Britain's postcolonial era. I argue that the processes of racist violence and state violence are productive of the domination and hierarchy that is secured for whites, through unevenly empowered and routinized contestations within the re-configurations of white racial state formation and an emergent neoliberal-multicultural national security state. It is within this framework of analysis that the politics of black mobilization by Britons of color and their allies, in the context of contemporary multiculturalism's contradictions, and against the many-sided form of racial subordination is made legible -- not as an anachronism -- but as socially meaningful, interlocked and politically urgent.

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## Introduction

The living human presence of people of African, South Asian and Caribbean descent in Britain, resulting from the complex sinews of the history of British and Western colonial conquest, slavery, empire-building, globalization and migration, confronts daily the politics of racial domination in Britain. The interlocked social struggles waged by overlapping and diverse ‘Britons of color’<sup>1</sup> for racial and social equality and everyday survival is the flip side of the contradictions engendered by the ruling relations of racial differentiation and racism in Britain. This continuous institutionalization of race in British daily life and political culture, and the resulting hierarchical effects within a wide array of political, social, cultural and economic organization, has been met in turn by dynamic and multiple histories of self-organized political resistance.

This dissertation ethnographically examines the cultural and political processes that construct solidarity-based anti-racist resistance as it emerges from the disparate experiences of Britons of color who are socially reproduced as racially different and subordinate to white British peoples in terms of immigration, citizenship and civil and human rights. Racism is continuously changing forms but, in the British experience, it has also steadfastly reconstituted its social force through the phenomenon of violent everyday social encounters – racist violence (Bowling 1996). In addition, racialized power relations and domination also reconstitute themselves through formal institutional channels in Britain, that is, through the processes of institutional racism. Institutional racism manifests itself as direct state violence applied during the practices of

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<sup>1</sup> This is a relatively recent term that was coined by the prominent journalist, Yasmin Alibhai Brown (2005), and I use it in a descriptive sense to encompass all racial and ethnic minority communities and not in terms of referring to standard usage in Britain. But the term is also strategically deployed against the more the bureaucratic and depoliticized formulation of ‘Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities, which is standard official practice.



criminal and ‘War-on-Terror’ policing and through persistent patterns of racial discrimination, statutory negligence and disparate treatment in the delivery of social services and the state’s equal protection of persons (MacPherson 1999).

Ironically this social struggle against the everyday realities of racial domination in Britain is largely rendered invisible by a more persistent representation of Britons of color themselves as embodiments of and embedded social problems. This dominant representation has now also been overlaid with a new emphasis on Britons of color, especially British Muslims, as national security and civilizational threats. The collected tropes of Britons of color, produced by colonial and postcolonial racism: as colonized-civilizational others, perpetual foreigners, criminal elements, illiberal cultural misfits, agents of multicultural miscegenation, welfare state interlopers, self-segregating religious separatists and terroristic enemies at large comprise an arsenal of interlocking stereotypes that for the past half-century has continued to frame Britons of color and their racial-cultural-religious behavior as the *sine qua non* problem of postcolonial or post-Empire British social cohesion.<sup>2</sup>

This master trope, reworking itself in shifting forms and through different historical contexts, recursively conceptualizes the physical and cultural presence of Britons of color as containing the ineradicable trace of pathological presence (Brah 1988, 1996). This state of suspended normality and equality is also engendered, I argue, to the cognitive erasure of racial domination that is achieved through interlinked everyday social processes and institutional processes of British liberal democratic state formation. The behavior of formal British public

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<sup>2</sup> The fact that British public discourse since the 1950s has established a guiding conceptualization of racism as a problem of interloping black presence rather than the theories and practices of white racism was first pointed out by Peter Fryer in his landmark study, *Staying power: The history of Black people in Britain* (London, 1984:381). See also the classic Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies work, *The Empire strikes back: Race and racism in 1970s Britain* (London: 1982). For a more recent micro-social study of the salience of the representation of people of color as interlopers in British social life see Nirmal Puwar’s study, *Space invaders: Race, gender and bodies out of place* (New York, 2004).

institutions and the shaping of the political center in relation to the issues of racism confronted by Britons of color is a key site for racial subordination. These processes are not simply reflective of other non-racial social factors and are not in of themselves linear processes. On the contrary they are contested and uneven processes incorporating differently situated white social actors, but these contestations over the working out of racial domination has historically produced a systemic tendency towards multi-class white ‘interest convergence’<sup>3</sup> in British liberal democracy. I argue that the denial of white racism in this structuring and political sense is critical for the social reproduction of racial domination in Britain. White racism therefore is not only conceptualized via random individual instances of racist violence and pathological hate-based social behaviors exhibited by sections of the white working-classes or the organized far right, but as dominant systemic tendencies that mediate the response to such strategic pathologies and racist social action in accordance with the structural reproduction of racial domination. It is my contention that the hegemonic political discourse of the denial of white racism, operating principally through color-blind liberal ideologies, multicultural backlash narratives and the emergence of a national security welfare state, works to reproduce social and racial injustice in contemporary Britain.

The resulting racial hierarchy naturalizes white belonging and renders permanent the illegitimacy of Britons of color’s fully human presence. This dynamic then re-surfaces in the incidental or spectacular moments of racist social encounters and in the endemic problems of discriminatory state practices. Racist violence and state violence has been a routine feature of postcolonial British social life, especially in urban inner-cities, where state violence emerges through the practices of racial profiling, the lack of civil rights protection, counter-terror

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<sup>3</sup> The concept of white interest convergence is drawn from the specific work of the U.S. critical race theorist, Derrick Bell (1995, 2004). My application of his ideas to Britain will be discussed more fully in Chapter 2.

policing, and discriminatory juridical and local municipal treatment. The disparate impact of race and racism ultimately creates a working social contradiction that underpins the racially sensitive application of British citizenship and reproduces a disempowered form of participation in the British state.

In my study I discovered how Britons of color's everyday lived experiences of race and racism contradict the foundational liberal democratic claims of an ostensibly color-blind British political culture and the now declining policies and practices of multicultural tolerance that characterized policy-making and social reforms in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. This persistent racial contradiction in Britain's post-colonial nation-building has given rise to a variety of strategic, tactical and discursive processes that facilitate and encourage racist violence, institutional deaths in custody, widespread police abuse and the derogation of civil liberties. Just as important, these discursive strategies aim to organize, control and contain the cognitive recognition of racism in the public sphere and they also regulate the possible range of respectable responses that can be legitimately applied in resistance or dissent. These mutually enabling social processes work powerfully to structure domination and subordination for Britons of color in their struggles for 'ontological security'<sup>4</sup>, permanent legitimacy and full participation in British social life.

Grassroots struggles against the ongoing and phenomena of routine racist violence and state violence, conceptualized as politically interlinked and as critical sites that contribute to the ruling relations and subordination experienced by Britons of color in contemporary Britain, is the key ethnographic research focus of this study. Beginning in the 20<sup>th</sup> century there were a number of largely left-wing social movement tendencies which developed interracial associational forms among a myriad of 'colored' people who settled in Britain by virtue of their rights and claims as

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<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of the Weberian notion of ontological security as it relates to racial discrimination and violence, See Max Farrar, *The struggle for 'community' in a British multi-ethnic inner-city area* (Lewiston, New York, 2002)

imperial subjects. These histories of joint ‘communities of resistance’<sup>5</sup> or solidarity-based associational formations by activists coming out of the New Commonwealth and Pakistan migrations, have powerfully shaped the theoretical debates and praxis of British anti-racism.

From the 1960s onwards the joint communities of resistance took on a more explicit and militant identity as a *black* anti-racist formation. The social meaning of this historically specific black identity and joint political community in Britain is not obtainable through primordial, naturalized and hermetically sealed anthropological explanations. Rather, these formations arose from the forgotten imperial connections and mutually inflected histories that connected the British Empire and its metropole. These connections and the struggle to claim rights and exercise legitimacy of belonging within Britain is essentially erased from the ongoing re-constructions of white-centered and post-colonial British identity and the corresponding immigration politics that for the last five decades has aimed to narrow and close the national border to non-European countries and its peoples, a long process that Kathleen Paul has termed as ‘whitewashing Britain’.<sup>6</sup>

Against this dominant structuring force of racial nation-building is the movement of black anti-racism that mobilizes transnational, and cross-cultural political formations that emerge through identifications and linkages between local, national and diasporic circulations of social struggle and across different racial groups. This internationalist oriented black anti-racist tendency and the legacy of joint struggle among different racial communities played a powerful historical role against British racial domination and its everyday operations. Black anti-racism’s legacy as a usable history for contemporary anti-racist struggles and its future as an associational form, however, have been heavily criticized and challenged in the past twenty years. Although a

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<sup>5</sup> This is an emic term conceptualized by A. Sivanandan (1990), an important theoretician of these associational forms and of black political identities in Britain.

<sup>6</sup> See Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and citizenship in the postwar era* (New York, 1997).

significant number of organizations still work on the concept of a black political identity, the absolute number of specific organizations and social movement tendencies advocating this form of black politics has declined and other forms of community-based politics have emerged and continue to emerge, often in competition and sometimes in cooperation with this tendency.

For social movement organizations the concept of a historical, propositional and re-imagined black community of resistance as a symbolic referent and as a strategy of grassroots organizing continues to encompass the interlocking struggles of South Asian, African and African-Caribbean and other ethnic minority communities against the daily reconfigurations of white racism. The definition of black here has been a contested political definition but at a minimum it concerns 1) structural power relations between white and nonwhite communities in Britain; 2) social movement mobilizing and solidarity building for Britons of color; and 3) an internationalist politics arising out of a collective memory of anti-colonialism, third world consciousness and contemporary anti-imperialism constructed by diasporic communities with concrete kinship and material political ties to the global south.

The examination of aspects of this form of racial minority politics has been referred to under many different terms and once sparked heavy debates in British sociological and cultural studies literature under the headings of ‘black politics’, ‘political blackness,’ ‘multiracial blackness,’ ‘black British feminism,’ ‘black consciousness,’ ‘black power,’ ‘black perspectivism,’ ‘black people,’ ‘black struggles for socialism’ and ‘black community activism’<sup>7</sup>. However, the question of black in academic debates has receded in contemporary scholarship as

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<sup>7</sup> See the following corpus of work: (Amos and Parmar 2005; Bhattacharyya 1998; Center for Contemporary Studies 1982; Duffield 1988; Donnell 2002; Farrar 2002; Fryer 1984; Gundara and Duffield 1992; Gilroy 1993; Gupta 2003; Hall 1991,1994, 1998, 2000; Holdaway 2004; Jeffers 1991, 1993; Keith 2005; Lentin 2004; Mercer 1994; Mirza 1997; Modood 1994, 2005; Parmar 1998; Ramamurthy 2006; Ramdin 1987; Reynolds 2002; Sallah 2007; Samantrai 2002; Housee and Sharma 1999; Siddiqui 2000; Sivanandan 1982, 1990, 2008; Tabili 1994; Shukra 1998; Shukra et al. 2004; Solomos and Back 1995; Sudbury 1998, 2001).

a central topic of inquiry and it is often understood to be a settled debate where the category of black as a racial identity in Britain has been dismissed through the arguments of postmodern anti-essentialist critiques of identity politics and through the rise of ethnic and religious mobilization. The decline in the debate of black, however, has been increasingly replaced by a new *doxa* (made up of no less essentialized categorizations) of ethnic, island, national, cultural and religious identities as the legitimate operational terms in British racial scholarship.

This shift in categorization and conceptualization is not without its costs. There has concomitantly been a progressive decline in carrying out in-depth studies on community-based anti-racist organizations and the question of the self-determining ‘political protagonism’ (Harnecker 2007; Lebowitz 2003), of Britons of color against everyday racist violence and state-based institutional racism. Hence, the selective choice in this study for studying the question of black anti-racist formations in Britain, not through *a priori* ideological and theoretical construction or deconstruction, but through everyday face-to-face and empirical fieldwork research into concrete political activity. Through this ethnographic study that details and describes the day-to-day work of the Newham Monitoring Project (NMP), an organization set-up to fight racist and state violence by Britons of color themselves, I contend that the legacy and future of black anti-racism still matters.

## **BLACK COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AND LOCAL RACIAL CONDITIONS**

This dissertation re-centers the politics of grassroots black mobilization that arises within the context of the daily activist work done by a handful of small and inner-city urban anti-racist organizations that are most visible and powerfully present in the politics of the city of London.

Such groups also exist in other urban settings in Britain, but the concentration of racial minority populations in the cosmopolitan context of London (almost a third of the country's total racial minority population) have made groups like the Newham Monitoring Project able to persist in developing an interracial black politics.

NMP is a community-based black organization, with a historical social base in East London. It was set-up as a community-based organization following the organizing efforts of youth-based mobilizations and campaigns against racist murders and intense waves of racist violence in 1970s and 80s. This period also saw the advent of a number of important race rebellions in inner-cities throughout Britain in 1981 and 1985 and it is was in this climate of race and left-wing social revolts and the historical environment of municipal-based socialism, feminism and anti-racism within London politics which first enabled its funding support (Rowe 2004: 125). NMP was a product of a prior milieu in British anti-racism that worked towards the goals of community self-defense against racist violence and greater community control and civilian monitoring of repressive state institutions -- especially the police. Always grounded within the conditions of concrete local contexts in fighting against racist violence and state violence, black community-based groups like NMP have utilized their local experiences to advance broader social reform and social change at the municipal and national levels.

The encompassing politics of black has shifted over time to mean the inclusion of different racialized communities at different historical periods. NMP activists remember that early in the group's history joint mobilization and solidarity was primarily associated with the coming together of South Asian (first Indian and Pakistani, then Bangladeshi) and African-Caribbean communities following the post-war mass migrations from the New Commonwealth. (This is as distinct from the 'Old Commonwealth' that gave privileged rights to white settler

communities in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South Africa and so on.) But the history of recent migration of refugees and asylum seekers and the growing diversity following Britain's incorporation into the European Union has forced the meaning of black to expand beyond these New Commonwealth-based definitions.

The definition of black also appears to be modular in terms of the changing boundaries of its imagined community and correlates closely with a local context, not only in terms of particular localities such as inner-city boroughs, but also in terms of professional associations, trade unions, women's groups and student politics. For example, black mobilization is the primary form of collective organizing for racial minority university students in Britain. The local context of the national university student politics and the historical struggles by minority students within the National Union of Students is a key site for the formation of black anti-racist politics. According to Kanja Sesay (NUS 2011), the current head of the Black Student Campaign, the organization 'represents the largest constituency of black students in Europe and students of African, Asian, Arab and Caribbean descent, at a local and national level on all issues affecting black students.'

In the long history of black social movement groups in Britain since the 1960s many groups have been dissolved, but a number of groups have been newly created or revived in recent years. Some of these groups include The Society of Black Lawyers, which had originally been formed by two South Asian lawyers, Rudy Narayan and Sighbat Kadri in 1969, and was relaunched by the African-Caribbean barrister Peter Herbert in 2006. It describes itself as the legal arm of the civil rights movement and an 'advocacy group that constitutes the oldest organisation of African, Caribbean and Asian lawyers in the United Kingdom' (Society of Black Lawyers 2011). The National Assembly Against Racism founded in 1994 following the electoral



resurgence of fascist parties, organized itself through a —founding principle that the agenda against racism must be set by those who experience it. It is therefore black community-organisation led, has a majority of black representatives as its executives, and works closely with victims and their families when taking up particular cases’ (NAAR 2011).

There are still other long-standing groups that continue to function, such as the Institute of Race Relations, Operation Black Vote, the 1990 Trust, the Black Workers Conference, Bogle L'Ouverture Press, BLINK, The Monitoring Project (formerly Southall Monitoring Group), the Birmingham Racial Attacks Monitoring Unit (BRAMU) and others, including NMP. In addition, newer groups have been founded in recent years, including the Network of Black Women in Birmingham, the Black People’s Alliance in Manchester, Leicester Civil Rights Movement, National Civil Rights Movement, and the short-lived nation-wide Black Racial Attacks Independent Network (BRAIN).

Most of these groups function autonomously from one another and are not usually linked in a centralized structure, but rather through common references, orientations and shared problematics. They also employ and emphasize a range of strategies and tactics, for example, some organizations are more oriented towards campaigning, while many others are not. However, the work of ‘streetwork’ campaigning, bureaucratic casework, community outreach, and sustaining organizations in order to develop broad-based, intersectional and multi-faceted resistance against racism are common denominators of the most radical and energetic of these groups.



Newham's location within greater London

*Source: [http://www.parkexplorer.org.uk/map\\_london.html](http://www.parkexplorer.org.uk/map_london.html)*

NMP itself has many activists who emerged from black student politics and transitioned to community-based politics. Some of these activists were from Newham but many also came from other parts of Britain and settled in Newham to pursue activist commitments in London and within the context of a strong Britons of color local context as it is found in Newham. Five miles east of central London, the borough of Newham, is one of the thirty-two boroughs that, along with the City of London Corporation, make up the geographical area of London and its top-tiered administrative body, the Greater London Authority. Newham borough is bounded by the River Thames in the south, by the River Lea in the west, the River Roding in the east and Wanstead Flats in the north.

Newham is the most racially diverse municipality in all of Britain with one of the lowest percentages of white British residents. The resident white British population has been in decline

in Newham since the post-World War Two era and coincides with the 1950s and 60s settlement labor migration from the Caribbean and South Asia into London transport and factory work. In the late 1960s and 1970s the arrival of stateless East African South Asians (from Uganda, Kenya and Malawi) complicated the national origin and class structures of Newham's black populations, as did the processes of social mobility movement from inner to outer London and the suburbs. There has been significant white flight to the outer and less crowded suburbs of Essex and Ilford and this movement was driven by the increasing social mobility of sections of the white working-classes, many of whom were working in the imperial dockyards, and who could afford to move out of the borough by accessing different government schemes that aimed to alleviate housing shortages and over-crowding in inner-city London.

The majority of Newham's quarter-million population today is comprised of different South Asian, African-Caribbean and African communities who are both British-born and recent immigrants, asylum-seekers and refugees. It is this complex diversity that is also a historical force which has strongly influenced the tendency for joint community struggles or cross-cultural black anti-racism. The fast-changing context of diversity in East London, while not casually deterministic, is, however, an important catalyst for organizations like NMP. This enables them to continuously adapt themselves to new constituencies and their emergent issues and experiences of white racism so as to remain relevant and in touch with the weakest and most marginal sections of Newham's population.

Starting in the 1980s, refugees, asylum-seekers, unaccompanied young refugees and other displaced people without permanent status were increasingly resettled into the borough through lucrative financial agreements made by the national state with local landlords and

<sup>8</sup>boarding houses or B&B's (Bed and Breakfast establishments). Newham has consistently been the top London borough for the placement of refugees and asylum seekers in the nation, with studies showing a population of between 20,000-25, 000 in 2001<sup>9</sup>. Newham, however, is also the sixth most socio-economically deprived borough in all of England and the third most deprived in London. A majority of neighborhoods within Newham rank in the top 10% in England for income deprivation, in the top 4% for barriers to housing, in the top 10% for worst living environments and its violent crimes against persons are 27% above the London average. A fifth of the adult population in Newham does not have any formal educational qualification and more than a third of all working-age people in Newham are unemployed.

According to estimates by the Office for National Statistics (2006), over 39% of the population is white, of which 32.6% are white British, 1.1% are white Irish, and 5% are from other white backgrounds. Approximately 38% of the population is South Asian, or 'Asian', of which 10.2% are Indian, 7% are Bangladeshi, 13.9% are Pakistani, and 5.1% are from other Asian backgrounds, such as refugee Sri Lankan Tamils who are largely concentrated in East Ham North. Approximately 20% of the population is categorized census-wise as Black/African descent, of which 6.5% are Caribbean, 12.4% are African, and 1.1% are from other Black/African backgrounds. In addition, 1.6% of the population is Chinese, and 2.6% are from other ethnic groups.

These census categorizations of racial identities, however, belie the immense differences that inhabit each category and the complex politics that differentiate everyday identifications such as Caribbean island identifications, specific South Asian nationality, intra-national regional origins, ethnic, religious, caste, gender, sexuality, skin color and many other determinations of

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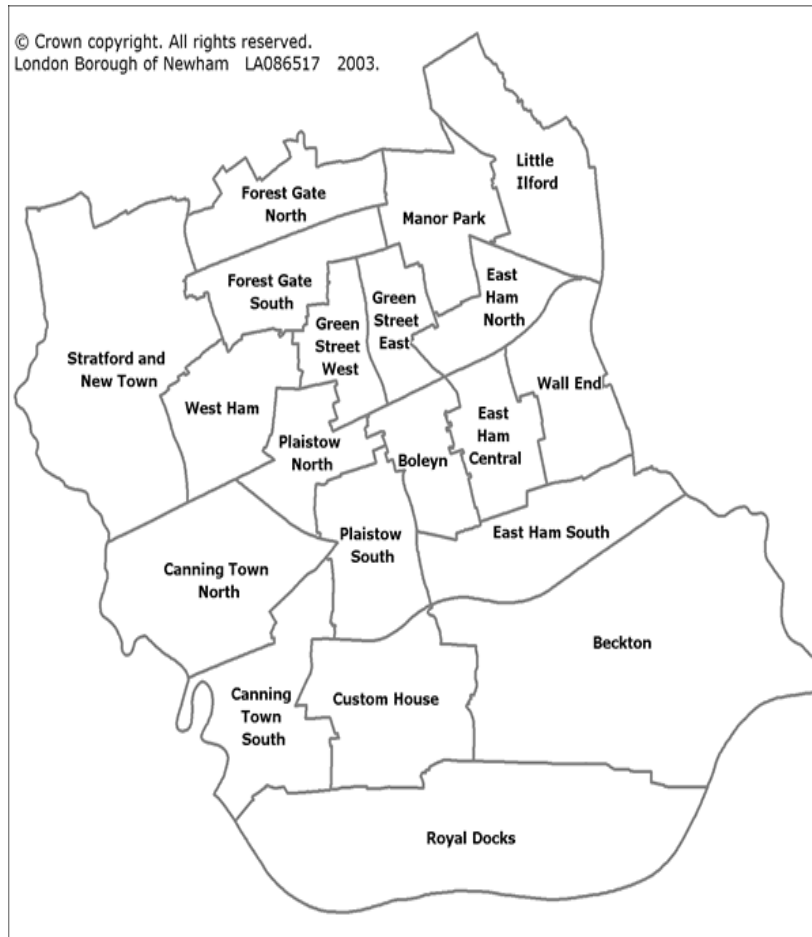
<sup>8</sup> Data compiled from Newham Council, *Strategic Plan 2009* (London, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> See David Griffiths, Nando Sizona and Roger Zetter, *Refugee community organizations and dispersal: Networks, resources and social capital*. (Bristol, 2005: 72).

lived identities among communities of color in Newham. The fairly recent official taxonomy of racial categories enumerated by the census to do not correspond to self-evident representations, but they do serve as powerful organizing forces of social differentiation, policing and avenues for claims-making determined by national and local state bodies.

Civil rights protections in Britain are empowered by a series of legislative acts, principally the Race Relations Acts of 1965, 1968, 1976 and the Race Relations Amendment Act of 2001. These forty years of legislative reforms now provide for *de jure* anti-discrimination protections and specific protections against racist violence. They also direct positive discrimination duties for local authorities. For example, Newham, which is an independent municipality within a federation of London boroughs, elects its own mayor and provides social services such as housing and schools, and is responsible for the enforcement of the racial harassment eviction clause in social housing tenancy contracts. It also has a statutory duty to monitor racial discrimination in education, to promote non-discriminatory police-local community relations and to provide equitable and ethnically targeted social services that fund youth work, elder care, refugee services, and many other forms of local community support projects.

The daily enforcement of such civil rights provisions and statutory duties to promote equitable and good race relations are monitored by groups like NMP. Casework for the organization often involves taking up individual grievances against local institutions and state actors who fail to provide equitable social service, whether they are at sites such as the local social housing department, schools or the borough branch of the Metropolitan Police.



Wards/place names in Newham

Source: <http://apps.newham.gov.uk/democracy/map.html>

Grassroots groups like NMP are found in different socially deprived boroughs in London and around the country, but NMP is one of the longest-standing anti-racist monitoring organizations. It has been engaging questions of racism in inner-city multi-ethnic contexts, focusing on issues such as racial profiling in policing, police brutality, deaths in custody, racist violence in housing projects, racial attacks on the streets, racist bullying in schools and, more recently, the derogation of civil liberties and human rights enabled by counter-terrorism policies and anti-terror police raids. These constellations of issues are the specific manifestations of

racism that make up the staple of NMP's daily casework load, direct actions and long-term campaigning and social change objectives. In carrying out its anti-racist work for over thirty years, NMP has consistently deployed the joint community or black mobilization strategy against racist violence and state violence, and to secure an ontological security that derives from 'the right to a life free from harassment and safe from attack'(NMP 2000).



*NMP and anti-racist activists doing campaigning work for the Stephen Lawrence Family Campaign in 1998.*

*Source: NMP Archives*

Black anti-racism as practiced by groups like NMP is a method and theory of cross-cultural community and movement-building for progressive social change. Empowering an imagined black community of resistance needs to be understood not simply as a separatist or exclusive political project (as it is often characterized and attacked from the outside) but

connected at an integral level with the historical trajectory of radical British constitutionalism and people-centered reform movements that have widened and deepened participatory democracy. Black anti-racism is tacitly understood -- at least by its practitioners -- as having the goal of making public institutions and the powerful accountable and answerable to the commoner, in this case, all racialized commoners. As such, it is a political project that enfranchises through the practical mobilization and development of self-conscious political subjects who work against racial discrimination and domination in British life.

NMP expresses the articulation of black anti-racism as an ontological movement by racial and ethnic minorities for social equality in following manner:

Put simply, community resistance means the right of black communities to defend themselves from racist violence by any means at their disposal. NMP believes that the black community in Newham, by which we mean Asians, African-Caribbeans and other 'people of color' in a political sense face a common enemy whose crude tactics of violence and intimidation recognize no differences of culture, religion and national background. Crucially therefore, we believe that a racist attack on an individual is a racist attack on our communities as a whole, as it seeks to increase the fear of violence for all black people in Newham. NMP believes that this collective experience of racism requires a collective response, and that whilst celebrating our differences we need to be united in our opposition to racial harassment. For that reason we reject the obsession with ethnicity and the way it is used to divide us, an obsession borne of the emerging black middle class. The fight for culture can be a fight against racism, but it is not automatically so, and does not speak to the condition of the poor, working-class black communities for whom fighting against racism often means fighting for their lives. (NMP n.d: 2-3)

The work that black anti-racism does, given the concrete and particular conditions of social oppression, is therefore seen as a part of the effort to realize egalitarian social relations. The formation of joint political communities and the consciousness of a black identity of resistance helps to mobilize critical voices for demanding concrete democratic policies and practices that have positive egalitarian impacts on the lived experiences of oppressed racial minorities. In sum, 'black' is an untidy, contested and unfinished political term in Britain and carries with it



overlapping social meanings about autonomous political organizing for racial minority communities who face historically specific patterns and forms of British racial oppression. As such, it is also practically useful in terms of hailing identifications that produces the political will to resist racism and it references a complex and powerful history made by Britons of color themselves.

### **MULTICULTURAL POLITICS AND THE ONGOING DEBATE ON BLACK**

At this particular historical moment in the early 21st century, joint community or cross-cultural black anti-racist strategies do not easily find themselves anchored within the respectable frameworks of British political culture and they are not hegemonic even within the ambit of ethnic minority political behavior. Arguably, one of the reasons black community organizations such as NMP are marginal to more dominant forms of ethnic or religious-based identity politics is its emphasis on cross-cutting solidarity in mobilizing anti-racist direct actions and campaigns. But there is another feature of black anti-racist groups that also does not make it mainstream and this is the issue of political militancy. NMP's militant mode of engaging both formal institutional channels and extra-institutional modes of protest politics with the local municipal and national state that has often been cited as the main reason for why it is an unsuitable partner within multicultural frameworks and the emerging paradigm of agreeable community partnerships in municipal policing and policy-making. This tension resulted finally in the complete withdrawal of funding from the local Newham Council in 1997 (Hamid 1997).

For groups like NMP, the dual strategy of engaging both institutional and extra-institutional political processes keeps open a range of practical resistance options and an


independence of action from bureaucratic constraints, and it also mitigates elite formation within the black community. In addition, it aims to preserve a social change agenda, or a campaigning politics, that is beyond the day-to-day resolutions of individual cases and grievances. Protest politics and mass mobilizations potentially allow NMP to surpass the limits imposed by the state to control, regulate and organize anti-racist and political dissent.

**NEWHAM MONITORING PROJECT**

*Policing the Police*

**POLICE BRUTALITY  
-WE FIGHT BACK!**

stop & search  
false imprisonment  
**POLICING  
IN  
NEWHAM**  
malicious arrest  
police assault



**Public Meeting**

*Time*  
7:30pm

*Venue*  
Shalom Centre, 395 High St North  
London E12 (East Ham tube)

*Date*  
**Thursday 29th June**

Telephone NMP 0181 - 555 - 8151 (24 hrs)

*NMP's militant strategies – poster for public meeting on police abuse*

*Source:* NMP archives

Black anti-racism's political strategy of engaging and also challenging the British state rather than seeking accommodation or tokenistic incorporation is one of the key political behaviors that will be ethnographically examined by this dissertation. In theory, these approaches seek to transform the British state and its lack of substantial accountability towards South Asian, African, African-Caribbean, and other racialized communities. Rahila Gupta has argued that 'the

experiences of racism of different sections of what encompassed black are so different' but that black 'allows for united action against the state' (2003: 15). Engaging the state is a terrain of struggle that is riddled with contradictions, but it is also not easy to bypass the power or the importance of the everyday provisions of the state for impoverished black people's survival and well-being. Such engagements carry the danger of further reproducing marginalization and oppression, but at the same time, practical needs for remedies and immediate measures against police violence or racial attacks are not abstract issues of racial domination.

The emphasis on political and institutional independence taken by grassroots black anti-racist organizations has been weakened by several other historical developments. One major factor has been the state's sponsorship of communal and religious elites as cultural brokers. This development in black politics became prominent following the formation of the unofficial Labor Party Black Section and the National Black Caucus in 1986 (Jeffers 1991; Jeffers 1993; Shukra et al. 2004), but has its roots in colonial forms of multicultural governance. Viable electoral politics has exerted a pressure for more accommodationist forms of black politics which is tied mainly to the fortunes of the Labor Party and individual black politicians associated with the Labor Party at the city or national levels. The rise of official multiculturalism also encouraged claims-making activity by ethnic groups who mobilize specific ethnic or national identities to compete for public funding for social programs and initiatives. These public policy changes give prominence to ethnic, religious, or Caribbean island national identities and open career doors for multiple community leaders to serve as the 'symbolic representatives' (Marable 1993) or cultural brokers between the state and their respective communities of origin and identification. Different black groups and leaders are situated in different degrees of proximity to state and electoral processes, and this close dependency has been found to result in various degrees and pressures of

‘ambivalent and compromising’ political positioning with respect to long-term and fully egalitarian anti-racist and social justice objectives (Shukra et al. 2004).

The rise of mediating cultural brokering in electoral politics and municipal multicultural policies also dovetailed with the emergence in the late 1980s of a British Asian discourse, especially in the field of expressive culture. The first intellectual break paradigm with black announced by some Asian cultural intellectuals was made in 1986 by the educational activist Sandip Hazareesingh who argued against the position of black as a political signifier of unity and joint experience of white structural racism against other leading Asian intellectuals and activists in Britain, principally A. Sivanandan, who was a pioneering theorist and advocate of black politics (1982, 1990). Hazareesingh argued from a cultural identity perspective, that the ‘tendency to define South Asian children as ‘black’ on the model of ‘political’ anti-racism...serves to increase, not lessen the confusion in the child’s self-perception [and] denies the reality of the child’s subjective, perceptual world, and silences the meanings he/she shares with parents and family’ (1986: 5). Hazareesingh’s attempt, however, to anchor diverse South Asian national, regional, ethnic, linguistic, religious and caste identities through another essentialized category, that of a pan-ethnic ‘Indian’ cultural identity (as it has been done in Malaysia, Singapore, South Africa and the Caribbean) based the premise of an *ur* cultural tradition emanating from the Indian sub-continent and incorporating all South Asians ultimately also failed.

What did rise, however, was a discourse of a pan-ethnic ‘British Asian’ identity as a form of new diasporic culture-making, with a strong focus on experiences of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities, and less so marginal communities such as Sri Lankan Tamils or the Chinese. This discourse became institutionalized in Britain and has resulted in the reworking

of census categories and the led to the rise of new waves of popular music, film and other cultural production that sometimes agreed with the notion of multiracial black as a form of cooperative mobilization in the arts (Sirmans and Beauchamp-Byrd 1998), and at other times disagreed (Dhillon-Kashyap 1988). The work of the sociologist Tariq Modood (1994, 2005) specifically has been critical also to arguing against the concept of political blackness for South Asians, which he critiques as a homogenizing and silencing paradigm for Asian difference and needs for culture-specific recognition in multicultural policy-making and service delivery.

Another reason for the declining hegemony of the concept of a multiracial black community was its removal as a public policy and service delivery framework in 1989 when the Commission on Racial Equality ceased its usage. Arguably this development was driven by the impact of the Salman Rushdie affair which highlighted the what Stuart Hall (2000) termed was the revelation of the 'complex internal cultural segmentation' of Britain's once-black racial minority communities and threw up the issue of Islamist fundamentalism in the eyes of the state, the media and broad public discourse for the first time. This change also removed a structural reason for organizing jointly in making representational and material claims upon the state. Ethnic targeting became the new framework for the social welfare state, and this turn has had an influential impact in generating fragmentation and the demobilization of black as a political strategy for different racial minority communities seeking redress of social inequalities.

In the last decade, however, the framework of multiculturalism which rose to take the place of the black-white paradigm in race relations policy-making has itself been under attack due to new panics about a series of urban uprisings and civil disorder that were mounted by severely disadvantaged South Asian communities in the northern towns of Oldham, Bradford and Burnley. What were called the 'worst race riots in fifteen years' began in Oldham in 2001,

where hundreds of youths clashed with a heavily militarized police, startled the state, and led to the Home Office's Cattle report on community cohesion (Cantle 2008).

This report and its recommendations have become institutionalized as the new race relations framework for the entire nation. It blamed the riots on the self-segregation and 'parallel lives' attitudes of racial minority communities and on the perceived anti-white biases of multiculturalism, which it identified as causing a negative white backlash. The emphasis of race relations under this most recent framework has shifted the focus of multiculturalism from a politics of recognition and a celebratory tolerance of cultural difference to a politics of ensuring the integration or assimilation of racial minority communities into putative British cultural norms such as speaking English, unveiled feminine appearance (debates around the Muslim *hijab*), cross-cultural social mixing and nationalist political loyalties.

The strategy has been conceptualized by David McGhee (2005) as a shift by the state from a multicultural politics of the recognition of difference towards a policy of 'cosmopolitanization', where non-liberal normative white and nonwhite communities and social behavior are theoretically rendered equivalent, and in need of pedagogical instruction and discipline by the state. The aim of cosmopolitan discipline is to regulate these non-normative communities into adopting convivial dialogue, within an uncompromising framework of the nation-state and liberal democracy. As McGhee (2005: 174) argues, this strategy of governance by the state now views 'the defensive affirmation of community, culture, tradition and identity' as a 'bad habit to be broken in order to encourage dialogue, facilitate participation and thus achieve the dream of a cosmopolitanized society of active citizens'.

Within this new emergent cosmopolitan framework of governance black anti-racism is likely to be conceptualized as an overly antagonistic and essentializing tendency – a bad habit of

defensive minority politics. This cosmopolitanization paradigm, however, is enabled to cast such judgments because it posits the state as a racially-neutral entity which stands above the social processes of racialized differentiation and domination. As such it authorizes for itself the role of schooling, regulating and policing its badly behaving marginal citizens. The cosmopolitan state strategy further neglects to provide an analysis of the processes of multi-class white interest convergence that I will argue is central its own historical and contemporary formation.

As McGhee notes the actual implementation of the cosmopolitanization strategy has brought a harsher focus and discipline on Britons of color rather than white and middle-class communities, and this is not simply an oversight. The reasons are structural and they mimic historical patterns and an established fallacy of conceptualizing racial minority communities and their cultural behavior as ontological problems for postcolonial statecraft. My ethnographic research will further show how the strategies of cosmopolitanization and the community cohesion and multiculturalism it hopes to perfect be themselves power-laden social situations, which enable racial domination to re-cursively manifest itself.

What have produced these new shifts in state discourse are the 2001 urban unrests in the Northern Towns and the advent of the 'War-on-Terror'. The 'moral panic' about self-segregating racial minority communities (Cohen 2002) following the unrests in the summer of 2001 was virtually coincident with the development of a national security panic surrounding Islamist terrorism following the September 11, 2001 event in the U.S. and Britain's hurried entry as a principal ally of the U.S. in the new geopolitical scenario. Following the July 7, 2005 bombings in London the construction of the national security panic only became more entrenched within the public discourse as a domestic issue concerning terroristic enemies within the body politic. These occurrences led to the development of more repressive forms of multicultural governance

by the state, including the passage of a slew of anti-terrorism laws that have derogated the rights of terror suspects, most of whom are from Muslim communities. They have also re-legalized racial profiling and have institutionalized frequent and broad-based anti-terror raids as a way to enhance the national security apparatus.

The focus on solidarity-based mobilization that characterized the core principles of black social movements in Britain in the past has therefore become more complicated in the contemporary period as British Muslim communities have been singled out and isolated as bad multicultural subjects in dire need of the discipline of cosmopolitanization and national security policing. Political developments in South Asia in the 1990s which saw the rise of anti-Muslim discourse driven by Hindutva fundamentalism also impacted diasporic communities in Britain (Bhatt 1997, Kundu 1994). Anti-Muslim discourse within South Asian communities has further played a role in creating social distance and political dis-identification with British Muslims. The category of 'British Asian' or the putative assumption of an Asian community has been recently questioned by a number non-Muslim Asian community leaders and groups since the advent of the 'War-on-Terror' (Thomas 2001). These community leaders now argue that the term Asian is no less objectionable than black, due to its very associational inclusiveness and proximity to targeted Muslims.

It is not clear what the future of the term black as a multiracial signifier is in Britain. But the genealogy of the term is most salient and held dear in the field of grassroots anti-racist political activism and social movement mobilization against racist violence and state violence, and this particularly located standpoint contributes its own rejoinder to the debate. Rather than aiming to settle this debate with this study I will instead point to the need for rigorous reflexivity and a politics of historical recovery.



In recent years senior black British anti-racist activists such as Sivanandan and the leading African-Caribbean and LGBT activist Linda Bellos have reflected on the ongoing debate by foregrounding a historical genealogy and usable past that is important to reference and elaborate when deploying the term black in racial scholarship on Britain. These activists locate in the debate over black identity in Britain, a broader question of the construction of ‘collective memory’<sup>10</sup> for Britons of color and for anti-racism. As Sivanandan explained in an interview:

Now, during that period where that racism was undifferentiated as between Afro-Caribbeans and Asians there was a hell of a lot of self-reliance and self-help. And that self-help went across Asian and Afro-Caribbean communities towards each other. And there were instances where an Afro-Caribbean may have been on strike and the Asian landlord might have said 'right, you carry on strike' or the Asian grocer would have said 'we will provide you with food. Don't worry about it. We will give it to you on tick till the strike is over'. So there was a lot of unsung co-operation that went on. And then of course there were all the parties. The Black Unity and Freedom Party, The Panthers, Grassroots, Avtar Johal and Jagmohan Joshi and the Indian Workers Association, all these people who started the Pakistani Welfare Association and tremendous activists like my great friend Vishnu Sharma in Southall. There was a whole mass of struggles that went on.

And though we defined ourselves culturally, we went to the Sikh temple, we went to the Hindu temple we went to church (we had no problems about identity, we knew who we were) we defined our identities in a cultural sense if you like, in the religious sense, in the way we ate and drank. But in terms of politics, we defined ourselves as blacks. In other words, when there was big march in Birmingham of the Universal Colored People's Association, for example, all these peoples came out on the street and marched. We marched against racism. So against racism we were black, right. For ourselves we were Afro-Caribbeans or Asians or Sikhs or Gujaratis or St.Lucians or Trinidadians...Black is a political color like red is a political color. Young black people still call themselves black, Afro-Caribbeans and Asians still call themselves black. It's the intellectuals who have reneged on the term. (Sivanandan 2000)

For Sivanandan, reflecting on the social memory of the black formation in Britain references a largely hidden and unrecorded history of cooperative social relations and associational forms between African-Caribbean and South Asian communities in the period of their mass settlement as imperial citizens in Britain. In his narrative, this history produced black as a political category

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<sup>10</sup> See Maurice Halbwachs, *On collective memory* (Chicago, 1992).

distinct but not disparate from a cultural identity for Britons of color. Cultural identity is not subsumed but held in a private civil society sphere, while in the public sphere the emphasis was on organizing social action against white racism with cultural-religious-ethnic others.<sup>11</sup>

I analyze Bellos contribution on the ongoing crisis of identity terminology for Britons of color as positing a tension between two needs within racial minority politics in Britain: 1) the recursive need to construct a temporally shifting authenticity in racialized group representation; and 2) the problematic of making and articulating political connections among all Britons of color who suffer from structures and effects of white racism:

Black remains a political term that we should be encouraging, if it means being united by a common experience of racism and a commitment to fighting that racism. It has a proud heritage; one we should wear with honor and pride... When, in 1987, I had the opportunity to introduce Black History Month into the UK, following the advice of Ansell Wong, I did so to encourage an awareness and celebration of the African and Asian contribution to British history. Black was inclusive then, and it still is as a political term. If there are people who feel that the struggle against discrimination is over, good for them; and if others insist that they have moved beyond the politics of solidarity, I cannot stop the tide. But I say this; in that case, please call me African.

Another possibility is that we could be hyphenated; African-English or African-Scottish, as our sisters and brothers are in the USA. Yet the UK is very diverse, with people from all over the world, not just parts of the old British Empire. How many categories will we need to include everyone? And yet our heritage is important. The question is how do we recognize and celebrate it without making it divisive? (Bellos 2006)

These debates concerning the problems of black political construction in Britain indicate that black is a term that is deployed through a multi-faceted politics of self-reflexivity rather than through assumed essentialisms or through some form of an 'innocent black subject' (Hall 2000).

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<sup>11</sup> I would also argue that it is the erasure or the 'sanctioned ignorance' (Spivak 1990) of this political history, which is achieved by the paucity of rigorous historical studies that is focused on these political formations mentioned by Sivanandan, that is a determining force on how the collective memory of black politics will be further deployed or forgotten.

Self-reflexivity, the construction of collective memory and empirical ethnographic research within contemporary black anti-racist spaces in Britain are the key ways through which this dissertation operationalizes the term black. The ongoing debate on political blackness in Britain I would argue is a deeply meaningful and a historically contingent debate that I would also argue is still open-ended given the critical racial conditions that Britons of color confront on a daily basis and the political tasks that are required to overcome the contradictions of their lived experiences of racism.

### **THEORIZING INTERRACIALISM AND INTERSECTIONAL CONTRADICTIONS**

The question of how to make connections in anti-racist struggles, which was achieved through the theory and practice of black mobilization in Britain, is a therefore a conjunctural problem, rather than a transcendental formulation. The identification of black is very much a historically located social and political process, rather than a pre-given essentialism, the presumption of natural nonwhite alliance and antipathy against whites. The social sciences on the whole, however, have tended to conceptualize inter-ethnic and inter-racial dynamics, especially among Britons of color themselves, in terms of naturalized divisions and conflicts. They have simultaneously indicated less interest in the politics of interracialism or solidarity-building, which Moon-Kie Jung (2006: 3) defines as the ‘forming a political community across extant racial boundaries.’ Furthermore, interracialism is itself common-sensically conceptualized as color-blindness, deracialization, an unveiling of false class consciousness or as centrally involving alliances with whites. As Joy James has put it, ‘Bridging the gap between polarized subaltern ethnic groups seems to be secondary to black and white or colored and white alliances’

(1996: 235). In spite of these challenges, however, Julia Sudbury argues for the importance of blackness in Britain as an oppositional consciousness that emerges through the ‘process of constructing a strategic black unity...[which] enables women (and men) with diverse histories, cultures and experiences to emphasize their commonalities and build a united movement against interlocking systems of oppression’ (2001: 44).

Making connections both in practice and theory means that race is conceived as an overdetermined form of social relations and hence it is impossible to consider the question of race in isolation from more complex articulations of contradictory social oppression which simultaneously incorporate class, culture, religion, gender and sexuality. Overdetermination as a concept helps to keep in focus a thinking-through of social formation as a ‘complexly structured whole’ that has many determinations (Freedman 1984: 147). Overdetermination also ‘understands that different forms of oppression may operate in relative autonomy’ and that ‘the social totality of Capital is decentered and nonidentical’ (Freedman 1984: 143). Hence, the social formation that race operates within has come to be termed racial capitalism, whereby the lines of social antagonism do not only cohere within waged relationships and power dynamics, but also along the unwaged axes and across intersecting lines of social oppression (Clever 2003; James 1974; McLemee 1996; Robinson 2000).

One method by which antireductionist forms of racial analysis has been made is through ‘intersectional’ theorization or through a politics of ‘articulation.’ The articulation and intersections of the analytical category of race with other forms of social differentiation such as gender, social class and sexuality helps to make links between these different categories (Crenshaw et al. 1995; Parmar 1998). Race also becomes determinate in changing material,

social, geographical and historical circumstances, and hence is not exactly the same everywhere and for everyone, even within a small locality such as the borough of Newham.

Culture and religion have, for example, always played a key role in racial discourse. From the historical beginnings of European raciology, the taxonomical and classificatory ordering of human beings did not operate along the lines of simple binaries or only against phenotypical difference. Culture and religious differences have been part and parcel of the codes of racial classification and racism from the earliest foundations of raciology. Cultural racism, in a sense, is not only emergent during the new racism or cultural racism periods that have been identified by Etienne Balibar and others (Balibar 2002; Michaels 1993), but has foundational origins in the civilizing and enslaving discourse of imperial racism itself (Blaut 1993; Stoler 2002).

The racializing experience has been recorded by differently descended and historically shaped national and ethnic communities and contexts: by groups racialized as Malays, Indians and Chinese in Malaysia; by groups racialized as Africans, Coloreds and Indians in South Africa, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago; as African Americans, Asian Americans, South Asian Americans and Latinos in the U.S.; and as African, Asian and African-Caribbean descended black peoples in the United Kingdom. Races as such do not exist in isolation to one another, they are historically made and they exist in concrete hierarchical relations and within the specific politics of colonial histories, nation-states, material conditions and situational local contexts.

But while it is important to recognize the specificity of the racial experience in terms of what has been termed 'differential racisms' or multi-racism (Brah 1996; Cohen and Bains 1988; Pulido 2006) and to de-essentialize the category of race to consider its gendered and sexualized meanings, I argue that it is also necessary to develop analyses that discuss the connections

between disparate experiences of racism and to posit the concept of the totality of overdetermined oppression as an unfolding object of analysis and political practice. A primary location to think through the connections between differential racisms and intersectional racializing experiences is in the examination of concrete organizing tendencies and social movements. The problem of making connections is not only a tactical issue in order, for example, to gather resources for social movement mobilization (Jenkins and Klandermans 1995; Meyer, Whittier, and Robnett 2002). At stake is something broader and deeper that delves right into questions of the consciousness of re-appropriating and substantiating the meaning of race as a political identity and as an antagonistic social force against social injustice (Sudbury 1998, 2001).

There is always necessary political work to be done in terms of how race becomes articulated and signified with respect to structural inequities and structural violence. Hence, race politics is more than an issue of proving the worth of racialized cultures and re-vindicating maligned and marginalized groups as self-sufficient ethno-cultural identities. These moves are not the absolute limit or totality of racial politics. In contrast, João Costa Vargas has conceptualized a particular mode of processual identity politics as ‘black radical becoming,’ a determinate form of blackness is oriented toward ‘the immanent revolutionary potential of becoming...the revolutionary component of Blackness that is capable of generating theories and practices that project a nonhierarchical life world, one that does not depend on tropes of difference associated with vertical scales of power and humanity’ (Vargas 2010: 138).

Working to counter the reproduction of a local, national and globalized racialized, gendered (and other determinate) capitalist social order is a critical horizon of political and theoretical intervention. It raises the theoretical-practical question of, *What is the necessary*

*formulation of solidarity in relation to the complexity of social oppressions?* As such, what is aimed for in this dissertation is a political analysis that builds on critiques against reductionist forms of social equivalence and an imposition of commonality and universality derived from single axis or master narratives of oppression.

The in-depth presentation of personal-historical lives and trajectories through racism, which is pursued in the following chapters, is structured through complex oral histories and personal accounts that are full of differences, not only along the lines of particular group positions but also along the lines of the irreducible personal pain and suffering to which I try to bear witness. At the same time, however, I strive to highlight the resonances that cut across differential experiences of racism and make cross-cutting analytical connections. It is from this conjunctural place articulation that I believe a once and future politics of solidarity-based anti-racism by Britons of color can be effectively mobilized against the forces of demobilization and political fragmentation.

#### **BLACK ANTI-RACISM AND THE CRITIQUE OF ETHNIC AND STATE HETEROPATRIARCHY**

In recent times black politics has also become more conscious of the need to address gender equality and to recognize the autonomous needs of women and sexual minority voices within Britons of color communities, as well as the fact that social oppression is articulated not only through racial, ethnic and national difference, but also along the lines of gender and sexuality. Hence, the challenges of multiple identity politics and the task of fighting against simultaneous vectors of oppression have resulted in an appropriate focus on the contradictions of heteropatriarchal masculinity within black anti-racist politics.

Black women's groups and Black British Feminism, a closely related academic formation, are two critical sites for the production of theory and praxis that address the gendered contradictions of interracial and solidarity-based Black anti-racism in Britain. Southall Black Sisters (SBS) is one of the premier campaigning-based organizations that has been central to the black women's movement in Britain. SBS (2011) states that it was founded in 1979 'to meet the needs of black (Asian and African-Caribbean) women. Our aims are to highlight and challenge violence against women; empower them to gain more control over their lives; live without fear of violence; and assert their human rights to justice, equality and freedom. For more than two decades we have been at the forefront of challenging domestic and gender violence locally and nationally, and campaigning for the provision of support services to enable women and their children to escape violent relationships.'

The SBS collective is an outstanding source of theorizing and practical strategizing around the project to combine feminist campaigning and anti-racist politics within racial minority communities, with a specialized focus on the issue of domestic violence. It has also consistently challenged the black anti-racist movement for its tendency to invisibilize women's specific experiences of racism, the question of communal patriarchy's collaboration with the British state, and the subordination of women's leadership (Siddiqui 2000, Gupta, ed. 2003). These critiques have been developed within the field of anti-domestic violence work, but they nonetheless provide us with important theoretical frameworks by which to conceptualize the contradictions within other locations of anti-racism and to work through them. As Hanna Siddiqui has argued, 'the new British civil rights movement, the anti-racist, as well as the left more generally, demands racial justice, which is often at the expense of black women's rights – silencing those who criticize the community itself' (Siddiqui 2000: 95). The critical participation



and perspectives of black British feminist scholars and activists provide an important imperative for the internal transformation and democratization of the movement that must be ongoing and embraced for all their difficult complexities.

Tracey Reynolds (2002) has argued that a black British feminist standpoint is an autonomous critical tradition that recognizes distinctions between different African, Caribbean and Asian women's histories, but that these various perspectives are brought together in collective struggle within different national, third world and local contexts. She argues against theorizations that are generalized, derived or dismissed by voices emergent from privileged locations of transnational academic production. Hence, she calls for an informed localized theorizing that 'is grounded in the critical analysis of black women's lives and an understanding of black women's everyday experience' in concrete terms as a central component of producing knowledge about racism and agendas for anti-racism (Reynolds 2002: 603).

In this dissertation, I respond to this call by placing a privileged emphasis on women's intersectional experience of gendered racism as they emerge in the context of NMP's casework and campaigns. I do so in order to counter the invisibility of women's oppression within specific discourses that struggle against institutional racism, racial harassment, police abuse and the discriminations wrought by state counterterrorism. I particularly emphasize a critique that is carried out with respect to the question of new political subjectivities among Muslim women in Newham and the need for grassroots groups like NMP to become more rigorously engaged in the development of an intertwined liberation politics which supports black women's anti-patriarchal and anti-racist struggles.

NMP has historically worked around questions of police abuse and black women, as the 'Justice for Gillian' campaign that follows will illustrate. In addition, it has made some tentative

moves towards addressing issues faced specifically by Muslim women through its casework and community outreach workshops. These are critical areas of work that need to become more rigorously conceptualized and explicitly emphasized in NMP's political priorities and I hope that my effort to highlight these present but weak areas of work will further develop the organization's efforts into more visible campaigning and community development commitments.

Within a political atmosphere characterized by Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism in Britain, as well as throughout Europe and the Western world, the simultaneous challenge against external and internal factors of oppression may be seen as a luxury, especially in the heat of state violence such as that carried out by anti-terror raids, control orders and the collective criminalizing of communities. This was an inadvertent gender-silent political position adopted by many of NMP's activists, both men and women, during the fieldwork year of 2006 when overwhelming state violence through counter-terrorism operations impacted Newham's Muslim communities. And yet, black women's groups have continued to argue that the critique against patriarchal tendencies even within besieged Muslim communities must not become subordinated. In fact, it is argued that patriarchal re-authorization and re-dissemination can also manifest themselves through anti-racist resistance practices which are not explicitly gender conscious. In their own everyday practice and within the specific conditions of the gender and race the strategy of combating the rise of religious fundamentalism and traditional patriarchal religious hierarchy that subordinates women's empowerment, justifies violence towards women and aims to limit their social and public roles is something is at the forefront of contemporary black women's activism (Inam 2003: 55).

The construction of anti-racist resistance by black community groups like NMP, for example, within the context of mounting a public anti-racist demonstration and building a

campaign, brings such groups in contact with the traditional male-dominated leadership structures of racial minority communities. These encounters, as black women's groups and Black British Feminists point out, are not politically neutral engagements – they can be sites to reproduce ethnic patriarchy and gender domination. However, I would also argue that these complex political moments, because of their destabilizing effects on everyday routines, can also enable openings for gender-conscious anti-racist social change.

By enhancing a greater participation and incorporation of gender-marginalized and other disempowered voices and bringing to center the unrecognized needs for gendered justice and equality, oppressed communities will themselves be internally transformed into more egalitarian directions. Black women's critiques of the construction of anti-racist resistance practices can transform the internal functioning of racial minority communities even as they work to challenge the discriminations of the racial state. These emancipatory imperatives are, of course, not incommensurate with the ethos of groups like NMP who claim that an attack on one is an attack on all, but there are uneven conceptualizations of anti-racist resistance and organizational practice that require self-critical scrutiny. Black anti-racist groups like NMP have the potential to formulate more gender-solidarity based mobilizations and self-transformative movements towards anti-racist and antisexist freedoms for black women, but it will not occur without a more explicit conceptualization and critique of the linkages between subordinate ethnic and dominant white-centered state patriarchy.

## CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY AND ANTI-RACISM

During fieldwork, I utilized critical ethnography field methods and engaged their participatory, collaborative and political intervention imperatives in examining the social organization of Britons of color's lives in Newham, East London. Achieving a research focus on what I conceptualize as the politically linked phenomena of racist violence and state violence emerged as a framework during the course of carrying out activist anthropology research methods in order to formulate initial research questions through collaborations and mutually formulated projects with the researched community (Hale 2001). In 2003, with the consent of NMP, I carried out daily participant observation in the offices of the group and directly participated in the carrying out of a focus group research project that aimed to investigate the non-casework and non-campaigning related needs of people who were victims of police abuse, racist harassment and attacks. This research was fed into the creation of a short-lived project within the organization that utilized volunteers to provide friendly moral support and to address logistical problems in people's daily routines that had been disrupted by the incidences of racist violence or police abuse. When I started extended fieldwork in late 2005 I initially began my collaboration with NMP by carrying out semi-structured interviews based research with dozens of local ethnic-based social and leisure groups in order to assess the cross-community experiences of racist violence in Newham and to identify informal resistance strategies pursued by local communities. These research encounters were then followed up by outreach training and education workshops, such as the one done with Muslim women wearing the *hijab* that is discussed later in this dissertation.

Greater familiarization and analysis of NMP's work influenced the orienting focus on racist violence and state violence as the two critical issues of racism affecting largely working-class black communities in Newham. These two themes were identified as the most recurrent in the daily casework and campaigning activities of the group as I worked with them in 2003, again in early 2005 and finally for an extended period during all of 2006. This final period was when I

began to develop a more direct participatory role and position as a caseworker and an activist with the organization. My personal fieldwork experience, emerging from this activist oriented positionality and everyday long-term residence in Newham, also routinely and reiteratively encountered racist violence and state violence and it begged the question of *how racist violence and state violence were not disparate phenomena but politically related at a systemic level*.

During the course of fieldwork I became partly or wholly responsible for some twelve cases of individual people or families suffering from racist violence and state violence, especially police abuse, and participated in helping to organize resistance activities surrounding the discriminatory impact of the Forest Gate anti-terror raid that was carried out in June 2006. These fieldwork and activist experiences led me to ask the question of how to make social and political sense of the ubiquitous incidences of white-on-black racist violence and state violence in the area of policing that I was daily witnessing inside the hidden realm of ordinary people's lives in Newham and within the organizing activities of community-based anti-racist activists.

This study has been principally carried out through a combination of overlapping ethnographic methods that all aim to establish collaborative relations and social change interventionist politics between the researcher and the community researched. I have joined the critical debates within ethnographic research that have aspired to go beyond traditional Eurocentric conceptions of ethnography as value-free methodology intent on creating omniscient narratives and dispassionate forms of analysis (Campbell and Gregor 2002; Foley and Valenzuela 2005; Hale 2006; Naples 2003; Mutua and Swadener 2004; Smith 1999). As a single author writer, however, I not only relied on collaborative participant observation methods, but also utilized oral historical research and auto-ethnographic methods.

My hope was to produce an ethnographic account that would weave critical personal narratives and systemic analysis in a work that aimed for the decolonizing of research into the lives of people of color by releasing them from a research and analytic zoo<sup>12</sup>, becoming involved

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<sup>12</sup> See Mutua and Swadener, (2004) for a further discussion of the role critical personal narratives can play in the decolonization of research.

and implicated in their daily lives and political struggles and producing an analysis about racism that is self-reflexive and internally linked to the question of the construction of effective anti-racist consciousness and mobilization.

My own personal-collective memories and experiences as a person from the former British Empire therefore became conceptualized as an archive and a contemporary field-site for examining the ways in which colonial racism and postcolonial racism have structured the trajectories and historical passages of Britons of color today. I came to this research in Britain not as a traditional white male anthropologist travelling to subordinate colonial or postcolonial outposts in order to carry out participant observation among 'native' inhabitants. Instead, my experience was one of struggle as a former 'native' to gain entry into Britain as it was emerging as a partner to the U.S. in the development of the 21<sup>st</sup> century's Western-led 'War-on-Terror' that principally targets the non-Western world. At the very physical points of access, such as at airports, these developments entailed battling constant immigration and increasing counterterrorism profiling as a national from the former New Commonwealth colony of Malaysia and as person of Sri Lankan Tamil descent.

The connection between Malaysia, Sri Lanka and the position of Sri Lankan Tamils in the world today as largely a refugee diaspora is deeply connected to the colonial racial policies of the British Empire. There are constitutive historical ties and, as such, Britain was a place, not by mere chance, where I had family who had migrated through New Commonwealth-based immigration and asylum-seeking routes. Specifically, they had come to Britain either for education and work or as asylum-seekers following the civil war between the Sinhalese-dominated Sri Lankan state and the Tamil Tigers, a war which brutally ended in 2009 with the genocide of thousands upon thousands of Tamil civilians defined immaterially as collateral damage. Beginning in the 1980s, following a major state-sponsored pogrom against minority Tamils, refugees started to arrive in Britain in great numbers and many of them were settled in Newham, where they too were racially interpellated as another 'black bastard' in the eyes of racist whites.

In fact, one of NMP's historical campaigns for justice was the joint community mobilization and demonstrations organized after the killing of Panchadcharam Sahitharan in 1991. Sahitharan was one of the fleeing asylum-seekers who came out of the civil war in Sri Lanka and had resettled from his war-torn home of Jaffna to the neighborhood of Manor Park in Newham in 1990. On December 29, 1991, as he was making his way home from the East Ham tube station, a tube station that I frequently used during my fieldwork stay, Sahitharan was set upon by a gang of racist white youths armed with baseball bats and sticks. He was savagely beaten and left with serious head injuries. This particular gang had not made an isolated attack on Sahitharan, but had carried out a number of attacks that day on black people. In addition, for the previous three decades, the area had been a site of other infamous racist killings, including Ali Akhtar Baig in 1980, making it a conflict-ridden zone for immigrants moving into the area. Sahitharan managed to remain conscious after his beatings and fled to his sister's home where he is reported to have said, 'Look what has happened. I never wanted to leave Sri Lanka. Now look what has happened. I am going to die here' (NMP 1991/1992: 38). Within days of his beating Sahitharan succumbed to irreversible brain injuries and died at the Royal London Hospital in Whitechapel.

The two white men accused and charged with the murder were found and arrested, after a massive mobilization undertaken by NMP for witnesses to come forward. However, the state's response to the crime was perfunctory and the racist dimension of the crime was not taken seriously. The charged men were routinely allowed bail and the lackadaisical interest in pursuing the public interest seriousness of the crime by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), the prosecuting arm of the state, resulted in the dropping of the case for lack of evidence (NMP 1991/1992:48). Two years later in 1993 Stephen Lawrence, an African-Caribbean teenager, was stabbed to death by another gang of white racists in Southeast London. Again, the five men charged in his murder were acquitted following a mediocre discharge of duties by the investigating police and the prosecuting state. The joint black community outrage and six years of campaigning by black and allied anti-racist groups against the state's callous treatment of the

murder and the Lawrence family resulted in the Macpherson Royal Commission of Inquiry that finally concluded in 1999 that British state organizations were ‘institutionally racist’ (Yuval-Davis 1999). But in the 18 years following Lawrence’s murder and the despite the over 10 years of the social reforms initiated by the Inquiry, another 90 people have been killed in known racist circumstances in Britain, an average of 5 people murdered a year.<sup>13</sup> These killings have as their backdrop a broader scenario of racist violence. In 2006-07, there were some 61,000 officially reported complaints of racially motivated crimes, involving verbal abuse, harassment, wounding, criminal damage and assault (Morris 2008).

My intellectual interests, multiple identities and research imagination that go into researching racialization and racism, while rigorously aware of contextual differences, is also driven by the recurring specter of racist violence, ontological insecurity, experiences of racially constructed non-belonging in various national-political contexts. My interests in tracing the interconnected genealogies of Western raciology and its global cultural diffusions arises from this critical personal history and the journey to trace the still dim consciousness of the interlocking histories of race, empire and displacement that is only partly excavated in this dissertation. And in this process I did not encounter myself as different from other Britons of color who were similarly struggling to make social meaning and achieve political resolution about their inherited, collective and inter-generational memories of racism.

During the course of the fieldwork year in 2006, fifteen years after Sahitharan was murdered, I tried to physically trace members of my own extended family who had become refugees in Britain. Initially this was a project that I felt was parallel and separate to my work with NMP and my investigations into British racism and anti-racist resistance. I was successful in getting in touch with a particular branch of my family, who had been displaced by the war in Sri Lanka, and this reconnection resulted in invitations to participate in the family and community life of diasporic Tamils in London. I attended a number of family and community

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<sup>13</sup> See Institute of Race Relations News Team (2011) and also the Institute of Race Relations report, *Racial violence: A buried issue* (London: 2010).



events, usually weddings, births and engagements, and after one of these joyful occasions of celebration and family reunion, members of my family were racially attacked as they exited a community hall, being set upon by a group of drunken white pub-goers intent on ‘Paki-bashing’. Racist violence, which I had been observing through the still distant lens of participant observation, only grew more salient as my fieldwork and residence in London progressed.

I therefore did not and do not find the project of researching racism to be viable as either a value-free or politically neutral enterprise. I agree with Satya Mohanty (1997), who argues that we need to understand racial identities, not simply as hermetically sealed ethnic or alien cultural identities, but as bearing a post-positivistic “epistemic status” that illuminates its own life-world and the external and systemic world which conditions its experiences (Buroway 1991). These identities can be rigorously subject to historical, structural and interpretive analysis, rather than dismissed as unwanted alien traces, essentialisms, parochial identity politics, and irrational antipathies. Such experiences and identities, my own and those with whom I carried out research, although differently located, are part of the repository of knowledge concerning the lived forms of ruling race relations and racialized structural violence in Britain today. The process of trying to resist these lived experiences of racism is an inalienable field-site for the production of knowledge about race and racism, and against whose lives research on racism must be ultimately measured.

## Chapter 1: Groundings in Black Interracialism in Britain

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, all of East London was experiencing a pattern of racist violence that emerged out of the mass immigration of first Jewish and then African, Asian and African-Caribbean people into the dockside areas. In 1911, three police officers were killed, and in the hysteria that followed, A.H. Castle, a city councilor from the Stepney borough moved a motion against the ‘scum of Central Europe’, where he ‘humbly requested that His Majesty’s Government will, without delay, introduce new and more stringent legislation to check the great evils of alien immigration for the better protection of His Majesty’s loyal lieges in this Borough and elsewhere’(East London Advertiser 1911). White British working-classes in the East End were mobilizing a politics of white privilege, via symbolic feudal metaphors, in contradistinction to other subjects of the empire. Riots between discriminated South African black sailors and white sailors broke out in 1919 when the black sailors were displaced by white sailors on returning boats. These sea-faring groups of nonwhite sailors were some of the earliest black settlers in East London. They were drawn from all parts of the British empire and many had started to settle down in London, where they also intermarried with white women. However, this settlement process was met by concerted racist violence on the streets. Here is an account of another incident in 1919:

Last evening...[there] was a series of disturbances as the outcome of resentment displayed by the people living in the street when it became known that a Chinaman named Locksing was moving into a house at No.68. The people allowed the furniture to be taken in yesterday, and then, in the absence of Locksing, assailed the premises. The wife of Locksing, an Englishwoman, and a friend were badly mauled by the infuriated crowd and the few police who were able to collect had to send for strong reinforcements in order to remove them to a place of safety. The mob threw all the furniture out of the house and wrecked the building in which the terrified women had been hiding. In the street the furniture was piled in a heap and set on fire...’ (Daily Telegraph 1919)

The template for racist violence in East London had by this period already acquired the now familiar features of possessive white territorial control and associated self-making strategies over

the exclusive ownership of neighborhoods and social housing (Hesse, et al.1992). But at the same time what is clearly evident is also the cross-class discourses and the contested negotiations of racial domination and white interest convergence that is constructed around the application of anti-black racist violence. A political culture that combines appeals to white elites is linked to direct action strategies of racist violence to structure a pattern of domination and exclusion that has made East London a crucible for institutionalized racial malevolence as a dynamic of multicultural social life and local political culture.

In this chapter I will examine the political lives of Britons of color and the significance of their life histories in constructing anti-racist resistance in the East End of London. Kamal Chunchie of the Colored Men's Institute, founded one of the earliest Afro-Asian black organizations in East London, and Cilius Victor, a contemporary African-Caribbean activist with the Newham Monitoring Project (NMP), has maintained a political involvement in various black formations for over three decades. These two critical narratives enable us to conceptualize political blackness in Britain as a recurrent and reiterative politics of becoming that has reconfigured at different historical moments. Through a retelling of historical life histories and contemporary self-representations, I examine how historical shifts in the social meaning of race and of political blackness take place. It is also therefore an account of how social movement actors themselves play a role in rearticulating the social meanings of race (Omi and Winant 1994).

These articulations within the broader field of race-making politics I argue points to incipient political imaginaries that re-organize Britons of color beyond the interlinked dynamics of possessive identitarian boundaries and reification, against consumption oriented models of racial self-making, and beyond its current moment of fragmentation and co-optation within the

mechanisms of multicultural normalization. The contemporary problematic for anti-racist struggle, as Kobena Mercer (Mercer 2000: 56) has conceptualized it, is not framed within the ‘equivalence of political empowerment and public visibility,’ but rather it is one of ‘hyperblackness,’ or consumptive cultural production and visibilities, which do not serve ‘to critique social injustice, but to cover over and conceal increasingly sharp inequalities within black society’ (See also Hall 2000; Shukra 1998).

The problem of articulating race within a broad-based politics of liberation, and hence unleashing a dynamic of radical black becoming, has to be foregrounded as a central anti-racist movement-building goal. Such strategies and politics do not spontaneously erupt out of the hegemonic command structures of racial capitalism, but they have their origins in the inherent operating contradictions of the racial order. And crucial to the articulation of a comprehensive politics of liberation are forms of black consciousness that are both intersectional and internationalist in orientation.

It is my argument that the political concept of black mobilization for Britons of color is a form of social consciousness that emerges not only in automatic reaction to common interpellative renderings of racism, the lumping of races as colored or black, for example. Rather, its logic emerges through historical development where there exists a lived theory and praxis of racial subject-making that appears through confrontations with the racializing impulses of the British state and the privileged cross-social class political agency of white Britons. The creation of diasporic mutualities, of emphasizing certain sets of cooperative and organizing principles, also emerges in contradistinction and through debates with other tendencies in ethnic minority politics. In an early pamphlet issued by NMP in 1983, a ‘calendar of resistance’ was constructed

to illustrate the lineage that the organization was invoking in explaining its own identity and method of struggle:

Calendar of Resistance:

- 1925 West African Students Union
- 1931 League of Colored Peoples
- 1945 Indian Workers Association
- 1953 Indian Workers Association
- 1959 Colored Peoples Association
- 1961 Pakistani Workers Association, Co-coordinating Committee Against Racial Discrimination, Racial Discrimination (Birmingham), Conference of Afro-Asian-Caribbean Organization (London)
- 1965 West Indian Standing Conference, Courtaulds Red Scar Mills Strike, Woolf Rubber Company strike, Campaign Against Racial Discrimination, Racial Action Adjustment Society
- 1967 Universal Colored Peoples Assoc.
- 1968 Black Peoples Alliance
- 1971 Mangrove 9 trial
- 1972 Mansfield Hosiery Mill Strike, Asian workers at Imperial Type- writer (Leicester), mainly women, go on strike.
- 1975 Searchlight comes into existence
- 1976 Gurdip Singh Chaggar murdered - Southall Youth Movement set up. Black youths fight back against police harassment at Notting Hill Carnival
- 1977 Grunswick's strike NF smashed in Lewisham
- 1978 Samaj inna Babylon, Black Socialist Alliance, Blacks Against State Harassment Campaign Against 'sus' laws, Bradford Asian Youth Movement Brick Lane - murder of Aktar Ali, Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent.
- 1979 Blair Peach murdered in Southall
- 1980 Akhtar Ali Baig murdered - Newham Youth Movement formed Manchester Asian Youth Movement, Bristol Black and White Cafe
- 1981 Black Peoples Day of Action Bristol, Brixton, Toxteth Uprisings, Black people rebel against years of oppression, racism and police harassment. 12 Asian youths arrested in Bradford and charged with conspiracy to make petrol bombs
- 1982 Sheffield Asian Youth Movement, Bradford 12 acquitted - self-defense is no offence! Arrest of Newham 8 - 500 school-children go on strike 5th November in protest.
- 1983 2,000 people, mainly black youth, march through Newham in support of the Newham 8. The struggle goes on!

This notational history hails a national historical consciousness of anti-racist resistance that brings together particular forms of struggle: self-organization by different cultural groups, cross-cultural coalitional formations, independent workers organizations, labor strikes, student

organizing, women's organizations, campaigns against racist murders, resistance against racial profiling and police harassment, anti-fascist work, urban uprisings and direct action community-based demonstrations. The connectedness of these histories provides a genealogy to authorize the ongoing struggles of militant black anti-racism, their specific issues of racism and the invocation of a broad horizon for social change.

These are examples of the issues that occupy the attention and concern of NMP, and they are routinely utilized in their day-to-day work. For example, the notion of black within the context of drawing together victims of police harassment under stop and search laws is illustrated below:

**STOP & SEARCH: THE FACTS**  
People from black communities are **EIGHT** times more likely to be stopped and searched

Over the last year the police in London have stopped and searched  
**40% more Asians and  
30% more African-Caribbeans  
but 8% less white people...**

**rua**  **?**  
TARGET

NEWHAM MONITORING PROJECT • PO Box 273 • LONDON E7

Photo: Ray Smith

*2006 leaflet to canvass community experiences of racial profiling in Newham.*

*Source: NMP Archives*

Although different racial groups such as Asians and African-Caribbeans in the borough of Newham experience racial profiling in different ways, and in different degrees - the differential between Asians being 40% more likely than local whites to be stopped and searched and African Caribbeans being 30% more likely - nonetheless the invocation of a shared racial condition of over-policing enables productive anti-racist mobilizations to occur.

As Joy James (James 1996: 243) has argued, in such specific political contexts, “black denotes a multiethnic people in anti-racist decolonization struggles,” and emergent where there is a need to create ‘viable political communities’ especially against state violence. But as she importantly points out, “This political designation neither denies nor minimizes cultural and caste differences, which are usually exacerbated by a reactionary state. Nor can such political language erase ethnic chauvinism or antipathy for blackness” (James 1996). Certainly, as we will see, the political use of the term black does not transcend the devolved forms of anti-Black and anti-Asian racism among subordinated racial groups themselves.<sup>14</sup>

## **DIVIDE AND RULE**

Between December 1964 and February 1965 Malcolm X visited Britain twice and made what has been described as his most important turning point speeches prior to his assassination.

It was after his tours of newly independent nations in Africa, encounters with the Chinese

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<sup>14</sup> As Allison Donnell (Donnell 2002: xiv) has argued, the status of racial identities in the British context may no longer be the singular cultural category of identification: “Not only is there a stronger sense of the recognition of the difference within the communities that had elected to identify through the category ‘black,’ but there is an acknowledgment that black may not be the necessary starting point for self-articulation—black may now be seen as one identity category alongside that of artist; or writer; or woman; or Muslim; or gay.” The politics of black anti-racism in the contemporary moment operates among complex and highly differentiated articulations of personal and community self-making.

revolution and his pilgrimage to Mecca following his break from the Nation of Islam that Malcolm began transforming his political discourse from a absolutist black nationalist and U.S.-centered civil rights campaign to an anti-imperialist and internationalist human rights framework. He started to rearticulate and reposition the African-American struggle in the context of simultaneous international struggles for the liberation of the African descended peoples and as part of the struggle of the third world against the first world. These struggles took the form of anti-colonial and internationalist struggles against colonialism and neocolonialism occurring at the time, and is sometimes characterized as the ‘Bandung’ moment of Afro-Asian solidarity (Prashad 2008).

During this sojourn in Britain where he debated in the Oxford Union and delivered an address at the London School of Economics, Malcolm also spent time with the Guyanese activist, writer and academic Jan Carew. Carew was at that time establishing Magnet, one of the first black newspapers in Britain. Carew recounts this exchange in his memoir, *Ghosts in Our Blood*,

‘We wanted the paper to attract Britons of color in Britain, regardless of class or country or origin...Most of them are fairly recent arrivals.

Malcolm, always quick to understand nuances, asked, ‘When you say ‘Britons of color,’ you mean Negroes, Indians, Pakistanis, Chinese, everyone of color?’

‘The English did us a favor, Malcolm. They’ve lumped us all together as ‘niggers’ –Asians, Africans, West Indians, the lot. They compel us to unite whether we like it or not. Of course, throughout the empire, we had the same educational system inflicted upon us and so we carry much of the same cultural baggage that’s bursting at the seams with its Britishness. And just as important as language is the fact that we play the same games, like cricket, soccer, rugby and field hockey. So despite enormous cultural differences, we can still communicate fairly easily with one another.’

‘And I can forecast that since all of you have, more or less, just arrived,’ Malcolm said, ‘being able to talk the same language and play the same games will help for a while. But later on, they’ll play the divide-and-conquer game on you too. In the States, they do it with the Indians, the Asians, the Latinos, and even the West Indians’. (Carew 1994: 19)



Carew's explanation helps to illuminate some of the objective and subjective structural reasons that existed in the 1960s for why arriving settlers from the British Empire, its colonies and former colonies in South Asia, Southeast-Asia, the Caribbean and Africa were able to build common identities and social movements against the racism they experienced within Britain. Everyday experiences of color-based racism and discrimination, and a common and yet critical absorption into colonial education and culture formed the basis for the communicative links that could articulate a common platform and cause. Malcolm's rejoinder to Carew that such a basis would prove threatening to the disciplining processes of racial rule could not have been more prescient and establishes an important theoretical insight into the transitional and cyclical circulations of black political formations in Britain.

Black formations have formed through cycles of resistance and fragmentation. There is no master narrative or linear history to narrate. The political decomposition of a particular moment of the 'black community' occurred not only through the lines of greater ethnicization or culturalism of racially defined identities but also through the fault lines of gender and class contradictions that do not allow for a simple assumption of a universal racial voice (Hall 2000; Sudbury 2001). This moment of the breakdown of blackness is often seen in a negative light as key political alliances and umbrella coalitions began to fragment into particularistic constituents. Such splits affected organizing efforts at both the national and local levels. At the national level there was breaking up of the Organization of Women of African and Asian Descent (OWAAD) which fell apart around questions of ethnic difference. On a local level there were examples such as the Coalition Against Police Abuse (CAPA) in neighboring Tower Hamlets, which broke

along ethnic and national divides between Asians, Africans and African-Caribbeans and then further split between Dhaka and Sylhetti Bangladeshis.<sup>15</sup>

Kalbir Shukra (1998) has argued that in the wake of the ethnic fragmentations of the late 1980s and 1990s, black consciousness today operates more explicitly along an ad hoc coalitional basis rather than through a seamless or unitary framework of singular black community. She sees this transformation of political blackness as a shift from the concept of a black community to a weaker mode of 'black perspectivism.' Shukra's critique of black consciousness today arises from an analysis that coalitional black perspectivism has become co-opted within the multicultural mechanisms of the neoliberal state. These politics are seen to produce uneven class development and elite formation within racial minority communities. Shukra argues that the co-optation of the notion of black has occurred as a result of the jettisoning of broader class-based social transformation for more limited forms of particularistic identity politics.

As well as being based on particularistic ideologies, all of these strategies celebrate limited forms of consciousness. They are limited in the sense that they represent only an understanding developed by a particular social group about itself in relation to the wider social and political economy and do not offer a holistic, liberatory vision of how the immediate interest of every group might be integrated. Black radicalism cultivated 'black consciousness,' ethnic perspectivists accepted fragmented ethnic identities and black perspectivists sought to maintain order between those ethnic identities. Each form of identity remained hermetically sealed and separate from other social issues because of its reliance on a particularity of experience. (Shukra 1998: 67)

In lieu of these broader horizons of resistance, many black activists and community activists have wandered into bureaucratic positions and careers in electoral politics once the policies of multiculturalism and the ascent of the New Labor government in 1997 opened up space for the absorption of black activists into such positions of power. These changing political circumstances provided upwardly mobile opportunities within what has become known as the

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<sup>15</sup> Recounted to me by Michael Keith, former leader of the Tower Hamlets council, and currently Director of Compass, Oxford University.

‘race-relations industry’ and also facilitated the advancement of neoliberal transformations of the British social welfare state where key welfare provisions were privatized and contracted out to the ‘Black Voluntary Sector’<sup>16</sup>. Black perspectivism, in contrast to the radical notion of a confrontational black community engaged in multi-sited forms of autonomous class struggle (Center for Contemporary Studies 1982), is now more of a resource mobilization or a vote-swing strategy that helps to propel the careers of individual black symbolic representatives in politics and government.

Withstanding Shukra’s important criticism, however, I wish to argue that the field of black politics reflects a more complex trajectory and contains multiple tendencies. The social meanings of race are subject to a counter-hegemonic contestation that is itself routed through the multi-faceted racial self-making on the part of black activists. And this multi-dimensional vector of race in political practice is not only discursively reproductive of domination, as has been argued by Paul Gilroy (Gilroy 1998; Gilroy 2000), but can also be a source for the production of new forms of social struggle and critical social antagonism. New forms of struggle and organization emerge from the positionalities of difference and hierarchies that are generative and necessary for racial capitalism. As autonomist Marxist theorists like Harry Cleaver (2003) and Massimo De Angelis (2007) argue, these mobilizational forms organize counter-hegemonic tendencies towards the ‘production of the commons.’ De Angelis states:

It is through the production of commons that new value practices emerge and divide-and-rule strategies dividing the social body on the basis of material interest can be contrasted. That process of reflection/communication/negotiation aimed at identifying and crafting a specific contingent commons is a philosophy born in struggle, a necessary moment of the production of struggle itself, a philosophy that is grounded, but also that aspires, and hence develops a strategic look that helps make clear what it is up against... (De Angelis 2007: 139)

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<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of how the Newham Monitoring Project was caught up in the transition to New Labor, see the unpublished thesis of Sameera Hamid’s (1997).

A processual notion of social structure is helpful in understanding the emergence of anti-racist formations as moments of composition-decomposition (Wright 2002) and struggles for formation (Aronowitz 2004) within particular historical conjunctures. Formations of political blackness emerge through the processes of composition and decomposition and agentic struggles for creating common ground and temporary identifications. The creation of a commons, of building common ground, in order to recompose confrontational struggles against racial hierarchy and racial capitalism, can be ethnographically examined within the non-commodifiable terrains of blackness: the context of racial justice campaigns, anti-racist casework and direct action mobilizations that occur within the work of groups like NMP.

The work of overcoming divisions and articulating new becomings takes place not in the context of essential and secure identities, but within a context of division. Such commons-producing activity is carried out, but within practical struggle against issues such as racist murders, racial harassment, police brutality and the collective criminalization of whole communities in the name of the War on Terror.

Black community activism is historically rooted in the dynamics of producing anti-racist social change against the institutionalization of formerly colonized Africans and Asians as nonwhite Others<sup>17</sup> throughout the empire and concomitantly having to be relegated to the bottom margins of British society. On the more general level, black community activism also argues and is open to including the lived experiences of any racial and ethnic minority communities that commonly experience racism in within specific locales and context, such as East London.

Especially through its racist violence casework, NMP has incorporated peripheral groups to the black formation such as the local Chinese community, which has also fallen prey to attacks and

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<sup>17</sup> The creation of racial mainstreams and margins, as Gary Okihiro has pointed out for the U.S. context is the process of racializing and institutionalizing particular groups as nonwhite others, usually through legal discourses around whiteness, immigration and citizenship. (See Okihiro 1994).

assaults. The criterion of the lived experience of racism has defined blackness more than ascriptive color or phenotypical designations.

### **THE EAST END'S HISTORICAL DYNAMICS OF RACIAL HIERARCHY**

In a documentary film made for BBC2 in 1986, *The Dividing Line*, NMP expressed inter-subjective political logic in the following fashion: 'each racist attack, each assault or insult is not isolated but connected' and that such 'racism can be defeated: by the coming together of the community, young and old, Afro-Caribbean and Asian' (Open Space Film 1986). The inter-generational and cross-cultural emphasis of this particular moment spoke to the key debates ongoing between what were first generation African Caribbean and Asian experiences of racism and tensions with the second generation of youth who were the first to come-to-age within Britain, and whose experiences of running afoul of the law needed sympathetic support from elders in their respective communities.

First generation African-Caribbean and Asian elders themselves had faced racism in the workplace and the struggle to secure living spaces against the color bar or the discriminatory 'sons and daughters' policies of local social housing allocation. But their formation did not include racist experiences within white-dominated local schools, discrimination in terms of youth services and experiences of street level harassment and attacks.

A major shift in the construction of black political identity since the late 1980s in Britain has been characterized by Stuart Hall as the 'the end of innocence' or 'the end of the innocent notion of the essential black subject' (1989: 443), which has seen the decomposition of a sense

of black community unified by homogeneous experiences of racism and singular political purposes. The fragmentation also coincides with the collapse of certain grand narratives of resistance such as a worldwide socialist movement. At one time the black movement in the U.K. was seen as operating within this broader counter-hegemonic movement context, as ‘black struggles for socialism’ (Sivanandan 1990).

The struggle in this earlier movement was not only against the dominant racial capitalism that was structuring racial hierarchies and denying a sense of belonging to nonwhite Commonwealth settlers within post-colonial Britain. It was co-emergent against the movements of white-dominated resistance that utilized possessive and exclusive definitions of class in order to structure racial exclusions within the realm of the trade unions and white left-dominated municipal socialist politics. Black struggles in Newham in the 1980s, for example, had to organize against the Labor Party controlled local councils that attempted to institute universal formulations of redistributive funding policies and programs that systematically neglected the needs of racial minorities.

African-Caribbean and Asian youth in the 1980s in Newham were at the forefront of staging militant campaigns in order to demand spaces for safe spaces and youth services that the Newham council was reluctant to provide. The creation of the One Love Center and Save our Stardust campaigns were two of the hallmark campaigns in this period that drew upon interconnected black solidarities and mobilization. South Asian activists such as Anita Kirpal participated as one of the ‘founding campaigners and organizers’ to create the African Caribbean oriented One Love Center in 1987 (One Love Center 1997: 4-5). African-Caribbean activists such as Herby Boudier and others worked to support the occupation of Newham’s Labor Party halls that succeeded in keeping Stardust Asian Youth Club afloat in 1986.

These campaigns and demands for racial minority oriented youth centers, which functioned also as safe spaces against racist attacks and assaults was met by a widespread rejection by dominant sections of the local white Labor Party, although the more radical white elements of the local Labor Party left had disagreed and openly supported the occupation.

This was in the period before the rise of multicultural governance, where the provision of ethnic-targeted services is now seen as a matter of course. The following response of local white-dominated Labor Party groups towards the Stardust building occupation at the time illustrates the logic of repressive color-blind municipal socialist politics.<sup>18</sup>

This GMC regrets the recent occupation of the Labor Party Halls by Stardust Asian Youth Club and believes that the behavior displayed by the Stardust occupiers ran contrary to, and undermined the spirit of co-operation which this Labor Party has tried to promote. Whilst we acknowledge the need for the provision of youth club facilities for both Asian and other youth in Newham, we feel that the manner in which Stardust have conducted their campaign and the consequences of their actions are at variance with the fundamental tenets of community and collectivism and brings into question their organization. The interests and needs of the community as a whole were ignored by their actions and the pursuance of what in this light may seem as sectionalist, factionalist interests. Their overtly aggressive, destructive behavior runs contrary to the ideals of community and co-operation that form the basis of socialist belief. By denying comrades access to the party halls, Stardust halted the campaigning work of this party... In view of the above, we call on the council to ensure that any future funding of Stardust AYC be strictly monitored, as should all council funded organizations. Further we call on our councilors to ensure that funded organizations have a base in, offer a service to, and promote the interests of all our community, conforming to the broad spirit of socialism.

Nonwhite needs and demands upon municipal socialism were interpreted in this chauvinistic framework as disruptive of socialist unity. Such a color-blind unity, however, was predicated on the presumed subordination of Asian and African-Caribbean voices within white-led socialist formations. This particular version of universalist class politics was based on an unquestioned

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<sup>18</sup> Resolution proposed by St. Stephens (ward) for GMC of Newham North East Constituency Labor Party. Minutes of General Committee Meeting, 30 November 1985. Source: Personal archives of Illona Aronovsky.

cultural premise of racial hierarchy, where white community agendas and needs occupied a superordinate status.

These formulations of class politics privilege white male/waged worker definitions of class which exclude autonomous black, women's, children's, and broader unwaged sector analytical definitions and mobilizations. As Selma James (James 1974:14) long ago pointed out, 'The social power relations of the sexes, races, nations and generations are precisely then, particularized forms of class relations... They are the particularized forms of indirect rule, one section of the class colonizing another and through this capital imposing its own will.'

The struggle to determine the shape and content and to seek the institutionalization of socialist policies as whole has faded from view in the current political moment. The social welfare state is undergoing contraction rather than expansion under neoliberal reforms. In such a milieu, what appears constant is that the fundamental basis of racial hierarchy has shifted from white-dominated socialist claim making to a politics of white backlash against multiculturalism.

The agentive construction and defense of racial hierarchy, within privileged resistance movements or anti-establishment cultures is itself constitutive of structural politics of racism. Racial hierarchy is also then processual and reproductive. It emerges through agentive processes, and within contested terrains.<sup>19</sup> Political ideologies have come and gone, but the politics of racial hierarchy, as will be shown throughout this study, has so far remained a permanent racial condition for black people as a whole in East London.

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<sup>19</sup> As Blauner, quoted in (Jennings 1994) explains, 'In a racial order, a dominant group, which thinks of itself as distinct and superior, raises its social position by exploiting, controlling and keeping down others who are categorized in racial or ethnic terms. When one or more groups are excluded from equal participation in society and from a fair share of its values, other groups not so excluded and dominated are correspondingly elevated in position... Whether or not racist policies are followed consciously or not in order to benefit whites is not the issue. Whatever the intent, the system benefits all strata of the white population, at least in the short run – the lower and working classes as well as the middle and upper classes.'





*Christmas gathering at the Colored Men's Institute in the 1930s*

*Source: Eastside Heritage Library Archives*

The traditions of nonwhite commons-building has had a relatively permanent presence within East London, where autonomous traditions of race and class resistance to racial hierarchy have been necessary. The black political formations that occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in Newham took place along the lines of the settlement of disembarking 'colored' seaman, nannies and soldiers marooned in dockyard settlements in port cities such as Cardiff, Liverpool, Glasgow and London.

Their struggles form an important historical precursor to the black politics of the 1980s and to contemporary black politics where questions of equal citizenship for second and third generation Asian, African and Afro-Caribbean communities are also inextricably bound up with questions of the contemporary settlement of new arrivals such as refugees and asylum-seekers. Settlement of new and impoverished immigrant groups is always something that is occurring in

Newham and it brings with it the manifestations of racism that react to the flows of immigration and settlement of nonwhites.

These dockyard areas are also usually spaces where the politics of racist violence continue to compromise the ‘ontological security’ (Farrar 2002) and basic everyday freedoms of black people, whether through racial harassment and attacks by mainly white working-class elements or through the policing actions of the state. Twenty years ago in Newham it was common to speak of Barking Road as ‘the dividing line’ between the white and black sections of the borough. But today, as white flight and mobility have taken Newham’s whites into adjacent Essex, Barking and Dagenham the north of the borough has become mainly nonwhite. But still in Newham, in white majority southern wards such as Canning Town and the Docklands, isolated black families in social housing continue to experience rates of racist violence that are reminiscent of the organized violent campaigns of expulsion carried out by the National Front in the 1970s. These are the conditions that give rise to the urgencies of black community activism.

The Colored Men’s Institute at Tidal Basin Road was formed by a Sri Lankan ethnic Malay Methodist pastor, Kamal Anton Chunchie in 1926, in what is today south Newham. He turned a former Chinese opium den into a community center that took in stranded and jobless African, Asian, Arab and Caribbean seamen and provided them lodging. The Institute also provided a socializing space for resident mixed-race families, comprised of over a hundred families and some 600 children, that were quickly forming in the dockyard wards of Newham. These families, whose mothers were usually drawn from the East End white working classes, were routinely cast out from the white community for breaking the norms of racial-sexual purity

whose children experienced violent ostracism.<sup>20</sup> Looking back from the current moment, the significance of black histories such as The Colored Men's Institute are important acts of reorienting collective memory. Such histories attest to political imaginaries among black communities that have been persistently developed in tandem with the shifting racial conditions of Britain. In addition, the presence of such autonomous black histories help to complexify the current representation of the East End that equates with white working-class narratives of 'the loss of localism' (Dench, Gavron, and Young 2006: 31).



*Colored Men's Institute in 1926*

*Source: Eastside Heritage Library Archives*

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<sup>20</sup> For an in-depth ethnographic study of the mixed-race dynamics of early port-side and dockyard black communities, see Jacqueline Nassy Brown's *Dropping anchor, setting sail: geographies of race in Black Liverpool* (Brown 2005).

In strategically resisting these dominant erasures it is important not only to rescue the history of formations like the Colored Men's Institute within "heritage" local history (Hall 1999), but to also locate the construction of the white loss of localism narrative in the context of the salient racial antagonisms which are ongoing in East London today.

The early twentieth century has been written into British history as a high point in the making of the English working-class and the emergence of organized labor movements, including the rise of the Labor Party from the industrial and dockside bowels of the East End of London in the early 20th century (Thompson 1966). However, the experiences of Kamal Chunchie (Visram 1999; Bell and Heritage 2002), a veteran soldier who had forced his way into military service with the Public School Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment in World War One, tell of another strand of development in 20th century East London history.

Chunchie's story is remarkable for the combination of the intense racism he had to grapple with and the bold pioneering with organizational forms that he undertook in order to make visible and whole the wretched lives of the black poor in the East End<sup>21</sup>. He had to do this by negotiating the prevailing colonial economy and power relationships. One life strategy that he undertook was to convert to the Methodist Church, despite coming from a family of illustrious Muslim imams. The conversion does not appear to be false, but it is inseparable from the strategic considerations that Chunchie employed in carrying out his work with fellow 'colored' seamen in the East End. He utilized his conversion and pastoral training as one of the first nonwhite Methodist ministers to develop strategies that would address the conditions of East London's early black community -- conditions he was acutely familiar with even before he took on his missionary clothes.

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<sup>21</sup> Apart from the published scholarship on Chunchie done by Rozina Visram and Geoffrey Bell, I also utilized the archives of the Eastside Community Heritage that had undertaken oral history interviews with Chunchie's daughter, Muriel Simpson on November 4, 2003 (Eastside Community Heritage 2003) to piece-together his life-story here.

Churchie's anti-racist strategy centered on the employment of discourses that aimed to redeem the promises of Christian and liberal equality for black people in Britain at the time. Through biographical research carried out by the historian Rozina Vasram, it is clear that Churchie identified strongly with the British colonial order and especially with its stated liberal premises of equality among the races of the empire. Such a staunch belief led Churchie to try to overcome racial barriers by serving in colonial institutions such as the military in much the same way that the Afro-Caribbean pioneer nurse, Mary Seacombe, broke racial barriers in order to prove Empire loyalty and equality by serving in the Crimean War in the nineteenth century.

The anti-racist strategies of Churchie focused on making the Empire resolve its contradiction between its rhetoric of equality and the racial exclusions and discriminations within the institutions of imperial war service and the merchant navy. Such individualistic strategies, however, could not do much to break down the entrenched notions of white supremacy and exclusionary logics that were in evidence at least since Elizabeth I's edict against the settlement of black people in Britain, and which gained fresh ground in the early 20th century through the Aliens Act of 1905 that targeted Jewish immigration to the East End and the promulgation of the Colored Alien Seaman's Order of 1925 (Fryer 1984). The 1925 act was the British government's first attempt to restrict the disembarkation and employment eligibility of nonwhite colonial subjects in the metropole. The law in a stroke created a surplus population of nonwhite seaman who were unemployable and brought into existence a destitute band of homeless seamen wandering around the docksides (Myers 1994).

In 1920 Churchie, who was now resident in East London, recounts an encounter that exemplifies that conditions of white supremacy that permeated the daily life of the English working-classes in East London. Churchie often experienced what today is called racial

harassment – a spectrum of behavior stretching from racist name-calling and insults on the streets to racist violence. Racism and white supremacy were not something that was only formulated through the wars of conquest and the establishment of colonial rule and exploitation that occurred in far-away colonies, but was already a social force that had transposed itself into the socio-political imaginaries of the lowest rungs of English society. Here is Chunchie (Bell and Heritage 2002: 2):

I met an English sailor lad, down and out. I took him to a magnificent building. I saw outside this building in large letters ‘All Seamen Welcome.’ It was a beautiful place, scrupulously clean. I asked the lad to sit at one of the tables, went over to the counter, placed a shilling and asked the English girl for two cups of tea and a piece of cake. The girl stared at me and said, ‘We don’t serve niggers here!’ What hurt me the most was, behind the girl, on the wall, I read in large letters, ‘God is Love.’ I left the place and gave the lad the shilling.

It is clear that the cornerstone of Chunchie’s consciousness and analysis of his experience lies in grasping and revealing the contradiction of the British Empire’s multi-discursive civilizational claims to the principles of equality, which are refused even in the context of receiving service in a restaurant. Furthermore, common belonging within an occupational class such as ‘seaman’ also did not bridge Chunchie’s racial difference and neither did his moral aptitude as a Christian exercising the principles of Samaritan behavior. White supremacy cut through the discourses of Christian fellowship, Empire fraternity and class solidarity and gave Chunchie an experience apart from these false universal frameworks. The irony of the situation is that, in order to fulfill his charitable inclinations, Chunchie had no choice but to accept the racial exclusions that had been imposed by the racial power of a white English waitress, despite his own status as a member of the sea-faring working-classes and as a recently distinguished military serviceman. He did not call into question the liberal imperial principles themselves, but

cast the operations of racial exclusions in terms of the inadequacy of class universalism and moral-religious hypocrisy.

The development of a differential consciousness then arose in Chunchie with respect to the condition of the colored population in the East End. This led him to crystallize the creation of an autonomous mission within the Methodist church, catered towards the dockside populations and their specific needs. These functions tried to redress the common forms of dehumanization and social exclusion experienced by racially excluded people in East London in a self-organized fashion. The focus of self-organizing by early African, African-Caribbean and Asian settlers was on creating viable living-space.

Organizing life-spaces and alternate arenas of re-humanized sociability were in a sense the frontlines of class struggle for the colored seamen and their families. The disparities created between the white working-classes and the black working-class of East London involved dispossession from the waged and industrial realms, and threw black people into ‘a partitioned social ontology’ (Mills 1997: 16), from which the basic aspects of life reproduction had to be organized and politicized. Hence Christmas dinners, seaside trips for children and providing shelter became critical points of struggle.

Such specific contextual locations for the development of racism and the counter-tradition of black anti-racism and black community-building provide openings for racial and ethnic minority politics that cannot to be reduced to the dominant ideas of culture clashes and the problem of the non-integration of ethnic minorities. The tendency to de-historicize black consciousness has given rise to spurious arguments which reproduce culturally fixed ideas about the inward-looking and self-segregationist social action repertoires of ethnic minority communities.

Part of the work of black consciousness even in this nascent moment of the Colored Men's Institute was to effect a political re-description whereby differential forms of racism experienced by different racial minority communities were analyzed in relation to one another. It is also often assumed that the structural conditions of British racism in the early and mid-20th century tended to lump all minority groups together and institutionalized all nonwhites as 'coloreds'. And it is often agreed that such a lumping was the decisive objective condition for the emergence of an Afro-Asian identity of blackness. But a close re-examination of the political writings of Chunchie at the time reveals a more complex story. Rather than being the direct reflection of the interpellative moments of racism, Chunchie's political consciousness actively constructed theoretical innovations by connecting the diverse experiences of colonial subjects in Britain in order to consciously organize and mobilize a black community of resistance.

I discovered a copy of the following rarely seen and rarely discussed article in the archives of the Eastside Heritage Library (Chunchie 1934). In this 1930s article, Chunchie attempts to connect the different discrimination experiences of Africans and Asians, which he is aware are two differently racialized groups. He is also acutely aware of class politics and elite forms of social distance inherent to the student-working-class divides of the black population in Britain at the time. Chunchie's writings galvanize solidarity and common counter-consciousness by articulating the links between these discrete and disparate racial and class positions.

### **The Colored Students' Problem in England**

About ninety-five percent of the colored students-and there are over 2000 in London alone! – have had some extremely unpleasant experiences in the course of their stay in this country. Therefore, in a measure they are justified in being bitter against the English youths who 'spurred' them.



The persecution of the 'color complex' section of the English community is a prejudice, which, like so many prejudices is based on ignorance. This is only one side of the picture; five percent of the colored students have happy memories. They have come into contact with Englishmen and women 'in whom there is no guile'—those who have devoted their lives to the welfare of the colored races. They value and appreciate the help and friendship of that minority section of the English community.

Thousands of these colored students have visited my 'Parish'—the East End (I have worked here for the last thirteen years among the colored seamen), where a section of the community are parasites. And not merely do they live in the body politic; they infect it with dirt, disease, and death. The abiding impression they give the foreign students, is that of the hopelessness of things. To them Hope is dead, Faith is dead, and God is dead. The colored student sees the appalling condition of his less fortunate brethren, and forms his own opinion.

The educated colored student can be credited with some amount of sense and reason. He is not prepared to leave the real fellowship of his own caste or creed for something he is not quite aware of. It is up to you to establish your sincerity and earnestness when dealing with the colored students. He seeks not your patronage, but real fellowship. He is well aware of the racial barrier in the Christian Church in many lands. He is not blind to the fact that his national hero, Mahatma Gandhi, when accompanied by two English Christians was refused admission. There was a board in front of the church on which was written, 'No Asiatics or Natives allowed'—Christ Himself, Head of the Church, would have been refused admission, into that church, being an Asiatic. He also knows that two Christian Africans were asked to leave a church in which white people had gathered to hold a service for the deepening of the Christian life!—and these were not oil-covered, half-naked, repulsive Africans, but men with an English Varsity Education!

He is gently reminded also of the fact in the early days of Anglican Christianity in India when Bishop Millman wished to consecrate Kali Mohan Bannaji, one of the saintliest Christians of Bengal, as Bishop, the European missionaries and chaplains were not prepared to give 'the Black Man' their loyal obedience! Well may the educated colored student ask if the so-called Church Catholic can offer him a fellowship which he enjoys in his present sect, heathen though he may be. These facts must be faced by you.

Many of these colored students would be in the future have influence in their own countries, and through their eyes thousands of others will see Great Britain and Christianity. Could anything be more unfortunate than that such men should be refused admission to some restaurant or place of public resort in this country; or be told, 'we don't serve Niggers here?' Even if such cases were the exception, they might do a world of harm—where such admission had been refused, the fault lay much more with the customers of the establishment than the proprietor. In matters of this kind, public opinion is the force; and I am sure that public opinion has only to understand in order to make itself felt. You who talk of Empire unity, Christian conscience, British justice, fair-play, playing the game and so on – then here is the opportunity to practice what you preach. If civilization is to survive, then friendliness between the races is essential.

When man to man, the world over,  
Shall brithers be, or a' that!

This is an ideal to work for—what has been the pledge of your forefathers to the colored races? Were you to go back upon your word (that sacred trust and heritage), your moral influence, the real source of your strength, would be fatally undermined. Consecrate yourselves to co-operate now in a task of emancipation, which will give the world a lead in the establishment of the Kingdom of God, and deliver the world out of economic wilderness.



*Kamal Chunchie, on the left, during a CMI Christmas dinner*

*Source: Eastside Heritage Library Archives*

In the above article we can see how the social construction of interracialism is a result not of primordial tendencies or separatist ideologies, but as strategies for survival. The grounding between inter-ethnic and cross-class solidarity within the black community is articulated precisely through an analysis of the commonality that is created by the racial conditions of everyday life in Britain. Rather than essentialism or a coercive ideology, black consciousness and black community activism are historically produced social movement traditions which work

to articulate the grounds for the development of shared political consciousness, identities and projects that are necessary to materialize anti-racist social change in East London and beyond.

### **BLACK RADICAL BECOMINGS: CILIUS**

The consciousness of a historical black community of struggle is an especially important influence on contemporary grassroots anti-racist activists as they create lifetime trajectories and careers in anti-racist work. Cilius is an African-Caribbean activist with the Newham Monitoring Project (NMP), in his fifties, who grew up in Newham. He works as a computer programmer in central London and has been active in anti-racist struggles across the country since his teens. He is now a senior member of the NMP Management Committee, Co-Chair of the United Friends and Families Campaign, and a board member of the Institute of Race Relations. Cilius' seniority in the anti-racist movement, the extensive network of connections he has accumulated in the race-relations industry and his long-standing involvement in NMP forms the basis of the power and influence he wields.

For the other dozen or so activists that I worked with at NMP during my fieldwork year, the question of how they came to be involved in black consciousness and black community activism usually drew on stories of how personal, familial and local community experiences with racism led them to seek out an anti-racist activist organization. NMP activists of African, Asian and African-Caribbean backgrounds had experienced racial murders in their extended families, racial attacks on their homes and bullying and assaults in schools.

Many of the activists I worked with were, like Cilius, second generation East Londoners and second generation NMP activists who were university educated. University student politics

were an important crucible for how second generation NMP black community activists became politicized, and it led them from engagements on campuses towards return commitments in their local communities. A majority had been active in student politics before joining NMP

This formation contrasts with the earlier generation of the first-generation black NMP activists such as Herby Boudier, Gulshun Rehman, Loraine Martins, Unmesh Desai and Hardev Singh Dhesi and others like white left-wing activists such as Illona Aronovsky and Caroline Sikorsi who came from teaching, community work, youth work and ethnic worker's organizations. Many were in some way also active in the left-wing of the local Labor Party at the time. As a current NMP activist Kevin Blowe explains, 'You got to realize that at the time racial minority communities were completely excluded - there was a Freemason's lodge housed within Newham Council itself! So these left-wing Labor party activists had an understanding how racism in the local bureaucracy worked, not that they would engage with the bureaucracy, but to embarrass them so that they could not ignore the racial problems in housing and so on. This had not been done before<sup>22</sup>.' The conjoining of the earlier generation of local activists with a new generation of university educated students formed the base upon which NMP developed as an organization in the 1980s and 1990s.

Cilius structured his coming to anti-racist activism through the frame of a slowly evolving black consciousness. Like many of the other anti-racist activists I worked with, he would initially assert that he had little personal experience of 'overt' racism growing up, by which he strictly meant some of the more extreme forms of racist harassment and police abuse. By becoming more involved in the spaces that facilitated black community activism, he grew to consciousness about what he classified as the more 'subtle' manifestations of racism in his life.

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<sup>22</sup> Personal conversation, September 10, 2010.

Cilius' earliest childhood memories of racism took shape around experiences of schooling, which was also true for many other second generation NMP black activists as well.

Cilius recalled how his mixed primary school, Godwin Junior School in Newham, had a large black presence, specifically of African-Caribbean children in the 1970s. Cilius remembered how the school would periodically polarize during recess into 'black v. white' football games. He also recalled how his involvement as one of three black musicians in the otherwise all-white school's brass band provided disconcerting moments within team practices and when they would travel for competition around England.

The presence of black people in rural areas and townships outside of London was considered an oddity. Cilius remembers that he and his friends received strange looks and questions. Whites would often wonder if they were celebrities and white team-mates would subject them to name-calling. 'Colgate!'<sup>23</sup> was one familiar slur that Cilius recalled. 'You just let that wash over you, you never did anything, you never said anything,' he explained.

As Cilius grew up, however, he became more aware of how race was exerting a constraining influence on his life opportunities. On the whole, he argued that his growing up years were relatively safe, in comparison to what he perceived to be more intense racial conflicts common for his African-American 'peers' in the U.S. Yet Cilius described going through the period of intense racial profiling brought about by laws such as 'Sus' in the 1970s. The 'Sus' laws allowed the police to stop and search people on the mere suspicion of criminal intent. The law became identified as the key mechanism which the state used to subject mainly Afro-Caribbean males to disproportionate police surveillance and criminalization. It was also a way that black people were harassed to stay out of the tourist zones and symbolic capital zones of central London, and restricted to their 'proper' place within the inner-city.

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<sup>23</sup> In reference to the blackface toothpaste commercials of the time.

‘It was common knowledge among youngsters, fifteen, fourteen, you don’t go to the West End because racially as soon as you cross that boundary, East to West, you get arrested, you get nicked. That’s what happened to black youngsters, and we were all conscious of that. I never went West as a young teenager because that was common currency.’

Whilst Cilius today works as a computer programmer and maintains a highly active interest in Middle Eastern archaeology, his schooling years were also marked by the institutional dumbing-down of black students. He recalls academic segregation practices which selectively pushed black students into the bottom-rung non-science streams. Most of his black classmates who were ‘corralled’ into nonacademic classes by the time they were eleven or twelve years old did not have many opportunities to enter the sciences and university tracks.

‘Typing was the most useful skill I left school with...which was useful in my later career with computer science since I could touch-type,’ he said.

At the age of sixteen or seventeen, however, Cilius encountered the novel *Black Boy* by Richard Wright during an extra assignment in his English class. This encounter was to have a significant impact on his consciousness.

‘You’ve got to remember that at the time anything written down black we gravitated towards because we weren’t on television, we weren’t around, we weren’t visible externally in the white world.’

The encounter with a key literary text of black consciousness from across the Atlantic encouraged Cilius to get involved with African solidarity politics as soon as he left secondary school and entered the sixth-form at East Ham College. East Ham College at the time was host to a number of Commonwealth scholarship students from the country then called ‘Rhodesia,’ now Zimbabwe. The contact with anti-colonial African students and the on-going struggle against the

white supremacist regime of Ian Smith contributed to a growing consciousness about the complexities of anti-racist struggles and questions of black identity.

Cilius remembers that even the African students at the time were divided between two tendencies, one which categorically opposed the Smith regime and another which argued for constructive collaboration and gradualist reforms. These complex politics and debates within African diasporic resistance provided nuanced understandings of the multiple forms of becoming and political tendencies that were available to Cilius. Taking up a political position therefore meant more than assuming a pre-given essentialist black identity, and involved having to negotiate a field of political identities within multiple currents of diasporic African politics.

While his college years were characterized by an intense interest in the world beyond the inner city, Cilius recalls being scarcely aware of the local struggles in his own community.

‘I was still in Newham, and still not engaged with the events taking place around me. Now this would have been the time of the Virk brothers and I had seen the riots on television.’

The lack of a local connection to struggles in Britain was something Cilius became more conscious of as he devoted himself to international politics. Events such as the case of the four Virk brothers, who were of South Asian/Sikh descent, and who had defended themselves from a violent attack by a racist white gang in 1976, was a seminal local event occurring in Newham. In defending themselves against attackers the brothers were paradoxically arrested and charged with public disorder. The racist attackers became the prosecution’s witnesses and the white judge ruled that the racist context was irrelevant. The brothers were summarily convicted and sent to prison.

It was a time where many campaigns around the slogan ‘Self-Defense is No Offense!’ were taking place in response to the rising racist violence in Newham. New populations of

stateless South Asians from Kenya and Uganda and other East African countries began to arrive in great numbers to add to the already resident Indian, Pakistani and African-Caribbean communities there. The hysteria against these newer arrivals led to mobilizations by far-right groups like the National Front and by ordinary white people to wage violent campaigns of bullying, harassment and forcible eviction of these newcomers.

Similarly, urban uprisings in the inner cities of London were also erupting and would come to climax with the Brixton rebellions in South London and elsewhere in the early 1980s. The significance of these events was slowly entering Cilius' emerging political consciousness. The contradiction between his identification with international Pan-African politics and his lack of consciousness about race politics in his own neighborhood propelled him to search for ways to become involved in the racial struggles going on within Britain itself.

Upon finishing his sixth form, Cilius left London at the age of twenty and went to Wolverhampton Polytechnic in Birmingham, principally to be in a higher education setting with a large black population nearby—'the largest Rastafarian community in Europe,' as he put it. His initial involvement with other black students was in what he called a 'culturalist organization' on campus, the Afro-Caribbean Society. His participation within this group revealed itself to be a frustrating experience. The organization was largely oriented towards staging cultural variety-nights and film shows and seemed to lack any connection to the racial and policing issues faced by black community in Birmingham that were just outside the campus. Furthermore, after being engaged in transnational and diasporic anti-colonial and anti-white supremacy struggles, the society's lack of engagement and interest with international political issues such as the national liberation struggles in Africa was disappointing and bewildering to him.



It was at this juncture that Cilius came into contact with a new social movement gathering momentum among the student body. A new black student organization had emerged on campus that called itself the National Black Student Alliance (NSA). The main organization was centered at the University of Essex and was in the process of forming itself as autonomous section within the national student movement. Drawn into the organization, Cilius attended a conference organized by the NSA and came into contact with a group of people talking about a campaign called the 'Newham 8.'

Cilius recalls, 'My ears just prick -- I'm tuned in now because they're talking about my yard.' It was also that this time that he met a Commonwealth student from Malaysia by the name of Jaspir Singh who was canvassing nationally for the Newham 8 campaign. This resulted in Cilius' first contact with the Newham Monitoring Project and he marks this moment as the starting point of his life-long commitment to the organization.

While affiliating with NMP, Cilius also returned to Wolverhampton for the remainder of his undergraduate years to organize a chapter of the National Black Student Association, which he recalls doing with two other South Asian women and a Jewish man. His organizing work led him to become immediately embroiled in debates about the contradictions of political blackness as it was then unfolding.

The assertion of black autonomy by student groups was then and has continued to be a difficult issue in student politics in Britain. In recent years there was great controversy surrounding the creation of a sabbatical position for a dedicated 'race officer' at the University of East London in 2000. The majority white students' union there and elsewhere had tried to block the creation of the race post on the argument that doing so would fracture student movement unity. One of NMP's most recent caseworkers was Titilayo Aloba, a first generation Nigerian

woman of Austrian nationality, who had eventually been elected to the controversial race officer post at the University of East London.

In Cilius' time, however, the issue over black autonomy within the student movement took the form of departures from traditional coalition strategies with white students in ways that were reminiscent of the thesis put forward by Charles Hamilton and Stokely Carmichael (Carmichael and Hamilton 1967; Carmichael 1969) in their classic text *Black Power*. Black student groups were arguing to become restricted in membership and wanted to create black-only political spaces in order to facilitate their own self-definitions and self-determined political issues and agendas, rather than having to achieve these in negotiation with white actors who held superior social power over them. This position, however, was opposed by both the white-dominated student movement and also a number of other ethnic minority groups who saw the strategy as separatist.

Cultural groups such as the Afro-Caribbean Society and other ethnic-cultural interest groups objected because they had maintained a policy of open membership and cultivated the practice of encouraging broader white interest in their ethnic cultures, arguing that deeper inter-cultural knowledge would lead to better understanding among the races, and thereby dissipate racism.

The National Black Students Alliance was also opposed by a group that termed itself 'Pan-Africanist.' The Pan-Africanists, Cilius recalled, had objected to the presence of a woman in a conference that the NSA organized who was of mixed Indian and African-Caribbean background. Inter-racial marriages between South Asian- and African-descended communities were not unknown phenomena in countries of the Caribbean where the two communities had

been thrown together by the processes of slavery and indenture. However, ultra-nationalist groups wanted to define Caribbean identity in exclusive and biologically pure racial terms.

Cilius recalls, 'They were questioning the African-ness of certain people who were at the meeting... People are saying she is not black--this is for black people. So my thinking was, this is absurd, what are they talking about?'

'I was first of all just perplexed by the argument. I wasn't angry, because I could not understand what they meant that she was not black. I am looking at her and I am saying what are we talking about? We ended up in a vicious argument about black and blackness. And these guys were basically mad. They were talking about genes, dilutions of blackness, and if this one bred with this one, and I'm saying this is crazy, this is nuts, who are these people?'

It was during the confusions arising out of this debate that Cilius then went to seek the advice of Gus John, one of the leading activists in the African-Caribbean community at the time, and a speaker at the conference.

'So Gus John comes up and I take him to one side explaining to him the battle that I had been having with these Pan-Africanists. Basically he agrees with me and says that it is really destructive. I am working my way now through the politics of being a member of the black community and asking, where are you going with this?'

The desire to bridge the gap between his transnational anti-racist activism and the felt need to ground his politics within his own local realities, his 'yard,' as Cilius put it, pushed him to gravitate towards the emergent umbrella formation of blackness taking place at the time. Furthermore, this dynamic was conjoined with his analysis of the contradictions of ultra-nationalist and liberal inter-cultural tendencies within in the broad field of race-based student politics that he had encountered.

‘And had I not possibly gone to Essex, and been exposed to the arguments about being black as a political color as opposed to black as a genetic thing or African—remember I was a staunch Pan-Africanist-- I had spent two years before with Africans in college talking about African liberation-- it would have been very easy for me to travel down that line.’

‘But when I heard the story of what happened to these Asian youths in Newham that these two Asian guys in Essex were talking about, I didn’t really say this is not about me, this is not about black people. I said that this is something we have to deal with. It instinctively grabbed me that this was a one-ness that we have to deal with.’

The student and anti-colonial politics of the early 1980s were also an important shaping influence on Cilius’ sense of blackness, but not in any simple mono-causal manner. It is hard to agree with Stuart Hall’s argument that this early period of hegemonic unity between blacks and Asians in the U.K. was in any sense ‘innocent’ (Hall 2000b). And the anti-essentialist critique of political blackness has to be re-examined given the contested and complex history of how such a political consciousness emerged through contestation, process and debate in the life trajectories of the individual activists and within organizational politics. The point I want to add here is that, rather than conducting debates that dismiss black political identities in Britain in the abstract, it is important to trace and grapple with these articulations of blackness as concrete knowable histories.

The different political definitions of blackness that vied for hegemony as second generation black and Asian youth entered political life coalesced into a tendency that developed a concept of blackness as a non-primordialist construction of community. It encompassed a coming to simultaneous consciousness of a sense of shared lived experience of British racism as

well as making connections with, rather than dis-identifying with, racial diasporic issues and internationalist concerns.

### **RACISM AND BLACKNESS IN THE NORTHERN TOWNS**

Upon graduation from Wolverhampton, Cilius moved from Birmingham to Newcastle in order to take up an industrial placement and started to work for the local council there. The move to a different local context in Britain and away from the university campus in Birmingham brought him in contact with new kinds of anti-racist issues that were specific to his new context. Cilius was now also a qualified computer programmer. Computer programming was a nascent field in those days and his job brought him in contact with the workings of bureaucracies and the development of what today is called institutional racism. At the time, the first ethnic monitoring information systems for the local council in Newcastle were being developed and Cilius was one of the programmers assigned to the task, largely, he reasons, due to his race.

His computer programming work for the Department of Health and Social Security enabled him to perceive the contradictions and limitations within the early forms of state-based anti-racist discourses. Those were the days when the state was instituting ethnic monitoring as a means to track diversity and to address questions of racial discrimination in employment. As a programmer, Cilius was instructed to create software that would track ethnic minority staff recruitment.

His research enabled him to identify a major problem in the question of minority staff recruitment, which was the problem of staff retention. Many black workers were not staying on the job and the council was being perceived as an unwelcoming environment. His attempts to convey these results to his superiors and to propose software functions that would track retention

rates in order to provide a more accurate picture of diversity issues were shot down. He was given stern orders not to create the software function that could track ethnic minority staff retention rates. This way, the problem of black staff retention could be concealed, and the success of diversity recruitment could be claimed.

‘It was a way to make the numbers of black people only go up, because it would appear that nobody ever left!’ Cilius explained.

While working on this project at his day job, Cilius at the same time helped to set up a community-based police abuse and anti-racist monitoring group in Newcastle. The focus of the project was working-class black communities living in Newcastle’s infamous council estates. Racial inequities in social housing were glaringly apparent in the 1980s as white families were routinely assigned to better housing, whilst immigrant and black families were given the leftovers, usually older, sub-standard and decrepit accommodations.

Some local councils even adopted explicit policies that privileged ‘sons and daughters’ relations in determining the social welfare provision of social housing. This policy, seemingly race-neutral, functioned as a de facto discriminatory tool against newly arrived immigrants and many second-generation black and Asian families who could not claim kinship ties to long-standing social housing recipients. In the context of Newcastle at the time of Cilius’ arrival, a major struggle was being faced by a recently arrived group of Bangladeshi immigrants.

Political blackness, which defined inclusion through one’s lived experiences and concrete struggles against racial discrimination, was logically expanded to include this new group of Bangladeshi immigrants as well. The flexible and expansive ambit of black political identity allowed Cilius to grow his own interracial praxis with another group of mixed-race families whose children were being targeted for bullying in schools.

Cilius at this time also became involved in campaigns to confront white working-class labor movements. Trade unions and the white left in the North of England appeared to be very comfortable forming alliances with the far-right, accepting them as part of the bloc of support for the white working-classes. Cilius recalls having to wage a major campaign to change the policy of including the National Front in trade union marches.

### *Return to Newham*

After a year in Newcastle, Cilius returned to London in 1985 and became directly involved with NMP. He first formally joined the organization as a volunteer and then moved into its Management Committee, where he remained for the next ten years. Unlike some other NMP stalwarts, Cilius did not become employed as a caseworker, preferring to continue his career in computer programming in central London. However, he resettled in Newham and established his own residence in the Forest Gate neighborhood. As his involvement grew, he also helped to found another coalitional anti-racist body, the United Friends and Family Campaign, which continues until today to work on campaigns for justice for the families of people killed in institutional custody, a disproportionate number of whom are of African or African-Caribbean descent.

The justice campaign for the ‘Newham 7’ and the ‘Justice for the Pryces’ campaign were the two major anti-racist campaigns waged by NMP at the time Cilius returned to Newham. The first campaign involved a group of Asian students who were being prosecuted for defending themselves against racially motivated violent attacks and the other involved the murder of a

young African-Caribbean man at the hands of a local racist gang. Such manifestations of racist violence were ubiquitous in Newham at the time.<sup>24</sup>

On April 23, 1977, on St George's Day, the National Front marched through Wood Green and on the same day three South Asian brothers were racially abused by five white youths and assaulted in front of their own homes. The brothers fought back and called the police, but when they arrived, they did not arrest the white youths, but instead arrested the Asian youth. The courts eventually found the brothers guilty of causing grievous bodily harm. Sukvinder Virk, aged 17, was sentenced to three months in a detention center whilst his older brothers were sentenced to a staggering three and seven years, respectively.

In 1978, ten year-old Kenneth Singh left his home in Plaistow to go to the local corner shop for his parents and was found dead several days later. During the same month a nine year-old Asian boy had his face cut open from his left eye across to his left ear in an attack perpetrated by five white boys. In 1980, 29-year old Akhtar Ali Baig was attacked by a skinhead gang and stabbed fatally in his heart by his killer who was heard to have boasted, 'I have just gutted a Paki,' whilst the local police initially categorized the crime as a mugging gone wrong.

In 1982, a group of South Asian schoolchildren who escorted younger children home from school to protect them from recurrent racial attacks in the area were themselves attacked by ununiformed police officers and racially abused and charged with public disorder. In 1984, 16 year-old African-Caribbean Eustace Pryce was stabbed in his head outside Greengate Pub in Barking Road as he and his brother, Gerald, went to aid some friends who had been racially attacked by a gang of youth. Eustace died from his wounds whilst his brother Gerald was charged with public disorder.<sup>25</sup> Also in 1984 a wave of vicious racial attacks by roaming white

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<sup>24</sup> The accounts of racist violence are compiled from the Newham Monitoring Project's Annual Reports, 1980-1985.

<sup>25</sup> Public disorder offenses in Britain are known as 'affray.'



gangs swept through Newham. In one incident, a number of South Asian youth descended upon the Duke of Edinburgh pub where some of the perpetrators were hanging out in order to directly confront them, but were arrested by the police instead. This was the case of the Newham 7.

Black anti-racist organizing arose from these conditions of racist violence. Race and blackness were signified in articulation with South Asian and African-Caribbean experiences of racial terror and solidaristic mobilizations were actively made between the two communities. To bring the different South Asian and African-Caribbean communities together, a shared campaign strategy had been developed by NMP. Through joint meetings, joint demonstrations, and joint co-ordinations, the campaigns for justice for the Pryce family and the Newham 7 for example, were symbolically and practically bound together. The alliance worked itself on a mass level and, through protest politics, new social relationships were formed between the two local communities. On April 27, 1985 over 3000 people marched in support of the Justice for the Pryces campaign and the Newham 7 - Self Defense is No Offense campaign.



*Kenny Pryce, former chair of NMP speaking at the joint meeting to coordinate the Newham 7  
and Justice for the Pryces campaigns*

*Source: Ilona Aronovsky*



*Newham 8 Support picket at the trial of Asian youths charged  
for defending themselves against racial attacks.*

*Source: Ilona Aronovsky*

Blackness for Cilius constantly acquired new becomings as he worked through 1980s and 1990s through direct lived experience with black community-building in the context of the violent racism in Newham. His inhabitation of a black consciousness was therefore neither essentialized nor stagnant and instead presents itself as historically informed and a re-emergent mode of black consciousness that adopted itself to concrete racial conditions found within the inner-city margins of East London.

### **BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE WAR ON TERROR**

The conditions of racial and ethnic minority communities in Britain today and the forms of racism they confront have shifted and gained new complexities. The advent of the War on Terror, for example, is a major social force affecting the lives of minority people in Newham today. In 2006, the year I spent working in Newham and with NMP as both a caseworker and a researcher, the organization was involved in daily casework that involved police brutality, racial harassment and attacks. It was also beginning to develop an area of activism around the question of anti-Muslim racism and anti-terror policing.

NMP was organizing the campaign to seek justice for the anti-terror police squad's killing of Gill Charles de Menezes, the mistaken Brazilian immigrant who was shot to death by the 'shoot-to-kill' policy during the July 7, 2005 bombing period. Cilius was engaged in the de Menezes campaign and also with another campaign to provide support for a number of Muslim families in Newham who had been detained and placed under house arrest upon suspicion of having terrorist ties or Islamist beliefs.

Cilius' understanding of the changing contours of black consciousness and the practical tasks of black community activism is perhaps best understood through the specific ways he constructs an activist-theoretical understanding of racism. Contemporary sociological theory has tended to pluralize and then, to a large extent, reify the understanding of British racism, with concepts such as 'multi-racism,' 'racisms' and 'differential racism,' or even more particularistic forms such as 'anti-Black racism,' 'anti-Asian racism,' 'anti-Muslim racism' that struggle to capture the total systematic phenomenon and its relational dynamics. While greater attention to the particularistic nature of each form of racism has been gained, each form of racism then becomes compartmentalized as a singular phenomenon unrelated to and isolated from other experiences of racism.

The analysis of racism that emerges through the experience and standpoint of black community and movement building, however, actively works towards establishing grounds for mobilizing inter-relationships between the different experiences of racisms. The following is the way Cilius analyzed the contemporary moment:

'Communities experience racism differently in the sense that the practical, physical manifestation of what it deprives you of affects different groups in different ways. So, practical example -- when I was growing up, the racism meted out leant itself to the stereotype that Asians were hard-workers, shopkeepers, that their kids didn't really get into trouble and all the stuff of about 'Sus' and policing was most associated with Afro-Caribbeans.'

'You transport the word 'Sus' to thirty years in the future, to now, where you have the anti-terrorism legislation that is effectively 'Sus,' on suspicion, on sight because of what you look like focused now predominantly on Asians. These things go back and forth and it could

easily switch back. So our communities, the different communities that make up the black community, experience the same onslaught in slightly different ways.’

‘The question is -- is the difference enough to say that it is a completely different experience, that we have no points of connection and therefore have no interest to be connected?’  
‘And I would say no, that is not true. I would argue against that. I would turn it the other way around, what is it that is so different that says we don’t have a point of interest? You still get arrested for no reason on the same basis of who you are and what you like and what we think you might do. Which is no different to what Sus used to do with Afro-Caribbean people.’

At the same time Cilius also reflected on another changing context for racism, and that is the relative political invisibility of racism that was affecting African-Caribbeans. He attributed this invisibility to emergent myths that seemed to weave a narrative of racial progress for African-Caribbeans in Britain.

‘You could argue that the number of lynchings that took place in America in 1938 and compare that to the number of lynchings that took place in 2001, that the numbers in hard numbers is drastically different. But could you argue that things have got better for the black male when you compare the shootings down by police or killings through the death penalty?’

‘I have to say yes when the police in Britain say that they respond better to racial attacks now. Yes, because twenty years ago you did not even recognize the term while today you have things like the Racial Incidents squad, then in the broad framework of things--yes.’

‘But thinking that this is progress also helps to subdue black people. So everyone is jumping up and down saying oh look you have black newscasters, black this and black that, black people advertising washing powder now! We’re being told that things have got better, that

we've been absorbed. You have to recognize when they've been concrete and unshakeable steps forward, but you can't wrap it all up.'

'You have to pull it apart. What are we actually talking about? But when I look at our communities from a global scale—we have connections to other parts of the world and not just here in Newham—in the Caribbean, then you say no, you can't say that. If you're trying to persuade me that England, at the root core, is getting on top of this issue and genuinely trying to deal with itself or about Britishness, no way. My brother has a child, now this is the third generation born here, and the government still has fundamental problems in recognizing that black people are still here when they talk about having to integrate black people.'

Cilius' ability to theorize the changing targets, the changing issues and the changing emphases of racism reveals a political understanding that is grounded in problematic of community and movement-building that is geared towards comprehensively changing the material consequences of racism for different groups of black people. The consciousness of the political condition of the black community for Cilius is also transnational and globalized social consciousness. And it is from the vantage point of assessing the racialized states of inequality and injustice on a global scale that the local logics of cross-cutting interracial struggles become meaningful for a contemporary sense of black consciousness.

#### **PERMANENTLY OVERCOMING DIVISIONS IN THE STRUGGLING BODY**

At the same time, however, the loss of the hegemonic position of a shared multiethnic identity of blackness or a militant anti-racist politics in Britain has nonetheless required that NMP activists like Cilius adapt themselves and pragmatically tone down their rhetoric. Rather

than dispensing with the hard-won traditions of black community activism entirely, these activists have taken practical approaches towards engaging the concrete struggles of their social bases in the inner-cities of Britain.

In many discussions with Cilius I would keep coming back to the question of why it was necessary to retain the signifier of 'black.' He answered with the following:

'Let's go back to one of the guiding principles or concepts that I've lived by—this concept of black. It is a very difficult line to keep because this word black is so damn strong. So I have to be careful exactly in what context I say that because some of the people we try to help, if I describe them as black would probably not understand what I really mean by that.'

An example Cilius referred to was a training session that I had participated in for new Emergency Service (ES) hotline volunteers. The 24-hour ES service was a hallmark attribute of NMP's presence in the local community, as it provided full-time access to people who needed immediate responses to police abuse and racial harassment.

The session had been organized by a fellow NMP caseworker, Titilayo, and drew in people mainly from the African and specifically Nigerian community that she had ties with. There were also in the room a smaller number of South Asian volunteers who had drifted in.

'At the NMP training session that we just had I did use the term black and then after I said that I instantly said something about all ethnic minorities in general, simply because in that environment you trying to unify people and actually it may not be a unifying core. These things can destroy a campaign even before it gets off the ground, even who turns up at your door wanting to help you. So you have to acquiesce to the way the community currently operates because they feel comfortable with somebody from their own particular background.'

‘But the question is this: if that is so damn difficult why do you keep it? This is the argument: just let it go. A reasonable argument.’

‘But I’m an old dinosaur simply because I don’t fundamentally agree with dividing people up in their ethnic bits and pieces. That does not mean that I don’t recognize that people come from different backgrounds, but in the struggle we are engaged in, the end product of where this goes is people being divided into own little constituent groups to get what’s coming to them. The struggle then shifts to getting our slice for our people instead of talking of how you’re going to transform society rather than getting a bigger portion for ourselves.’

‘I’m a minority but I also still think that fundamentally we have to come back to this issue if we’re going to advance as a group of people, but I’m also a pragmatist. To get to see C I’ve got to go to B.’

‘Why Afro-Caribbean people are sometimes resistant to the notion of a wider black consciousness is that the past is so much about telling them that they don’t exist as a group of people, that you’re chattel, you’re not even human, that you’re the missing link between humanity and the apes, so for them they don’t want anybody else encroaching on what they have spent quite a lot of blood struggling to grab for themselves.’

‘But the practical reality for NMP in its work is that we don’t have time for these arguments with the very people we’re trying to help. Why? In the heat of the moment this is not what they want to hear, some intellectual argument. In the heat of the moment they want the police off their backs or they want to know who killed their son or daughter or why they’re being discriminated in this particular environment.’

‘Part of what we do is to build people so that people rally around other people. So if there is a family that is being abused you don’t just try to galvanize support from that particular



community, but from other communities as well to get them to see what is happening and to see what might happen to themselves a bit further down the line. That's the way it always works.'

'The current hysteria around Muslims is one of the difficult scenarios we've been in. You tell someone that you need to support that person over there. They will say but he tried to blow up this building or this plane, are you mad? Then you have to say on what evidence? Then people see the onslaught of the state if you put your head up and say I will support this people, and people say I'm not ready for that kind of heat and keep quiet. It runs right to the roots of NMP. Beyond Sus –the entire Muslim identity. The rhetoric behind Muslim is rhetoric behind the black community.'

In Cilius, and for the Newham Monitoring Project, black consciousness is a political tendency that links up differential racisms in reconfigurations of struggle. Therefore articulations are made between the questions of difference and the questions of grounding anti-racist resistance in the solidarity and alliance-building politics between Britain's racial and ethnic minority communities. The distinction that Cilius draws between a politics of social transformation as against a politics of ethno-racial competition that develops from the consciousness of differential racializations is an important political distinction.

One way to interpret this politics is to view the ethics of political blackness as politics that is steadfastly against the processes of underdevelopment and uneven development of different groups of racialized people, both globally in a North-South sense and within the inner-city localities of urban Britain. It is also a politics that is against the uneven development within racial minority communities themselves, where elites are created and sponsored for social mobility and political leadership.

The emphasis on community and mass participation in anti-racist politics is an important vector of this form of anti-racist politics. As NMP (Newham Monitoring Project 1985: 4) has argued since its founding, ‘At the end of the day, we believe that racism can only be altered by community self-organization and action. As a practical result of community action and campaigns, institutions and agencies have been forced to respond to racism and racist attacks in a serious, non-tokenistic way.’ The insistence on assessing anti-racist progress in this totalistic sense is critical for mobilizational forms of racial identities. The holistic nature of the social transformation sought by black consciousness therefore makes the struggle against the current political culture of fragmentation logical and urgent.

## Chapter 2: Groundings in Remembering Empire

It is a truism for anthropological work today to have to hear accounts of a researcher's positionality in order to develop decolonizing ethnographic narratives (Jacobs-Huey 2002; Mutua and Swadener 2004; Smith 1999) . Master interpellations of the fieldworker's positionality, however, are difficult to locate in the context of multiple subjectivity and diasporic formations. What is evident are the experiences of multiple interpellations that are themselves nuanced according to transnational, local and situational intersections. Furthermore, the processes of social interpellation according to overdetermined vectors of race, class, gender, diaspora and nationality are met in turn with one's own agentic decisions, collaborative designs and resistance on the part of the researched.

The turn to activist anthropology, which aims to locate knowledge production within the context of making social change is one mode of authorizing an ethnographic voice (Hale 2001). However, activist anthropology can emphasize the valorization of the individual researcher activist, while occluding the standpoints of struggling communities. The question of political accountability to the communities that anthropologists work with can become lost as requirements for theoretical knowledge production take precedence over situated political struggles. This is not an argument for pure action, but activist researchers do have the privilege of exiting the field and mobilizing their experiences for career-building projects. These complex questions necessitate a consideration of failure, and not merely triumphalism, for politically oriented ethnographic projects (Foley 1991; Visweswaran 1994). Each success or failure, however, will constitute new contradictions that have to be openly grappled with, as we keep moving in struggle.

In the context of locating myself as a participant observer researcher in Newham and an activist affiliated with the Newham Monitoring Project I grappled with the politics of seeking how to articulate my multiple and contradictory positionalities. Activist research positioning enabled me to carry out ‘relational organizing’ (Warren 2001), where issues were determined by the concrete struggles faced by people themselves. My location as a caseworker NMP was critical for enabling me to ‘build cooperative action’ with African, South Asian and African-Caribbean people who suffered from racial and state violence. Victories in the arena of concrete struggle are not always available or clear cut, but the relationships built in the process of struggle hold value and they helped to expand the depth of my political and intersectional racial identifications. As Grace Lee Boggs (2008) has argued, ‘We are all works in progress, always in the process of being and becoming. Periodically there come times like the present when the crisis is so profound and the contradictions so interconnected that if we are willing to see with our hearts and not only with our eyes, we can accelerate the continuing evolution of the human race towards becoming more socially responsible, more self-conscious, more self-critical human beings’.

I aim to develop a multi-sited politics of coming to voice, which articulates my own unfolding positionality as a researcher and as an allied activist, alongside other racialized and gendered black people in Britain. This coming to ethnographic voice aims to pay attention to the differentials of gender, racialization and different diasporic locations in creating a consciously polyphonic narrative which is unfinalizable (Bakhtin 1981). The strategy also allows for political work that connects interlocking oppressions. Cooperative and solidaristic anti-racist activist research work needs to account both for the shared victimizations of white supremacy and the shared complicity in the oppression of others who do not share our positional privileges.

The groundings of solidarity, therefore, are not only based on our shared victimizations, as Andrea Smith (2006) has argued, but also on unraveling our shared complicities in each other's oppressions.

Rather than seeking to become an expert cultural informant or elevating a single masculinist resistance voice I work to provide narratives of oppression and struggle that arise from multiple sites of experience. In this chapter I particularly try to grab a foothold on the history of the racialization of diasporic Sri Lankan Tamils, as it pertains to the many ways my own individual male subjectivity and a broader familial or collective experience has been shaped by colonial history. As Smith (Smith 2006: 72) cautions, 'in order to colonize peoples whose societies are not based on social hierarchy, colonizers must first naturalize hierarchy through instituting patriarchy. In turn patriarchy rests on gender binary system in which only two genders exist, one dominating the other'. The model of resistance that is based on 'heteropatriarchal racial nationalism', where masculinist anti-racist voices are representative of experience and subsume other gendered experiences, are themselves emergent from the logics of colonial inheritance (Alexander 2005).

Coming to a resistance voice is not an easy foothold to achieve, but a recognition of the provisional, and necessary contingency upon others, is an important basis for moving and questioning. The authorizing strategy here is relational rather than representative. And it is through the spaces of practical anti-racist activism in Britain that I was enabled to make such relational strategies materialize in both the researcher and activist roles. Having done so, however, is not to provide a narrative of triumphalism or a vindication of charismatic male leadership. But at the same time there is no reason not to self-critically and through dialogue move forward.

## FIELDWORK AND THE SOMATIC NORM

A coalescing pattern that seemed to connect my experiences with those of the people I encountered had to do with reconfigurations of the master trope of the illegitimate and interloping presence of racialized minorities who are not the 'somatic norm' in Britain. The difference of context is of course enormous, and it is the difference between suffering actual physical racial attack or racial discrimination in professional work. However, there are certain discursive logics that are commonly at play. As Nirmal Puwar (2004:8) asserts,

Formally today, women and racialized minorities can enter positions that they were previously excluded from. However, social spaces are not blank and open for anybody to occupy. There is a connection between bodies and space, which is built, repeated and contested over time...Some bodies are deemed as having the right to belong, while others are marked out as trespassers., who are, in accordance with how both spaces and bodies are imagined (politically, historically and conceptually) and circumscribed as being 'out of place'...they don't have an undisputed right to occupy this space. Yet they are still insiders.

During professional exchanges in Britain I was often asked, 'Why Britain?' and, as time went on, 'Why are you still here?' Britain, it seemed, was not a place where foreigners came to do fieldwork. In these questions, I heard a need to assess the legitimacy of out of place bodies, whose presence in the metropole causes a number of somatic disturbances.

I started to wonder why my presence needed such an open accounting of motives and positionality. And what was the right answer that would earn legitimacy? The demand for deep confessional revelations about my positionality seemed reserved for my unusual trajectory as someone coming from the Commonwealth via graduate school in the U.S. to study the question of race and racist violence within Britain. It seemed perfectly normal to have first world and white/western anthropology graduate students from departments all over the U.K. freely depart to points across the globe. Perhaps the anxiety lay in the reverse direction of anthropology's

usual trajectory - that of whites and first world located academics departing from western centers to study the proper nonwhite objects of anthropological inquiry out there.

At the same time, however, as Puwar (2004:1) observes, newly admitted women and racial minorities are nonetheless insiders within these professional fields, and this outside-insider status 'causes disruption, necessary negotiations and invites complicity'. One complicit strategy of authorizing an ethnographic voice for oneself is to function as an expert, a symbolic political representative (usually masculinist) or so-called 'native anthropologist' of one's own putative ethnic community. I often found myself explaining to other academics that I had intellectually come to this project via terms of family kinship. Kinship -a classic anthropological object- became a good way for me to present myself. It was a tried and tested method of understanding the motives of the 'native', and I began to utilize this 'racial slot' (Trouillot 2003) when I spoke to other academics. Many would nod and smile in understanding and acceptance. It is as if an ethnic tribal link had to be established and only then could the motives associated with my racial body and mind become intelligible. There was no simple Enlightenment investigator position to assume, or even pure intellectual curiosity to present, let alone conscious political objectives.

'I have some family here' I would start to explain.

'My grandmother's sister is somewhere in Nottingham,' I'd say, and yet it did not seem convincing to the listeners. The ties to Britain appeared to be thin and not primordial. I would try to elaborate, 'They came as refugees,' I would add. But immediately I would be aware of the potential negative connotations of this confession and I would hasten to add 'I don't really know where they are.' I could not find a way to pose my native anthropologist authority in a secure fashion and I turned towards the social distancing necessary for acceptance.

As soon as I would start to talk about kinship, the discomfiting subject of influx of ‘illegal’ immigrants, asylum-seekers and refugees would emerge. I would try to distance myself from my own discomfort that also stemmed from the reigning approbation surrounding the question of black immigration. It was a move to try and individuate myself from the taint of tribal belonging so as to aspire towards some dispassionate academic speaking position. My own contradictory move to claim a familial connection to rationalize my voice and my anxiety about the need to socially distance myself from my extended family was a recurring tension in my self-presentation to various authoritative voices.

Frequent checks and long processing times at the airports was another site for the production of an ambivalent positioning, as I was subject to rigorous and isolated questioning each time I entered and departed Britain during the fieldwork year. I was able to come to Britain and stay on for up to six months at a time without a visa, since I was New Commonwealth visitor with Malaysian nationality. I had to carefully walk a tip-toe of stating that I was doing research in Britain for my PhD, but I had to assure the border authorities that I had no intention or aspiration of working or settling here, which would thereby violate the terms of my Commonwealth pass. I had to be careful to show I was not trying to get myself employed through academic appointments. Taking an interest in pursuing an academic career in Britain was potentially a criminal act, and at the airport, I could feel the danger.

I also tried to downplay the family connections I had in Britain, in case that was another cause for suspicion of a possible intent to migrate. Any demonstrated inclination towards family reunification was no longer associated as a humane standard of behavior, but as a filter to weed-out would-be immigrants at border check-points. Nevertheless, I also had to provide addresses and names of the people I was staying with and detailed histories of how I came know them.



Once, while waiting for a flight back to the U.S., the immigration officer spotted me with some friends from the NMP and proceeded to carry out a detailed interview on how I had acquired these associations with ‘English friends’.

The immigration border into Britain appeared premised on the idea that black people were assumed to be surreptitious would-be immigrants unless proven otherwise. How had this state of fear and approbation against nonwhite Commonwealth migrants become dominant, despite the hundreds of years of inter-linked and inter-dependent colonial relationships? These tension-filled puzzles and ambivalences led me to examine the formation of my own research imagination and the way my bodily presence, and somatic abnormality, had become constructed historically, politically and conceptually in Britain.

As Uday Mehta (1999) has demonstrated, the British empire constructed a racial divide between what was a white *herrenvolk* and multiple black others who were tenuously included and excluded from fully belonging to the central and exemplary body politic that was the ‘mother-country’. It is this template of imperial contradictions, I argue, that establish a conception of British politics as primarily defined by hermetically sealed and institutionalized class politics made up of different classes of contending whites. The forgetting of empire helps to jettison any notion of institutional notion of class politics that sees analytical or political anti-colonial solidarity with the colonies or the formerly subject races moving into British shores. As will be discussed below, there exists, instead, volkish traditions where white social classes struggle with each other in order to form hegemonic social blocs.

In a public sphere comprised of parliamentary politics, media debates and multicultural or race relations policy-making, resistance against volkish whiteness is sometimes expressed in panics concerning rising electoral support for far-right political parties such as the National Front

in the 1970s or the present-day British National Party (BNP), the English Defense League and the United Kingdom Independence Party. Nick Griffin, the leader of the BNP, for example utilizes a revisionist history of the empire to structure a political narrative that helps to mobilize white backlash: ‘Ordinary British people’, argues Griffin, “did not benefit from colonialism”. Griffin class analysis pits elite whites as anti-racist or multicultural do-gooders against working-class white people: ‘The people who benefited were those who bought tacky, 19th century mansions. The vast majority of working people didn’t. We as a country benefitted in wealth terms and the colonized countries also benefited in some ways so we are quits on that’.

This simple act of closing the book on empire, or forgetting empire is not only the provenance of far-right politicians. The former Labor Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, in an important foreign relations speech in Tanzania, in 2005, also deployed a revisionist history of the British empire:

I’ve talked to many people on my visit to Africa and the days of Britain having to apologize for its colonial history are over. We should move forward. We should celebrate much of our past rather than apologize for it. And we should talk, and rightly so, about British values that are enduring, because they stand for some of the greatest ideas in history: tolerance, liberty, civic duty, that grew in Britain and influenced the rest of the world. (Brogan 2005)

Here, a mainstream politician is recasting the history of subjugation, extermination, colonization, divide-and-rule and exploitation of racialized peoples as part of the noble cultural diffusion of liberal western values to the rest of nonwhite world (Blaut 1993). An echo of Kipling’s ‘white man’s burden’<sup>1</sup> is heard. But whether it is a white supremacist politician who

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<sup>1</sup> Kipling’s (1899) poem conceptualizes whiteness as a civilizing burden, a noble sacrifice by whites, on behalf of infantilized subject races. The first stanza of the poem reads:

Take up the White Man's burden--  
Send forth the best ye breed--  
Go bind your sons to exile  
To serve your captives' need;  
To wait in heavy harness,

renders empire irrelevant to present-day discussions of race-relations in Britain or a mainstream politician who sees empire as the incubator of universal values, what there is in common is the dynamic of the forgetting of the actual empire and its embodied presences. It is this forgetting that shapes the discussion of the scope of belonging within Britain.

My search for being able to claim a legitimacy of presence as a researcher or activist in Britain invariably did keep coming back to the question of my extended family's apparently serendipitous presence in Britain. This presence could not be accounted for through functionalist kinship logics. Rather it requires a negation of the dynamics of forgetting empire, and demystifying Britain's colonial inheritance by revealing its cognates as a racialized polity. This requires a politics of remembering empire against the present cultural tendency that works to forget imperial social relations through nostalgic narratives about the loss of white localism and homogenous community (Gilroy 2005a). In order to do this it is necessary to trace the reconfigurations of the racial order in Britain through its postcolonial and post-imperial manifestations, and not simply upon the models of elite Kipling-esque white supremacy. The empire-to-nation transformation of Britain following decolonization is a historical process that reworks both elite and working-class subjectivities into new formations.

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On fluttered folk and wild--  
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,  
Half-devil and half-child.

## RACIALIZATIONS OF TAMILS

Sri Lanka and Malaysia are two former outposts of the British empire, and yet this history has been silenced and rendered irrelevant in the daily discourse about ‘illegal’ immigrants, refugees and asylum-seekers that are the staple of the media, especially the tabloid press, and its influence on contemporary political culture. During the long reign of the British empire, Tamils in both Sri Lanka and Malaysia had become institutionalized as a race apart from whites and other racial groups. They were assigned racial slots in various positions and functions within colonial racial hierarchies, transported as British subjects across commonly held colonial territories and following de-colonization rendered as ethnic minorities with very little political power or representation in either Sri Lanka or Malaysia.

Tamils became subject to discrimination, ethnic cleansing and genocide, and found themselves with nowhere to turn to, but on the same Britain that had engineered these historical conditions. Margaret Trawick, the American anthropologist of Sri Lanka, explains,

The British created animosities of whole birth categories of people against whole birth categories of people where there were no such animosities before. They essentialized what they considered to be races, and then deliberately or not, set those races against each other. The British, along with Western Europeans and Americans, at that time genuinely believed in the essential qualities of races, and of birth categories. Although they might have been in disagreement over what constituted the essential qualities of a particular race, such as Brahmans or Red Indians, there was little or no disagreement over the reality of distinct races, each with its essential, heritable qualities. This concept of essential qualities of one or another race haunts Sri Lanka still, and is what makes the war between Tamils and Sinhalese conceivable. (Trawick 2007: 12)

My research imagination therefore started to formulate a question on how the public sphere in Britain, after centuries of participating in building an expansive global empire, in a short half-century or so, could come to see itself as separate and abstract from that colonial past. Instead of trying to prove legitimacy as to why I was in the UK, I want to ground a standpoint that examines my extended family’s political experience of gendered racism and colonialism as a

way to disrupt white-centered British political discourse today, and not necessarily to shore up a gendered Tamil nationalism based on pure victimhood. A Tamil story is a part of an ensemble of stories presented in the dissertation.

But a Sri Lankan Tamil family history and the dynamics of British political culture? Not something you would be likely to hear in the halls of Westminster anytime soon. What on earth do they have to do with one another? I hear the halls ring. For whom is this articulation of a research question an exercise in absurdity?

### *The British Council Library*

When I was a teenager, I used to make a weekly trek on Saturdays on the ragged No.33 bus from my neighborhood in the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia to the heart of the capital in order to borrow English books from the British Council Library. My own high school had a library scarcely worthy of the name and there were hardly any bookshops in 1970s and 1980s Kuala Lumpur. This was strikingly unlike the situation now where you find multinational bookshops like Borders and Kinokunia in shopping malls everywhere. Seated atop a small hill overlooking the city's main square and former colonial administrative buildings, and just behind the police headquarters, the library was my portal to the outside world. Grabbing copies of the BBC short-wave radio magazine which was handed out free at the Library and roaming across what I considered to be its magnificent collection of books from the heart of the Anglophone civilization, I was exploring a world outside of usual confines.

I devoured the books as fast as I could and religiously tuned to the BBC World Service in order to listen to what I considered to be superior cultural programming and also, of course, the weekly radiocast of English football, which every Malaysian boy followed religiously. Rivaling

the popularity of English football were the writings of the British children's author Enid Blyton, whose grand adventure tales of schoolboys and schoolgirls in British elite boarding schools were the envy of every Malaysian student of my generation. It was also in the British Council Library that I came across mythical creatures like 'gollywogs' that I knew to be black and very dangerous, almost as dangerous as the 'gypsies' who stole children away.

I remember reading book after book searching for greater knowledge about the world and also somehow hoping that somewhere along the shelves there might a story or passage that had something to tell me about myself. I remember the day it first happened, when I came across a passage in a book in the library, which had anything at all to say about Tamil people. It was in book entitled *The Great Railway Bazaar* and it was authored by the writer Paul Theroux (2006) and published in mid-1970s.

Tamils are black and bony; they have thick straight hair and their teeth are prominent and glister from repeated scrubblings with peeled green twigs. Watch a Tamil going over his teeth with an eight-inch twig and you begin to wonder if he isn't trying to yank a branch out of his stomach... Tamils are also modest. Before they change their clothes, each makes a toga of a bed sheet, and, hopping up and down and working his elbows, he kicks his shoes and trousers off, all the while babbling in that rippling speech that resembles the sputtering of a man singing in the shower. Tamils seem to talk constantly—only toothbrushing silences them.

I never did realize until adulthood that Paul Theroux was an American writer. What I do remember was the sense of confusion and humiliation. Here was a portrayal of a community through the deficiencies of its degraded masculine representative. The degradation invites almost a violent contempt. Where does this contemptuous violence lead?

So this was how I am perceived within the annals of white Western civilization, within the august collections of the British Council. The description was funny, and I could grasp that the writer meant to make somebody laugh. I tried to laugh along and imagined the people I

knew, my family, as one of these Tamils described by Theroux. Well, it might describe so-and-so, but not me, I reasoned.

When I was growing up in Malaysia, the British empire seemed to exist in a state of decomposition. It was ostensibly gone, since Malaysia had gained independence in 1957, but its legacies were everywhere, especially within family conversations. Going to Britain for further studies was the dream of every ex-colonial family and for racial minorities in Malaysia, those groups brought over by the empire, and also those very groups now discriminated against by the state's educational policies, it was a way out. Getting to Britain meant not only prospects for education and social mobility, but a dream of entering a state free of racial discrimination, one where the principles of justice and equality reigned, and which would be applied to those of us both lucky and deserving enough to make it there.

The dream of the mother-country and the dream of Britain meant this for Tamils. Often caricatured as Anglophilia, the combination of rose-tinted nostalgia and rootless and stateless hope was and continues to also be indicative of what the anthropologist Edmund T. Gordon (1998) has analyzed as a resistance oriented form of differential self-making or 'Anglo-affinity', within post-colonial conditions. This valorization of colonial lineage is also found among English-speaking Creoles on the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua who face racial marginalization in relation to Spanish-speaking *mestizos*. In 2007, after a half century of independence from the British empire, ethnic minority Tamils, many of whom were the impoverished descendants of indentured laborers brought to Malaysia to work the rubber plantations following the abolition of the British slave trade, took to the streets in the largest mass protest of predominantly ethnic Tamils to support a class action reparations suit amounting some four trillion pounds against the British state for 150 years of exploitation.

Ironically the protestors who were demonstrating against their present marginalization in the Malaysian state were recalling both their historical oppression and their Anglo-affinity. Signs in the demonstrations carried appeals to the colonial sovereign against the Malaysian government, ‘THE QUEEN OF ENGLAND — THE SYMBOL OF JUSTICE, WE STILL HAVE HOPE ON YOU’, pleaded the banners. These political statements still seem to betray a quixotic belief in the eventual application British civilizational values that had been promised in exchange for becoming colonized.

The British empire is referred to by my parents’ generation as ‘white man’s time’, when we were ruled over, but supposedly on a fair basis. This is unlike the present state of affairs where Tamils are slotted as the other of a Malay-dominated post-colonial Malaysia and concomitantly suffer political marginalization, educational discrimination and persistent worries about the threat of racist violence. In contrast to all this, people selectively remember colonial boulevards that were lined with blooming rose trees, well-kept hill stations, songs of ‘God save the queen’ and free pencil boxes distributed during Queen Elizabeth’s coronation.

### *The Indo-Ceylon Café and everyday complicities*

On one of my first visits to Newham in 2003, when I started my collaborations with NMP, I headed out from central London on the District Line and went eastwards to the East Ham stop. Through the advice of family members living in London, I was told that there was a significant Sri Lankan Tamil community resident there. When I got out of the subway station I immediately knew I was in the right place when I saw sign after sign advertising Sri Lankan food and the Tamil writing script on a number of shops. Over the last three decades, East Ham had become one of the ethnic minority dominated wards within the borough of Newham, and there



was a Tamil community of 5000 here, mostly of people who had resettled as refugees and asylum seekers.

As I gazed up and down East Ham High Street I noticed how different the shopping atmosphere was in contrast to high-end tourist enclaves of Oxford Street. The majority of the people here were black and the fashions were Kanchipuram silk saris, salwar kameezes and jubbas. Mosques jostled in with Hindu temples and abandoned Christian churches that had now turned into community centers. Cell-phone stores abounded as did internet cafes, pubs and, of course, restaurants. Very few tourists came this far east, and in most central Londoners' eyes, this was considered the 'ghetto'. As I often heard, it was not at all like what you would think England is like. The lack of white English people automatically signified an area in London as a 'ghetto'.

As I walked about I saw a small eatery with about three tables that called itself the Indo-Ceylon café and I decided to have lunch there. The place was friendly. My initial conversation was with the two people who were in the restaurant. One was an old gentleman wearing a worn blue suit who was smoking a cigarette. He was clearly taking a break from work and the owners of the restaurant let him alone to take his cigarette break. I discovered later that the eatery ran a sort of luncheon subscription program, where workers in the area could pay a flat monthly fee and come in for regular meals and hang out. The unrushed atmosphere seemed like a good place for an anthropologist to deeply hang out and strike up a conversation. The man in the blue suit, though, did not speak much English and left as soon as I ordered a cup of milk tea and lamb samosa. Another person entered and he appeared to be some sort of security guard. He looked like he was of South Asian descent. I explained to him that I had recently arrived in London and asked him if there was anything interesting to see in Newham.

‘There is nothing nice to see here, Sir. You go to central London.’

Soon, another South Asian looking woman walked in with a young boy who was fairly light-skinned and appeared to be her son, followed closely by an elderly white gentleman. They joined in the conversation that was aimed to help me out of my misplaced views of Newham as a tourist destination. The woman’s name was Anne and I started to laugh when I saw that her son was wearing a cap with the Malaysian flag on it. How fitting to make my first trip to London and discover fellow Malaysians, already hanging out in the ‘ghetto’, I thought. The place started to feel very much like home. A conversation about the cap opened up a sense of the familiar and we exchanged the usual Malaysian pleasantries.

Anne was a nurse who had migrated from Malaysia in the 1980s and the elderly white man was her father-in-law Albert, a native East Ender, so to speak. Very quickly the Indo-Ceylon café became a lively place of conversation as the security guard, Anne, Albert and I started to discuss the state of the ‘ghetto’.

‘Sir, be very careful about this place,’ the security guard warned. ‘There are many thieves and thugs here.’

‘Yes, this area is known for pickpocket and snatchers’, Anne quipped in, ‘So be careful with your bag. You didn’t bring your passport did you?’, she asked with sincere concern.

‘No’, I replied. All of them proceed to tell me about how passports were a big draw for thieves in the area since there were so many ‘illegal’ immigrants about, hungry for documentation.

‘They found a body of a guy, abducted and dumped in plastic bag, just a few blocks from here. Cut up to pieces’, the security guard said.

‘Did they know why it happened?’ I asked. As he answered I almost choked on my food.

‘This place is terrible. You know here there are many refugees, asylum-seekers, from Sri Lanka - Tamils. They’re bloody rude. You ask them something and they say to you: watch out I will kill you!’ the guard exclaimed.

‘Why do they say that?’ I asked, trying to play it cool and not wanting to be outed as Tamil as yet. But at the same time I wondered, what made me different from the Tamils here? After all, I had dark skin and I could easily have been ascribed as one of the many Tamil people walking around.

‘I don’t know. It is not like in central London, where people are.’ He gestures towards himself and mimics putting a suit on. ‘They are civilized’, the guard explained.

At this comment, Albert, the white East Ender started to join in the conversation. ‘These asylum-seekers! I don’t know what the government is doing!’ he groaned. ‘Yeah, he added, ‘that’s why I am for the identity cards. If you don’t have anything to fear, then it’s ok innit?’

‘Sir, we have 90 000 asylum seekers, refugees, coming into UK! And all coming into Newham! I don’t know what the government is doing at the airport. Letting them all through,’ the guard says, and gestures like an immigration officer rubber stamping passports.

I wondered why he was compelled to refer to me as ‘Sir’.

‘They say they are refugees, but after a few years they are driving a Mercedes Benz. But you cannot say anything, it’s racist . . .’ the guard continued, very agitated, and, as he grew more vitriolic, he appeared to encourage Albert to speak up.

‘Yeah! These refugees don’t look to scared to me, yeah!’ Albert added.

‘I go to DSS office and I’ve been here 7 years’, the South Asian guard starts up again. ‘I have to bloody queue up, and these refugees they’re treated first!’ he shouts.

‘I’ve been here 7 years’, he repeats. This seemed to be his claim to legitimacy against the newcomers.

‘Where are you from?’ I asked, genuinely puzzled at his anti-Tamil and anti-refugee sentiments. Where was his South Asian solidarity or identity, let alone a politically black identity?

‘I from here, UK!’ he proudly boasted. ‘I been here 7 years, if I cannot get things, how these people get everything. They have big house, big car. I have English friend . . .’

‘But isn’t everybody who is black from somewhere?’ I pushed on, hoping to discover more of his mode of identification and the reason why he did not seem to identify with his fellow South Asians in the ghetto.

At this, the guard retorted, ‘I not talking about immigrants. Here refugees, illegal immigrants!’

And then, almost on cue, Albert chimed in. ‘Yeah, it used to be secure around here. Now, look at it. Back in my day we could play around here, and if we got into trouble, by the time we got back our parents would know. We were poor, but it was secure. Now!’

After it seemed like the conversation was reaching into fractious territory, Anne tried to ease the tensions.

‘Well, everybody has their opinions. These are some of the problems of the inner city. The government never gives money here. You look at Stratford, it used to be like East Ham,’ she said in reference to another ward in Newham, now more prosperous and the site of the future Olympic games in 2012.

‘Now it looks fine. But whenever the government gives money, it is always with a hidden purpose’, she reasoned.

Anne went on to explain the NIMBY-ism (Not-In-My-Backyard) policies she attributed to the government. She seemed very well read on current affairs and had a critical analysis of the media-hype on refugees. Funds had been allocated to impoverished wards such as East Ham in Newham to facilitate the resettlement of refugees and asylum-seekers, and thereby, in her view, protecting the middle-class and white boroughs from receiving a similar burden. And Stratford had been developed not out of concern for the well-being of the people who already lived here, but in order to facilitate the money-making bonanza the Olympics would bring for people and corporations that had nothing to do with Newham. A large settlement of traveler or ‘gypsy’ people had already been removed to make way for the construction of the main stadium.

This conversation enabled me to perceive some of everyday fault-lines and racialized social antagonisms that ran through Newham, often described as the most diverse borough in the country. There were considerable anti-refugee sentiments raging in the public discourse in 2003, driven especially by the media campaigns produced by the popular tabloid newspapers. The hysteria around the arrival of non-white refugees and asylum-seekers had no correspondence in material reality, as the numbers were relatively modest. But these anti-refugee and anti-asylum seeker antipathies, like the anti-black immigration debates of the 60s and 70s, was becoming linked symbolically and logically within the local context in terms of diminishing social welfare provisions and moral panics around crime.

These sentiments coalesced around the local figure of the Sri Lankan Tamil refugee, who is associated with a culture of barbaric ethnic violence and suicide ‘Tamil Tiger’ bombers. For example, an Independent news article reported the geographical determination of Tamil-bounded cultural grouping in the following manner: ‘The breakdown of traditional values and

ties within Tamil families, as well as rivalries exported from Sri Lanka, are leading to an increasingly violent culture among their young men' (Bennetto 2003).

The article was in response to a rising visibility of violent Tamil male gangs among the 100,000 strong Tamil community in London. And yet the article made no reference at all to the social conditions of refugees and asylum-seekers living within Britain itself. Instead, Tamils were supposedly a race apart and it was 'their' self-induced problem the media seemed to be saying. Most of the young men involved in the gangs had been born in the U.K. or had arrived at a young age following the start of the Tamil exodus from the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict and anti-Tamil pogroms that were unleashed in July 1989. It was a war that lasted until 2009 with another round the slaughter of almost 20,000 Tamils in the short months that the Sri Lanka military moved to militarily resolve the ethnic conflict.

The settlement of Tamils in East Ham was a part of this historical diasporic formation that arose out of people exiting the conflict and re-locating across Europe through internationally agreed upon human rights provisions under the 1948 Geneva Convention on Refugees. Britain adopted this convention after it had itself turned away many fleeing Jewish people during the Holocaust. However, by the 2006 general elections, the Conservative political party had made a complete withdrawal from this treaty one of its campaign platforms as way to show that it was tougher on immigration than the other political parties.

It was true that the intra-community violence within the Tamil community was at a serious level, and it was not uncommon to see posters of slain Tamil youth adorning the telephone poles in East Ham High Street. Usually the young men's biographies would read 'born in Sri Lanka, died in East Ham.' The latter aspect of the condition of Tamil youths' lives seemed completely invisible to the media, and would remain invisible. In fact, the problem of gang

violence within a black ethnic minority community was inserted with the emerging race-relations framework of ‘community cohesion.’ The analysis was put forward that fractured Tamil communities were lacking ‘proper community cohesion or networks [and] that the influence of elders and traditions is being lost’. As the article went on Tamil gangs included groupings formed along village of origin lines but also according to ‘parts of London they live in’ such as ‘East Ham, Southall, Tooting, Wembley, Harrow and Walthamstow,’ all impoverished and deprived inner-city areas.

The mainstream belief was that Tamils brought their self-contained and ahistorical cultural pathologies with them, and the failure of such minority groups could be conceptualized along two frameworks – the disintegration of traditional cultural control and the incomplete absorption into new forms of social control within contemporary post-colonial Britain. Some non-Sri Lankan Asians, such as the South Asian security guard I encountered in the Indo-Ceylon café, appeared to be defining themselves in contrast to Tamils by virtue of distinctions that mobilized the dominant racial and cultural framework about refugees and asylum-seekers and positioned themselves as successful ethnic minorities. This involved displaying disciplinary patriarchal traditional community features and linking such cultural difference with ‘modern’ British values that were aspirational and assimilationist in orientation. Such distinctions utilized the binary terms of the dominant racialized discourses: pure traditionalist vs. hybridized ‘ghetto’ ethnic minority cultures, legal vs. illegal immigration status, hard-working economic migrants vs. asylum-seeking migrants and integration-friendly minorities vs. pathological and illiberal minority cultures.

Albert and the South Asian security guard’s repartee derived from different social locations but they were complicit concerning their general antipathy towards the ‘bad’ and

illegitimate racial minority groups in their midst. Participation in the narratives that empower white supremacy do not only involve whites, but are mobilized by racial minority communities against the lower classes within their communities and constructions about new interlopers.

The failure of the guard to discern my Sri Lankan Tamil background had much to do with the way my education and accent distinguished me from the multitude of refugee Tamils. Many East Londoners would notice my 'formal' English accent, which was not quite the standard 'Queen's English', but neither was it identifiable as a local Cockney accent associated with London's East End. I think this provided me the racial slot of a 'successful' ethnic minority within the context of Newham. Speaking good English in the British context is an important marker of social distinction. It is not merely the ability to speak English in general, but the ability to speak what is considered to be an educated formal version or close to it that is absolutely a requirement for employability, social mobility and status.

Hence, I observed a few elite members the Tamil community mobilizing resources in order to send children to proper 'elocution' tutors and to search for ways to enter 'public' (i.e. private) schools so that their children could possess 'public school' English. There were the compulsions for such complicities for even in 21st century Britain the ability to enter 'public' schools marked the route into social mobility: 76% of all of Britain's judges, 68% of the barristers, 55% of the solicitors, a third of the Members of Parliament, and more than half of all the media staff were products of 'public' schooling, even though only 7% of all British students were schooled in them (Garner and Russell 2006). And since such accomplishments within the local context were not associated with lowly Tamil cultural traits or socially immobile refugee social status, I was not interpellated as one of them.



## EAST LONDON WHITE IDENTITY POLITICS

Many middle-aged and elderly white East Londoners I casually encountered in daily life created distinctions between themselves and all black people in terms of their assumed natural and primordial ability for creating cohesive communities that naturally displayed desired British values. This natural predilection towards ‘community cohesion’ was seen to have been historically and traumatically ruptured by the increasing influx and disruption of black people into the borough. Working-class whites I encountered repeatedly rationalized the changing racial composition of the inner-city in terms of a perceived institutional bias in favor of black people.

Specifically, they perceived themselves as class victims of the state. This was a political narrative that was redeployed by the elite political class as well. In January 2010, for example, John Denham, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government participated in a forum to defend the then ruling Labor party’s record on race equality and to usher in a new framework for its Equalities Bill. Notable in his speech was the linking of the question of racial equality to the political phenomenon of white working-class backlash against multicultural policies. Dunham reappraised of the role of social class in public policy, a move that has emerged as a new rhetoric which limits the horizon for state intervention in anti-racism and ties such policies to the question of white voter backlash. Denham announced,

But all of this action to promote fairness for one group can be seen as unfair in another. Class still matters in Britain and the politics of identity ignores it at its peril. The very positive and growing self-confidence of minority communities can actually be seen as a threat to communities under pressure. Of course, this does not mean that we step back on our action to tackle racism, to address discrimination or to promote equality. You don’t go forward by going backward. But we do have to recognize how that action may be perceived. (Denham 2010)

Denham’s articulation of official anti-racist thinking reveals how anti-racism and racial progress for blacks has become yoked to white community concerns and potential resentment

and backlash. I draw on the American legal scholar, Derrick Bell's conceptualization of 'interest convergence' to explain the emergence of this framework for the state's anti-racism (Bell 2004). Bell offers a theory of racial justice that argues that 'The interests of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites', rather than being determined through the 'character of harm suffered by blacks' (Bell 1995: 22). Furthermore Bell argues that white dominated polities in the U.S. will traditionally not provide racial justice remedies that 'threaten the superior societal status of middle – and upper-class whites'.

In truth, Bell further argues the development of racial justice legislation and judicial remedies that provide for a measure of racial equality for black only emerges when such remedies are the 'outward manifestation of unspoken and perhaps subconscious judicial conclusions that the remedies, if granted will secure, advance or at least not harm societal interests deemed important by middle-and upper-middle class whites' (Bell 1995: 23). In the U.K. context, Denham's official musings invoke the figure of working class white communities who are seen to be victimized by racial justice. Specifically, in his speech, he mentions whites in the construction industry who, in his argument, are subject to unfair labor competition and declining safety standards due to the influx of immigrant trades people.

In response to the potential backlash by a section of out-flanked white workers, Denham invokes a popular analysis of racial antagonism driven solely by labor market competition (Bonacich 1972) to argue that unscrupulous capitalist employers would take advantage of labor segmentation in order to hire cheaper and more vulnerable immigrant labor over native labor. The issue here is especially in relation to the recent influx of immigration from the Accession 8 (A8) countries, which are principally from the poorer nations of Eastern Europe that had been

admitted into the European Union in 2004. What is notable about Denham's remarks is that he appeals to the disenfranchised white working-class voter through discourses about tightening controls on non-EU migration.

White sentiments against non-EU black immigration emerge out of a politics of forgetting about the empire. The long-standing presence of black people in Newham, such as that exemplified by The Colored Men's Institute or the history of black social movements, hardly comprises the mythical sense their 'East End' by white East Londoners. These white British communities once lived and worked in good industrial jobs or in the London docks and are presumed to have been free of social conflict and social ills, unlike the present state of affairs in the multiracial and multicultural 'ghetto' that East London has become. It is the memory of whites' work identities and hermetically sealed social fabric, as separate from the imperial context that gave rise to the jobs in the first place, that is part and parcel of the dynamic of forgetting.

Both the docks that received materials from the colonies and the industries that produced goods for export through the same docks and back to the colonies are shed of their colonial associations and therefore their long historical inter-dependence with black people in the colonies. Working-class whites imagine themselves as separate from the broader political economy of empire that gave rise to their identities. De-industrialization and the loss of dockyard work through the containerization and mechanization of the imperial docks destroyed most of the local political economy by the late 1960s and 1970s. With this went the racially homogenous and individually fulfilling cohesive social fabric, even as some more prosperous elements of the white working class had accumulated enough to abandon Newham for the surrounding suburbs

in Essex or Ilford. However, such class fragmentation or ‘embourgeoisment’ is also necessarily forgotten.

Whites appear to locate their sense of identity and prior ownership of the borough through remembered childhoods, which, like childhood itself, is irretrievably lost. East London was a place where they were a part of a community, where nationalist block parties occurred during St. George’s Day, and there was a common mono-cultural local identity where people ate in English food café’s and fraternized in neighborhood pubs. Though they were of different religious denominations, they were all Christian. They also expressed patriotic support for the local football team, West Ham United, whose working-class coterie of players made up some of the key players of the World Cup winning English squad of 1966. This was the greatness of East London, and even though they were poor, they were capable of dominating the world.

All this that was solid was lost for whites who did not achieve social mobility and to this day remain stuck in contemporary Newham. For these whites, their sense of loss appears legible and gains potent meaning when it is linked to the continuous influx of nonwhite immigrants into the borough. These immigrants, despite their legal or illegal status, are nonetheless seen to be illegitimate because they are out of place in whites’ remembered childhood images of the borough. The new immigrants are perceived to bring with them a Babel of culture and social ills that make the place unintelligible. Even the use of English as the lingua franca of the borough is experienced as a traumatic loss of white sociability. In Newham, I was often overhead exchanges such as the following,

‘People no longer speak English in the buses!’

‘Hey you, do you speak English?’

‘Yes, I speak English as well as you do.’

‘Are you trying to be cheeky?’

And yet what seems to have been forgotten is that working-class whites are themselves discriminated against for the lack of formal English and their inability to rise above the Cockney accent that fixes their low social status. Working-class whites seem to imagine themselves as undifferentiated or aligned with socially superior white elites in their allegiance to nationalist markers of identity. It appears that racial difference is privileged by East London whites in terms of their local identities, and this often is routed through the heroic memory of participation as foot soldiers and survivors of the world wars. At one point, residential areas north of Barking Road, where nonwhites predominated, was dubbed ‘no-man’s land’ by local whites. Blacks are not even in some sense the enemy; they are intelligible only as a constitutive absence within an authentic white East London.

Black migrants are lumped together and are perceived to have taken over authentic East London by visually transforming the borough with their ethnic corner-shops and inter-racial marriages. The fact that commercial high streets like that in East Ham or Green Street were dilapidated for decades following de-industrialization and managed to only house charity shops selling used clothes is forgotten. The commercial streets now are a sign to many whites of the ascendance of black people, and these changes are linked to how blacks are privileged by the government over and above native whites. The refugees and asylum-seekers are only the latest groups of black people seen to be privileged over local whites and poor whites are relegated to ‘steerage class’ as nonwhites are allowed to ascend to ‘first class.’ The forgetting of empire conjoins with a deeply felt sense of loss and betrayal of the whites-only social contract.

## FORGETTING EMPIRE ON THE WAY TO EUROPE-CENTRIC NATIONHOOD

The processes of the nation-building and the positioning of black people as marginal citizens in Britain has had manifold manifestations since the post-World War Two period. But what all colonized subjects of the British empire hold in common is an imaginary relationship with the so-called 'mother-country' that determined the way their agentive trajectories could historically take shape. The mass arrival of British empire subjects, through the right to entry and abode within the mother-country, facilitated a large-scale settlement process of people from Caribbean, South Asian and African colonies that peaked in absolute numerical terms between 1956 and 1974.

The "privileged metaphor of 'race'" was the idiom to discuss the black immigration of 1960s and 1970s Britain. As Kobena Mercer (Mercer 1994: 275) argues, the racialization of immigration positioned former colonial subjects through "the labor process, in the political process, in social relations" into a racial hierarchy within post-colonial Britain. The rationale for open immigration from the colonies was initially buttressed by the British state's need for labor reserves to shore up its post-war domestic labor shortage. This economic rationale, however, came into conflict with the political logic of white supremacy. The contradiction lay between what Lisa Lowe has identified as the "capital imperative" and the "political imperative" of white-supremacist western states (Lowe 1996: 15). Post-imperial Britain utilized its colonial relationships to elicit cheap factors of production, but this process collided with the political redevelopment of Britain as a hermetically sealed and autochthonous white-dominated polity, rather than as a globally expansive empire.

What emerged out of this contradiction was a long-term immigration tendency that continues to steer between closing borders specifically to nonwhite Commonwealth migration, or

black people as a whole, and ambivalently opening them up towards non-black immigrants more broadly. Hence a dynamic to systematically regulate, modulate and manage black immigration, beginning with the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, was put into place to try to extricate black immigration from Britain's economic and political needs (Paul 1997). Even as essential Commonwealth labor immigration into the municipal services, transportation, health care and factory work was then barely beginning to take off in the 1950s, elite Britons were already beginning to mobilize support for regulating immigration through appeals for maintaining the racial integrity and coherency of a white post-colonial Britain (Carter 2000).

Winston Churchill, as early as 1954, framed his arguments against black immigration through the tropes of racial miscegenation - 'It would be a Magpie society', he claimed, and 'that would never do' (Carter, Harris, and Joshi 1987). This theme of the biological racial degeneration of Britain was developed by other Conservative politicians, including Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of blood' speech in 1968, which also argued that Britain was undergoing cultural degeneration through its acceptance of black immigration, and threatened that unbridled black immigration would be met with racist violence .

These elite mobilizations of race and the shaping of a post-colonial racial discourse that conceptualizes Britain as undergoing a threat to its fundamental racial core has proven to be a consistent electoral vote-getter. In the 1964 general elections the Conservative candidate Peter Griffiths won the West Midlands constituency of Smethwick, a Labor Party stronghold in the general elections of 1964, by affecting a 7.2% swing to the right. He ran a campaign that had as its slogan, 'If you want a [n-word] neighbor, vote Liberal or Labor' (Kettle and Hodges 1982: 45-46). The victory of Griffiths and the defeat of his Labor Party opponent, Patrick Gordon-Walker, who like many members of both the Labor and Conservative parties at the time had

initially opposed immigration controls, meant that upholding of the historical rights of black British subjects to enter Britain became ‘the greatest potential vote-loser’ in British politics. The development of anti-black immigration as a popular issue with white working-class social bases eventually moved the Labor party to abandon its pro-immigration and pro-New Commonwealth policies as well (Hansen 2000).

By the time of the Margaret Thatcher administration in Britain the immediate right of entry into Britain for colonial and ex-colonial subjects had become decisively abolished. Thatcher had made a famous television appearance while campaigning for the 1979 general election where she claimed that ‘People are really rather afraid that this country might be swamped by people with a different culture’. She was similarly successful in utilizing the immigration issue to affect a significant swing vote in order to capture power, thus ushering in eighteen years of Conservative party rule and the dismantling of the social welfare state.

The political work of elites has been met with favorable reception by white working-class social bases not only through voting behavior but also through sustaining postcolonial forms of possessive white identities. During the course of research undertaken for the study, *What’s new about new immigrants in 21st century Britain* (Berkeley, Khan, and Ambikaipaker 2005), that I co-authored with Robert Berkeley and Omar Khan, I discovered a cache of political cartoons archived at the Runnymede Trust collection housed at Middlesex University. The cartoons were from the 1960s and 70s and were published in the popular tabloid presses that aim to cater to the tastes of mainly by working-class constituents. Many of these cartoons schematized the developing popular opposition towards black immigration from the empire in terms that positioned whites as post-colonial victims of an invading black multitude.



The following cartoon, which appeared in the Daily Express in 1972, is a case in point. It shows a hyper-miscegenated Afro-Asian male imperial subject, exercising his right to enter Britain. The subject's lack of racial purity is juxtaposed to the superordinate whiteness of the male police officer, an upholder of law and order, not only in a criminological sense, but also as it appears in a normative racial sense. The image conveys a white masculinist self-image of Britain as confused, anxious, confounded and helpless to stem the tide of black immigration that is bound up with illegitimate miscegenation. These legal-historical and biological miscegenations are counterposed to an ex-nominated white heteropatriachal social order that now remembers colonialism as a misadventure.

The border is presented as porous and chaotic in the shape of multiple black subjects of empire entering the UK and breaking down a racially stable polity. For whites – depicted in the cartoon as being relegated to gate 799 of 800-- the arrival of black British subjects meant that they were about to be reduced from a supremacist racial position to one which implied potential equality with a variegated horde of subject races. Black immigration then is seen to threaten the putative order of racial hierarchy and white supremacy.



My father was a Congolese headhunter who married an Indo-Australian missionary domiciled in Uganda, and I was born in a B.O.A.C. aircraft on charter to Bolivian Air Lines. Which gate please?"

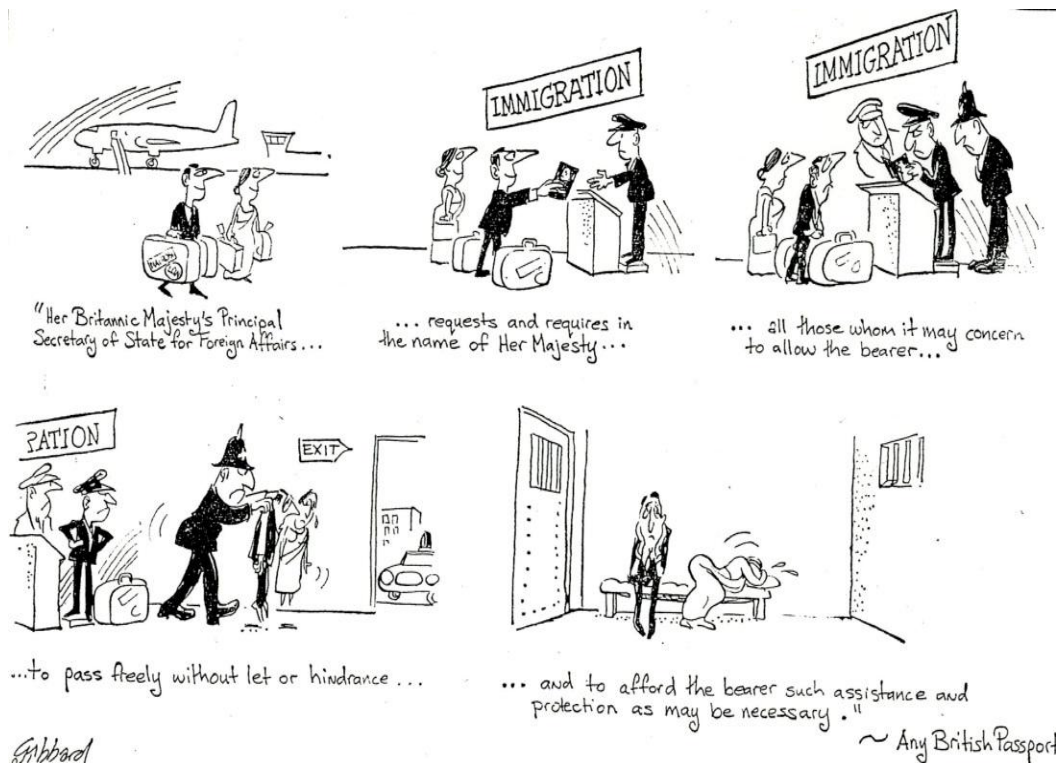
*1972 Immigration cartoon from the Daily Mail*

*Source: Runnymede Trust Archives*

This post-colonial reframing of the British nation has had the effect of recasting nonwhite members of the empire as no longer equal British subjects who carried with them imperial citizenship rights. It created a new category and a political narrative which subsumed their former identities into a novel construction of black people as ‘immigrants’ who were invading Britain and dispossessing whites. The impulse towards the criminalization of such black mobility is announced. Black British subjects were rendered as ahistorical interlopers. The legal and historical basis of British subjects to exercise citizenship rights within the mother-country was progressively undone and has been effectively forgotten.

Those citizenship rights once conferred under the 1948 British Nationality Act had rendered members of my family, including by grandfather, Veeramuthu Arunasalam, as a legal

and legitimate British subject. He was granted citizenship under the 1948 act on two grounds. The first was that he was born in Ceylon (modern day name – Sri Lanka), which was Britain's first crown colony that it acquired from the previous Dutch empire between 1796-1801 and directly ruled until 1948. The second basis of citizenship was on 'the ground of crown service under Her Majesty's government in the United Kingdom'. In his application, my grandfather states, 'I am employed as Goods Agent, Malayan Railways, Kuala Lumpur'. His application for United Kingdom citizenship was thus approved on January 9, 1957. The developing antagonism against black immigration renders the exercise of such citizenship rights to be both formally and practically null and void. The following 1970s cartoon from the liberal newspaper, the Guardian, illustrates how these broad shifts begin to criminalize and adversely affect the treatment of black immigrants at border security check-points. The cartoon depicted the reception that greeted thousands of stateless South Asians coming into Britain following the Kenyan and Ugandan crises.



1970s cartoon in the Guardian on immigration

Source: Runnymede Trust Archives

The racialized nature of anti-immigration hysteria has continued to mobilize anti-black tendencies, despite the long-term empirical decline of black immigration. While the present-day target of the new immigration panics is stimulated by Eastern European immigration, the way Britain has moved to resolve the panic has once again reverted to the post-colonial anti-black immigration dynamic, albeit in coded ways. This coded discourse of anti-black immigration control emerges as part of the debates concerning the question of 'non-EU' immigration. This new form of anti-black immigration politics crystallized during the course of the general election of 2010.

During this election campaign promises were made by all parties to cap all non-European Union migration into Britain as a way to offset and compensate for the increased immigration

numbers from Eastern Europe. The campaign fervor against non-EU immigration principally implied immigration from the former parts of the British empire. Of the approximately half-million people who immigrated to Britain between 2008 and 2009, only some 200,000 were from non-EU countries, and yet this was construed as the problematic immigration flow (Home Office and DWP 2009). The largest groups of non-EU migrants were from Africa and South Asia, among them were the very same nations that Britain had ruled and whose peoples were once considered legal United Kingdom citizens.

During the heat of the election campaign in April 2010, Gordon Brown, the Prime Minister, dealt his re-election campaign a bad publicity blow when he was caught making seemingly disparaging statements about an elderly white Labor party supporter he had met on the campaign trail. The media went up in arms over the supposedly elitist comments made by Brown after he had a face-to-face conversation with the woman, Gillian Duffy, a 65 year-old pensioner who quizzed him about immigration issues. Brown apparently exchanged pleasantries with the woman who had been heckling him earlier and, upon exiting the conversation, was caught on microphone saying, "That was a disaster – they should never have put me with that woman." When asked what about the exchange with Duffy that made him upset, Brown answered again on mic, "Everything, she was just a bigoted woman" (The Guardian 2010).

A media backlash ensued about Brown's labeling of Duffy as a 'bigoted woman' and the gaffe seemed to lift a veil of Brown's claim to be at ease and at one with the ordinary British voter. This voter could not be more quintessentially figured than Duffy, an elderly retired white working-class woman from Rochdale, who described herself as an 'ordinary woman', and who had worked at the local council for 30 years. The tension between Brown and Duffy symbolized a classic and proper theme in British politics – the question of social class between whites, where

elites with seemingly liberal racial views are pitted against more intransigent and ethnonationalist working-class whites, whom they must depend upon for legitimacy, in this case through electoral support. Political candidates must be able to show that they can identify with and relate to the white working-class voter in order to secure their consensus to rule, and Brown had seriously compromised his credibility on this note. A released transcript of the exchange revealed the nature of the offending exchange<sup>2</sup>:

Duffy: Look, the three main things that I had drummed in when I was a child was education, health service and looking after people who are vulnerable. There are too many people now who aren't vulnerable but they can claim and people who are vulnerable can't get claim.

Brown: But they shouldn't be doing that, there is no life for people on the dole anymore, if you're unemployed you've got to go back to work. At six months –

Duffy: You can't say anything about the immigrants because you're saying you're – but all these eastern Europeans coming in, where are they flocking from?

Brown: A million people come in from Europe, but a million British people have gone into Europe, you do know there's a lot of British people staying in Europe as well. So education, health and helping people, that's what I'm about.

Duffy: I hope you keep to it.

Brown: It's been very good to meet you. And you're wearing the right color today! How many grandchildren do you have?

Duffy: Two.

Brown: What names are they?

Duffy: They've just come back from Australia where they've been stuck for ten days they couldn't get back with this ash crisis.

Brown: They got through now?

Duffy: Yes.

Brown: We've been trying to get people back quickly. But are they going to university, is that the plan?

Duffy: I hope so. They're only 12 and 10.

Brown: They're only 12 and 10! But they're doing well at school?

Duffy: Yes. Very good.

Brown: A good family. Good to see you.

Duffy: And the education system in Rochdale I will congratulate it

Brown: Good. Good to see you, take care.

[In car] That was a disaster. Should never have put me with that woman. Whose idea was that?

Aide: I don't know, I didn't see.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/politics/article7110540.ece>

Brown: Sue's, I think. Just ridiculous.

Aide: Not sure if they'll go with that one.

Brown: Oh they will.

Aide: What did she say?

Brown: Everything. She's just this sort of bigoted woman who said she used to be a Labor voter. Ridiculous (*The Guardian* 2010)

In the aftermath of the gaffe, Brown worked quickly to apologize to Duffy and Labor party leaders scrambled to do damage control. Lord Mandelson, Labor's business secretary professed further repentance by stating, 'For the government and the Labor party as a whole, we are compassionate people, we care about others like Mrs Duffy, we respect her point of view.' The discourse of immigration control and the demand for elite politicians to foreswear allegiance towards white British working-class anti-immigration sentiments have come to occupy an important function in a democratic but racially exclusive form of consensus-building. Despite the shifting targets and different xeno-racist forms accompanying the immigration control issue, what continues to emerge is the renewal of 'racial solidarity' (Hooker 2009), between different classes of whites.

The threat of immigration as directly and causally linked to the scarcity of social welfare state provisions and services for white working-class has held sway as unquestioned political sense for more than a half a century. A recent editorial on immigration in the *Financial Times* echoes the familiar refrain that 'the surge in immigration from the rest of Europe has put a big strain on public services in some areas. Waiting lists for doctors' surgeries, housing and school places have lengthened... officials must be open about how these goods are distributed. Rumors of government favoritism to immigrants are a favorite claim of racists'. This common sense brokers an agreement with political elites who are pursuing agendas that aim to weaken the social welfare state and the social democratic consensus with the white working-classes that had been achieved following World War Two. This immigration-social welfare scarcity linkage is

one that is effectively de-linked from any ideological or political critique of the neoliberal retrenchment of the social welfare state that has been aggressively pursued by both Conservative and New Labor governments, and shifts the focus of resentment instead onto immigrants broadly, and black immigrants especially. The trope of immigration control as a populist issue is vital as a symbolic terrain for how white communities and white politicians can seek common ground and morally identify with one another.

In the case of Brown, he was publicly dressed down and disciplined so that he would better identify with the counterfactual belief status rather than the truth status of his white working-class constituent's 'bigotry'. In so doing he was attempting to re-suture the relationship of the white political class with white working-classes.

During this controversy, though, the fact that Duffy's own family members were themselves immigrants to Australia was neither picked up or its ironies commented upon by the media. The erasure of this important detail has to do with the normalized functions of the politics of forgetting about empire. White British settler emigration is only possible within the context of the colonialism and conquest of non-white lands, which is historically the case for Australia. The unremarkable fact of this important detail reveals certain tacit social organizing principles and a racialized global divide between white diasporas and black diasporas. The expansive mobility of settler whites within the context of colonialism, imperialism and globalization is seen as legitimate, while the reverse flows of black immigrants into Britain through the exercise of colonial citizenship, family reunification, economic migration, refugee and asylum-seeking processes are not.

This contrast between white emigration and black immigration had also been historically developed in the context of 1960s and 70s Britain during the debates concerning the mass



settlement of black British subjects. In fact, black immigration was framed in the emerging debates of the era as posing a direct threat not only to an autochthonous white British population, but equally towards the ‘kith and kin’ diasporas that had been formed through white settlement in places such as Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Canada and so on.<sup>3</sup>

The following cartoon positions white ‘kith and kin’ diasporas from these countries as victims of black immigration. Their blackface attempts are meant to convey that black immigrants from the empire were superseding the racial kinship privilege of free entry into Britain. And it further implied that it was the waves of black immigration that would now ironically require an act of racial degeneration in order for them to enter Britain.



"You're too late, cobber—she just sank under the weight of immigrants."

*1970s Cartoon on white immigration into Britain*

*Source: Runnymede Trust Archives*

<sup>3</sup> At the present moment over 200, 000 British people emigrate out of Britain every year, mainly to Australia, New Zealand, France and Spain (Daily Telegraph 2007).

The question of immigration continues to be racialized, and while today the immigration of non-white people into Britain has been systematically curtailed and criminalized through the common agreement to restrict non-EU immigration, the continuous re-opening of the debate on the right of immigration of black people into Britain nonetheless fulfills a constitutive political function for the racial polity. This political function has been conceptualized by the philosopher Charles Mills as the ‘racial contract’ that is tacitly embedded in Western liberal democratic political states. Mills argues that the racial contract is a ‘set of formal or informal agreements or meta-agreements’ between whites to categorize and assign nonwhites ‘subordinate civil standing in the white or white-ruled polities’(Mills 1997: 11).

My argument follows that, in the British context, both state and society are sutured through the reproduction of a racial contract between whites where whiteness, that is to say the maintenance of white identities, the struggle for white racial solidarities across class, white political representation and interests becomes defined and maintained as the predominant material and ideological priority of British political and institutional processes. But as Mills explains,

One has to learn to see the world wrongly, but with the assurance that this set of mistaken perceptions will be validated by white epistemic authority, whether religious or secular. Thus, in effect, on matters related to race, the Racial Contract prescribes for its signatories an inverted epistemology, an epistemology of ignorance, a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions (which are psychologically and socially functional), producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world that they themselves have made. Part of what it means to be constructed as ‘white’ (the metamorphosis of the sociopolitical contract), part of what it requires to achieve whiteness, successfully to become a white person...is a cognitive model that precludes self-transparency and genuine understanding of social realities. (Mills 1997: 15)

The forgetting of empire, the forgetting of the historical rights of belonging and the question of the British empire’s accountability to black people are necessary cognitive erasures in the

reproduction of the racial polity. Black people's presence in Britain is disruptive of a white-only social contract, and it requires an enormous amount of continuous hegemonic work within the dominant public sphere and political culture to restrict, regulate, manage and control that presence within a proper racial order.

### **RACIAL ATTACK AND THE FAILURES OF ACTIVIST RESEARCH: NOVEMBER 19, 2006**

Well, it has come a full circle now. It appears that Kumar, my cousin in Acton, West London, was racially attacked last night after Dev's engagement party. The news hasn't even hit me emotionally. Neelen is beside himself. On the way to Acton to drop me off – he could hardly contain his rage.

Nothing seems to make sense and my brain does not seem to be able to put my Newham Monitoring Project work and my family life together. A dizzying array of thoughts and feelings run through me, all clamoring and screaming for some kind of cohesive resolution.

All morning, since they knew this had happened, Neelen kept the news away from me – playing host: cooking fish curry, providing my morning tea, breakfast. They know what I do and I have explained anti-racism to them so many times. I had talked to Auntie Yalani, Kumar's mother, on the phone and she must have known already that Kumar had to have several stitches on his head and had been taken to hospital, and that Logan, Kumar's friend was more severely brutalized.

And yet she was talking to me about coming over for lunch before I returned for the U.S. I did not want to return to the U.S. I wanted to stay and help them fight this out!

I have noticed this behavior with all of my ‘cases.’ They refuse to remain victims, and they are often more concerned about me and my well-being and comfort than I think is warranted.

But my fieldwork was coming to a close and I am reaching the limit of the legal stay allowed by Commonwealth visitor pass. I have spent more than a year working with NMP, fighting racist attacks and police abuse, and I now have skills that could help my family.

I have moved from being a volunteer with NMP, assigned to organize the storeroom, taking out garbage, to carrying out a focused group research on support services for victims of racial harassment to being a caseworker, with some dozen cases under my docket. Most of my cases were of Black and Asian people struggling to seek justice for acts of violent racist attacks or police abuse.

And yet I am getting ready to leave the field so to speak and I have been thinking of how to tidy up the research end of things and to pass over my responsibilities as a caseworker as well. I now think I have finally achieved a good sense of what the experience of British racism is like, given my intimate relationships with people who were my so-called ‘cases.’ I see myself as a sympathetic and political ally, who has grasped the emotional weight of their experiences and am spurred by anti-racist commitments to work as their advocate for justice.

It is a standpoint of academic research I had wanted to achieve, social research in the process of trying to change an unjust social reality. I am going to carry on the struggle by writing up activist research I reason. What exit interviews should I be carrying out? I have been asking myself.

But how do I exit now?

I woke up on this morning at my cousin Neelen and Meenakshi's place, hung-over after a night of dancing and revelry at another cousin, Dev's engagement reception. It is wonderful to be reunited with family I did not know I had. But last night as the party dispersed, Kumar had been set upon by a group of white pub-goers outside Greenford Town Hall. He had tried to help his friend Logan who was having an altercation with a white guy from the pub, when five and then ten of his mates from the pub came out with pipes and batons in hand, yelling 'fucking Pakis!' and beat the shit out of them.

When the police arrive, a white policewoman tells Kumar that he has to have witnesses to go to court or else the case was a waste of police time.

'This is not Africa!' she tells him. Why is Africa symbolized as the primordial opposite of Britain? Which does she assume to be the civilized node and the primitive node? And did Britain not rule many places in Africa? Once again, the racist mobilization draws on tropes of blackness, and especially African-ness, as a sign of the obverse of civilization, even though racist violence is savagely wrought upon a 'native' body.

The police refuse to entertain racial motivation; they advise Kumar to let them pursue the matter as aggravated assault. Racism becomes invisible again, disappears into the night as an unrecorded event, another common 'Paki-bashing,' and it is shocking that the Home Office's own British Crime Survey, despite this familiar story of police gate-keeping, still records over 60, 000 cases of racist attacks annually<sup>4</sup>.

Aunty Yalani is puzzled about why her son was attacked. He is a nice person. It must be because he drank too much at the party. He should not have stuck around after the party and he

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<sup>4</sup>More than 61,000 complaints of racially motivated crime were made in 2006-07, a rise of 28 per cent in just five years, with increases reported by most police forces in England and Wales. Officers classified 42,551 of the complaints as racially or religiously aggravated offences. Nearly two thirds were offences of harassment, 13 per cent wounding, 12 per cent criminal damage and 10 per cent assault' (Morris 2008).

should not have tried to help his friend. There is nothing in mainstream political culture that gives any kind of analysis that she can utilize. Her predicament is invisible and irrelevant to Westminster, or the media, and so we must avoid trouble and stay low.

Many months ago in the heat of the World Cup we all had a discussion about who to support for the World Cup. Not England was the family consensus, except for Neelen, who felt that he was now English, innit? Neelen felt that the act of identification would override his somatic difference, and that he would be able to equally claim Englishness, based on his residence. Neelen's sister, Sujatha, did not support England because the English were racists. 'Dream on,' she told her brother. She had been called a 'Paki' before and all the brothers had also experienced this at some point, when they were out and about on the streets, doing their thing. She remembered how a bunch of white people came up to her at a car park and demanded that she not park in a spot, because she was a 'Paki!' It ended there since she did not put up a resistance and I suppose luckily there were no metal pipes around that time.

And then everyone groaned about how the English could not differentiate between different Asian people. 'They think every Asian is a Paki – they can't tell a real Paki from the others!' Here we go again, becoming complicit in another axis of oppression, seeking our social distance.

Getting to know Auntie Yalani and her family has been the surprising development arising out of coming to London to do fieldwork – re-uniting with a part of the Sri Lankan branch of my family that had been dispersed to Britain. This too is connected to the strange career of race, although seemingly beyond the research focus of racism and anti-racism in Britain; the geographical determinism of the tribalistic ethnic conflicts out there, away from the civilized boundaries of Europe.

But we are not exogenous to this place. We have claims and we have a history. In a political pamphlet published in 1988, *From the Jews to the Tamils*, by Steve Cohen, the political significance of the mass arrival of Tamil refugees in the 1980s is documented,

In fact the (mis) treatment of Tamils by the UK government over the last 3 years has proved to be the catalyst in tightening not just laws in respect to asylum but also in respect to immigration control... Thus the Parliamentary debate in which Jeremy Hanley waxed so lyrical ('The United Kingdom has an honorable record in giving refuge over the years to hundreds and thousands of people who have suffered persecution in their own countries'), was actually one which confirmed the Home Secretary's imposition of visa controls on Sri Lankan citizens – the first time such visas had been demanded of citizens of a Commonwealth country. Again David Waddington in February 1987 ('We have an enviable record on the treatment of genuine asylum seekers') was speaking at a time when immigration officers had only been restrained from forcibly removing 64 Tamils after they had stripped and staged a well-publicized protest at Heathrow Airport. Douglas Hurd, speaking in March 1987 ('The Government remains fully committed to their obligations under the United Nations Convention to genuine refugees') showed the government retaliating against not only the 64 Tamils but against all asylum seekers. Hurd announced that existing safeguards, such as they were for refugees coming to the UK were to be removed. (Cohen 1988: 11)

The contemporary dehumanization of asylum-seekers and refugees traces its genealogy through the history of the racialized Tamil presence in Britain. It is yet another moment in the long process of forgetting the empire and the rights of New Commonwealth citizens. The dehumanization is necessary for the further elaboration of a white-dominated polity.

While doing my fieldwork I tried to humanly stitch together my non-cohesive community, by searching for my grandmother's lost sister who apparently sought asylum and now lives somewhere in the north in Nottingham. But I had no address and little information about names. People in my family only remembered pet names and family names like *Cinnamma*, grandmother's little sister, which would not come up in simple telephone book searches or even Google. I had a lead with the Red Cross, but I had not followed that up. I don't

know if it was a question of a lack of time or an inability then to see how all of this connected to my research focus.

In the most fortunate of coincidences, Aunty Yalani had somehow contacted my family in Malaysia (she had spoken to a relative who now lives in India, who had met my parents on a trip to Australia, where my father's brother and my brother now reside), to ask if they could locate the birth certificate of her mother, who was a British subject born in the crown colony of Penang. It was necessary to help process her refugee claim, so she and her children would not become classified as what the tabloid presses were labeling as 'shambolic' refugees and deported back to the war in Sri Lanka.

We cannot locate the birth-certificate in Malaysia and Aunty Yalani's case drags on. Aunty Yalani tells me that one day when she gets her British passport, she will travel and visit me in the U.S. and visit her family spread all over. There is an ethic of connection here that is important. A sister in Grenada, a sister in America, a brother in Canada. She was denied a visa when Kumar was getting married in the U.K. and denied a visa when her grandchild Chelvi was born.

The Home Office stated that since she already had three sons in the U.K. who were asylum seekers, she might try to join them on the pretext of attending the wedding or attending the birth of her grand-child. Tamils might come to Britain on one pretext and then lo and behold claim asylum since they are in the midst of a war. So Britain has to be careful about those complex human motivations – is she a genuine tourist or a genuine refugee? Britain has to watch out for those bogus refugees and bogus non-EU black people wanting to come over. Aunty Yalani was unable to leave Sri Lanka then, and missed both of these once in a life-time events. But when she gets a British passport...



During my year of fieldwork, I had entered Britain on a tourist visa and lived for a time with a white American student who was studying in London Metropolitan University. He was not studying at the university as a foreign student, but as a home student, and paying home fees. My roommate and his immediate family had never lived, worked or ever paid taxes in the U.K. The reason he was able to go to school in Britain and live freely was because he was able to claim a European Union passport by virtue of his paternal grandfather, who was an immigrant to the U.S., and at one time had been an Irish citizen. Another friend of mine from Chile was employed in Britain, also on a European Union passport issued by unified Germany. He had been able to obtain the passport through proving his German paternity.

Britain's membership in the European Union meant that it would abide by the rights given to all EU member states and differentially privilege their citizens to freely move across borders, take up employment and to mutually access each other's social welfare systems. These were the same rights that had been stripped away from the former black British subjects and their descendants. In many EU states a passport can be obtained if you can prove a 'blood' paternity, the privileged marker of belonging and inclusion in the formation of the new Europe, rather than a historical relationship.

I decide to write to the British Home Office to see if my own 'blood' paternity and the historical basis of my grandfather's citizenship under the 1948 British Nationality Act would permit me to continue to stay and work in Britain. The Home Office sends me an email. There is no longer any legal basis for your claim, they say. Request denied.

I am on a plane out of Britain.

A fellow caseworker, Titilayo, at the Newham Monitoring Project takes over Kumar's case for me. Before I leave she invites me over to her home, where her family has cooked up a

farewell meal and her sister is busy making me some music CDs to take back. We feast on Nigerian egusi soup and fufu . Titi promises, ‘Don’t worry about Kumar’s case - this is for Mohan’s family,’ she says. ‘This is what happens when you do community work. When you live and work in the community’.

### Chapter 3: Groundings in Resisting Gendered Racism

It was a bright and clear early evening in March 2006, an unusually sunny day that was a welcome break from the grey low-slung skies that make up most days in London.

Looking out the window of the offices of the Newham Monitoring Project, I decided I would take advantage of the lovely weather to take a walk to Gillian Smith's house in North Plaistow, Newham.

Gillian was a 42 year-old African-Caribbean woman who was one of NMP's long-standing community participants, especially around issues of black women and policing. She had been at the center of struggles against the abusive policing of black women in Newham during the 1990s. But my recent attempts to contact her by phone about work on her current case had gone unanswered.

Buoyed by my own good mood, I arrived at her home at the most inconsiderate social hour. The family was having supper.

'Join us,' Gillian said to me.

I tried to protest and said I would come later, but that only seem to offend Gillian's sense of hospitality even more. As a steaming plate of chicken stew and rice was fixed for me, she started to tell me how happy the whole family was.

'If you had come yesterday, you would have seen us all crying,' she said.

I didn't know what she was referring to, but I smiled and began to happily dig into my food.

'Six pounds and forty-five pence,' Gillian said slowly and cryptically. 'That's what they're giving us now.'

'What do you mean?' I asked.

‘Benefits,’ she explained.

I was startled and somewhat incredulous. At the time I was not at all familiar with how Newham Council administered its welfare benefits, but council benefits surely could not be as low as that. And besides, virtually a third of Newham borough’s residents depended on local council benefits. There was no way they could survive on such small amounts. As field-worker at the time, trying to live as cheaply as possible, I was certainly spending more than £6.45 a week on food and groceries. This was London after all.

Slowly a story emerged. Gillian had been eligible for income support and child benefits at various times between employment periods during the course of the previous twelve years. In 2004 Gillian had been suddenly laid off from a well-known builder’s firm where she had worked as a personal assistant. She had been sexually harassed by her boss and her protestations had led to her dismissal after a short seven weeks on the job. After she was laid off, she went to the local Newham Council benefits office in order to get herself back on the rolls and received a rude shock when she was told that she was no longer eligible.

‘They said that I needed to have a passport!’ Gillian explained. ‘They said that in that seven weeks that I got that job, the law had changed and now anyone who signs on needs to show a marriage certificate, driving license and a passport! Well, I had a passport and I am legally in this country, but it wasn’t up-to-date!’ she exclaimed.

‘But aren’t you a British citizen?’ I asked.

‘Yes, I am.’

‘So why do you need to show a passport?’

It took Gillian over five months of fighting the bureaucracy to finally get back onto the benefits rolls. The process required appealing to her local councilors and MPs to finally establish

that she was a British citizen and that she and her children should be entitled to income support benefits.

What had happened in that crucial intervening seven-week period when Gillian was off income support was that Parliament had passed new laws and directives beginning on May 1, 2004 to implement a new 'right to reside' test that scrutinized access to the benefits system. This test was ostensibly introduced over panics that the enlargement of the European Union to include ten new countries in Eastern Europe would flood the benefits system in a matter of months. The government typically responded with a set of immigration 'reform' measures to assuage anti-immigration fears. The 2004 rules would eventually be amended, however, to allow new EU immigrants to access the benefits system after five years of residency. Under pressure from the EU, almost all EU nationals (29 countries to date) have been granted exemption from the rule. However, there is not a single national from Britain's former empire, largely African, Caribbean and Asian countries, that have been granted similar exemptions.

Under the new rules, black British citizens like Gillian need to show documentary proof of their right to reside and this consists of a current passport (which costs £72 to renew), or a British birth certificate, or a Home Office certificate granting citizenship. These new rules do not take into account the history of black immigrants like Gillian who entered Britain decades ago as imperial citizens under the 1948 British Nationality Act.

With the new 'right-to-reside' rule, black immigrants were immediately burdened with providing documentary evidence of their legal status in Britain irrespective of their history of settlement or citizenship. During subsequent months of working as a caseworker at NMP, I had occasion to accompany African-Caribbean and South Asian victims of racial attacks and harassment to local agencies such as the Homeless Persons Unit, which was statutorily

responsible for re-housing victims of racial attacks and harassment. Documentary proof of residency was almost always the first line of gate-keeping required before a local state agency would deem to respond, even in life-threatening situations. In general, it appeared that immigration laws and rules were applied inconsistently in practice.

For example, while at these offices, I rarely observed white British people being questioned about their legal residential status or subject to immigration control tests before the administration of public services. In Gillian's case, her blackness was enough reason to trigger the need to prove that she was not a 'person from abroad.' And this was also done despite the local benefits office knowing full well that Gillian had been an income support recipient for many years. Practically speaking, this would have been one of the reasons officers would not have to subject a person to a 'right to reside' test since it was apparent that Gillian had already been 'habitually' residing in Britain.

As we ate dinner together that evening, Gillian smiled cheerfully at me. 'I made dinner for just £3.99,' she said. Though I returned a small smile, I was feeling heavy inside. '£1.50 for chicken legs, £1.89 without skin. You put in some allspice, tomato and stew for an hour in a good pot. If you have a pressure cooker you could do it in half an hour.'

I tried to express my appreciation for the meal in the best ways I could, but I really wished I hadn't just popped in for dinner. I imagined the pack of chicken legs that was bought with the left-over benefits money and looked around at the faces of Gillian and her two daughters enjoying the meal. I reflected on the fact that the social and racial elites of Britain never expect to have to wage political struggle against antagonistic bureaucracies simply in order to experience the satisfaction and enjoyment of basic, daily food. The economy of survival was at a barest minimum here, calculated in terms of pennies.

On the face of it, the predicament appeared to be a question of social class and impoverishment. Culture-of-poverty theories have developed a phalanx of arguments that turn to the non-agentive female heads-of-households as way to explain the structural deficits of impoverished African-Caribbean diaspora families (Collins 2000; Kelley 1997; Reynolds 2003, 2004) . According to these arguments, the lack of the presence of an income-earning male or the heteronormative nuclear family signify deficiencies that lead to black poverty. Such culture-of-poverty theories argue that these gendered structural deficits point towards the declining significance of racial exclusions and paint black women's agency as either non-evident or culturally deficient. And yet Gillian's emergence as a black anti-racist activist in Newham reveals a different story.

#### **COMMUNITY COHESION AND POLICING BLACK WOMEN**

African-Caribbean women's anti-racist struggles and survival on the grassroots level has long involved engaging the local state, municipal multicultural policies and state institutions such as the police. But black women's struggles have been largely invisible in the theorizing of state violence against racial minority communities. The Home Office's 'community cohesion' report (also known as the Cattle Report), for example, has strictly formulated a gender-blind British multicultural policy (Cattle 2002). The report's analysis of the problems of multiculturalism identifies communal self-isolation and racial self-segregation as the major ills facing Britain's inner-city areas, and as the main reason for social disorder. The focus of analysis problematizes cultural separatism as the central problem for race-relations in Britain (Cattle 2002:9),

Separate educational arrangements, community and voluntary bodies, employment, places of worship, language, social and cultural networks, means that many communities operate on the basis of a series of parallel lives. These lives often do not seem to touch at any point, let alone overlap and promote any meaningful interchanges.

The Cantle Report concluded the British society was heading towards U.S. style racial polarization with its attendant lack of cross-cultural contact, increased polarization and the development of entrenched antagonistic race relations based on mutual ignorance and fear.

What was absent in the Cantle Report's analysis, however, is any form of analysis about the historical and contemporary structuring effects of intersectional forms of police racism in Britain. The police in particular have historically applied a disproportionate degree of social control, criminalization and surveillance against African-Caribbean communities (Hall 1978; Keith 1993). Questions about racist policing, resurgent far-right British National Party mobilizations, entrenched racial discrimination in social housing and on-going racialized and gendered violence against Black and South Asian communities are some of the seemingly obvious issues that a discussion of structural racism in Britain would have required.

Police racism was off the agenda and was not mentioned as a possible cause in the obvious color-lines drawn during the northern uprisings, which were most pronounced in the collective confrontation of impoverished South Asian youth in the towns of Oldham, Burnley and Bradford against the largely white police force. The absence of an analysis of state racism and the liberal reading of the rebellions as a product of symmetrical cultural antipathies and mutual hostilities belies the great power imbalances that construct white and black inner-city communities in relation to institutional sites of power.

Furthermore, it is also peculiar that, in the Cantle Report, third, fourth or fifth generation African-Caribbean and South Asian citizens are constructed as people outside of a history of antagonism that has negatively shaped their settlement and participation in British society. Such



a narrative also does not recognize the degree to which black people in the inner-cities lead lives that are already culturally hybrid. Furthermore, the report scarcely recognizes that racialization and ethnicization processes are as much a result of British social processes as they are of ossified cultural separatism. The report ignores research on indigenous processes of ethnogenesis, or what Stuart Hall termed 'new ethnicities' (Hall 1992b). New identity discourses such as being Black British, Black English, British Asian and British Muslim can hardly be said to originate from outside the experience of the British polity.

In other words, multiple generations of black communities are still constructed as perpetual aliens and foreigners who require further lessons in acculturation and citizenship training. This is evident from the treatment Gillian received at the hands of her local welfare benefits office. The understanding of racial and ethnic minorities in the Cantle Report still relies on a forgetting of empire and an assumption of black communities as recent interlopers within British history. So, despite the citizenship status and personal histories of participation within British society, issues relating to black communities are conceptualized not through endogenous British antagonisms such as racist or nationalist exclusions, but through exogenous factors introduced by the very presence of supposedly culturally incommensurable communities.

A new and more sharply delineated common sense in this new multicultural discourse appears through the state's interest in constructing what I argue is a repressive multicultural apparatus. An aspect of this discipline is the construction of a discourse around 'good' multicultural subjects and 'bad' multicultural subjects. The Cantle Report (Cantle 2002: 9) makes a sweeping and flattening equivalence between bad white multicultural subjects that 'look backwards' to a monocultural British society and bad racial minority subject that 'alternatively look to their country of origin for some form of identity.' Good multicultural

subjects are defined as those who can demonstrate social distance from those aspects of their ethnic and racial cultures that are categorized as illiberal and separatist. They are also subjects who visibly display inter-cultural sociability and racial mixing in their everyday lives.

The thrust of new multicultural policies, argued the Cantle Report, would need to promote what it called ‘community cohesion.’ The reports’ analysis makes no mention of the structuring impact of racism and discrimination that constrains the agency of black communities and situates them in relative racial disadvantage. This new paradigm of multiculturalism has become quickly implemented. In Newham, within the space of a few years, programs for disadvantaged racial minority youth and other racial equality programs lost their traditional funding and had to change their programs in order to promote community cohesion across cultural and racial lines.

During one funder’s meeting that I attended on behalf of NMP, I encountered community activists who were crafting programs that would bring Muslim students to visit a church and Christian students to visit a mosque. These kinds of cultural bridging social initiatives aimed at ‘promoting good relations’ have assumed top priority for municipal multiculturalism in the post-Cantle era and are seen as recipes for maintaining social order.

In the following discussion I argue that the Cantle Report has misconstrued racial conflict insofar as it conceptualizes the problem as a result of the absence of meaningful cultural contact, rather than in discriminatory institutional processes and everyday power relationships that are both gendered and racialized. I propose that significant cross-cultural contact between ethnic minorities and whites and between ethnic minorities themselves in urban inner-cities is actually a banal everyday fact and does not materially alter the tacit power imbalances that structure social positions in relation to each other.

In my own experience of living in Newham, where two-thirds of the population is comprised of racial and ethnic minorities, I was hard pressed not to come into daily contact with white British people. I had routine encounters with authorities in the Methodist Church who rented a room to me and other homeless immigrants, asylum-seekers and refugees in their church-owned boarding-house. White churches owned significant property that housed community organizations and other ethnic minority spaces. As a caseworker for NMP, I dealt with numerous Newham Council officers and high-level managers, police officers and transport police officers who were predominantly white. Newham's two Members of Parliament are white as is the borough's mayor. The most influential councilors in city council are also known to be white. White people still hold the highest positions of power in what is ostensibly a majority minority inner-city borough.

A key social fact of ordinary inner-city life for black people, however, is confrontation with law enforcement state agents. Routine police harassment, carried out under stop and search laws and now under anti-terrorism measures have made racial profiling a persistent issue in Newham and in Britain at large (Sveinsson 2010). It is hardly arguable that racial minorities living in the inner-cities are in fact far too aware and cognizant of inter-racial contact with law enforcement officers. A question that needs to be asked is what kind of racialized and gendered power relations are constructed in these encounters, and how do these encounters structure multicultural community cohesion?

It is this polarizing dimension of black and white contact, rather than a simple analysis of the presence or absence of banal inter-culturalism or cultural hybridity that requires critical exploration. Some academic commentators like Paul Gilroy, however, have claimed that British society as a whole has changed in ways that no longer tends to produce racial absolutisms.

Gilroy argues that there is a progressive everyday resistance in Britain, which he terms as ‘conviviality’ - defined as ‘the processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multiculturalism an ordinary feature of social life in Britain’s urban areas’ (Gilroy 2005: xv). This convivial tendency resonates with his arguments about global cosmopolitan subjectivities that do not utilize race as a political category (Gilroy 2000). These global and third world cosmopolitanisms are seen to cut through the polarization of previous racial orders, such as apartheid South Africa (Gilroy 2005b) and are seen to depart from imperialistic U.S. models of race-relations (Gilroy 2005c: 436).

Gilroy strenuously argues that the racist nationalism advocated in the past by the far-right Conservative Party politician Enoch Powell in the 1960s has changed along with new configurations of British racism. He argues that racism today articulates with the processes and anxieties of globalization and the neoliberal and post-imperial re-organization of Britain’s capitalism, rather than on the logics of exclusion or assimilation.

I agree with Gilroy that racism has of course changed historically and in tandem with shifts in the logics of capitalist organization. Racism has become reconfigured and resumes its discourse with new articulations in post-colonial Britain (Hall 2000). But Gilroy over-reaches when he seems to wishfully project absolute ruptures with the historically evolved racial formation of Britain. I am more apt to agree with Arif Dirlik’s (2008: 1370) formulation that while ‘the old racism may no longer be sufficient to explain the present, it persists as a dynamic moment of the reconfigured racism.’ And also to recognize as Nirmal Puwar (Puwar 2004) has done that the question of black people and women’s interloping presence is still an issue within many institutional domains in Britain.

At the same time, however, I am also less convinced specifically by the argument that the advent of multiculturalism in inner-city urban areas in Britain performs the role of a negative dialectic against racism. In fact, as I will aim to show in my ethnographic discussion below, the context of multiculturalism itself dialectically gives rise to new forms and structural articulations of racism. The limits of aesthetic and consumptive forms of multiculturalism do not automatically enable for the historical interlocking presence of black people in East London to become a settled issue and racial polarizations re-emerge when multiculturalism is put to the test, especially with regards to direct confrontations with the racism of the British state.

As explored in the previous chapter, these are also part of the constitutive struggles for racialized state formation engaged in by working-class whites within the dominant political culture. Racism as such is not a residual social force, but rather an instrumental and material politics for whites, which links everyday social action with broader and super-ordinate agendas for racial domination.

Both the Cattle Report's concept of community cohesion and Gilroy's claims of cultural conviviality need to be examined against grounded realities of the lived experiences of gendered racism in Britain. Gendered racism, as Julia Sudbury (1998) explains, is a relational concept that does not disaggregate the components of racism or sexism, but rather seeks to understand their intersectional emergence and occurrence. Furthermore, I argue that gendered racism is a critical concept that can make a necessary intervention into the current discussion of the fictions of British multiculturalism.

Community cohesion and cultural conviviality discourse are multicultural idealizations that mask the historical experiences of black gendered subjects, whose own oppression is routed through sexualized forms of domination. Jacqui Alexander (2005) has argued that sexualized

dominations productively link male violence of oppressed or colonized communities with the heteropatriarchal constitution of state authority. The unproblematic ideal of cultural hybridity and inter-racial mixing do not take into account such gendered violence and power dynamics that have accompanied the history of racialized encounters. The co-articulation or confluence of these different forms of social oppression has been to produce effects greater than the sum of each part, creating in the process qualitatively different forms of social oppression. As Sudbury notes of the history of gendered racism in imperial and postcolonial Britain:

Black women's experiences of racism are not the same as those experienced by black men, for they are uniquely gendered. Thus the subjection of Asian women to 'virginity tests' by immigration officials in London was an integral part of their racialized objectification and abuse. Similarly rape, sexual abuse and commodification of their reproductive functions were integral to African women's oppression under slavery and continue to shape modern day representations. (Sudbury 1998: 38-39)

An ethnographic account of Gillian's own personal and activist life-history allows for a reconsideration of theories that either cast African-Caribbean women as structural deficits of a culture of poverty or erase their specific historical and contemporary experiences within the processes of re-emergent structures of gendered racism. Cattle and Gilroy's proscription that multicultural, conviviality and community cohesion can serve as effective tools against racism must now be placed in the context of the hidden racialized and gendered lives of confrontational social struggle.

#### **THEORIZING POLICE RACISM AND THE SOCIAL POSITIONALITIES OF BLACK WOMEN**

In Newham the development of black women's groups in the late 1980s was partly a result of anti-racist activists in the Newham Monitoring Project encountering many cases of

domestic violence even as they were working with Black and Asian husbands and partners who were themselves the victims of racist attacks or police violence. The difficulty of black anti-racist groups to deal with the simultaneous oppressions of black women led to the growth of autonomous women's groups and the domestic violence movement within black communities. These included groups such as the Newham Asian Women's Project and the East London Black Women's Organization, both of which are politically black identified groups who focus on work within their respective communities but engage each other in solidarity and through the combination of cross-community issues.

Women's groups in Britain have been making intersectional analysis of law enforcement violence but they have been concentrated in the realm of the state's complicity with domestic violence issues (Patel 2003). As Andrea Ritchie (2006: 142) points out, from the U.S. context, violence against women of color is usually seen as a secondary issue to men of color's experience of direct state violence and mainstream feminist movements have also failed to 'imagine women as subjects of state violence in public spaces.' In this regard, African Caribbean women's experiences of policing in Britain also represent a critical challenge for 'mainstream police accountability and antiviolence organizations' that ignore black women's oppression within their political theorizations and practice of countering police brutality (Ritchie 2006: 140). The confluence of oppressive social forces that cuts across public and private domains needs to be understood in its integrated context. These forces are not simply the result of isolated incidents, anti-social behaviors or social ills as is largely the case when public discourse, if any, about Black women's oppression are discussed in the British public sphere.

A key dilemma for black women activists has been the question of how to address the dilemma of demanding greater state involvement in the protection of Black and Asian victims of

domestic violence and at the same time protesting the over-policing and harassment of Black and Asian communities by the self-same state, especially the institution of the police (Sudbury 2006). The British state, operating on liberal individualist criminal justice principles and procedures, does not routinely engage in a complex intersectional understanding of African-Caribbean and South Asian women's oppression. At best, different social categories are tagged on as additional or aggravated grounds of discrimination.

Ruth Chigwada -Bailey (1991; 2003) classic studies on black women and policing in Britain presented four key reasons why black women are more likely to come into contact with and receive maltreatment from the police. First, there is the perception that black women, as part of the poor and black community in general, are likely to be engaged in criminally suspicious behavior. Second, it is due to the high rates of criminalization of black male youth that black mothers are also linked as potential accomplices. Third, their non-white racial difference sets them apart as potential targets for immigration checks and harassment; and fourth, black women are targeted by police who assert their powers of removal for persons deemed to be exhibiting behavior linked to mental disorders. These key areas identified by Chigwada generate representations of African and African-Caribbean women as morally suspect, potentially aggressive and devoid of the respectable qualities of genteel middle-class white femininity. These images continue to inform mainstream public perception and, as will be shown, function as common sense for inner-city policing purposes.

Contact with the police has also been historically documented to produce experiences of what Ruth Hall termed 'racist sexual violence' for black women (quoted in Chigwada-Bailey 1991: 141). The pioneering resistance of Esme Baker and Jackie Berkeley Defense Committees in the 1980s, both of which campaigned on behalf of the first black women who dared to make



official complaints against sexual abuse, rape and assaults by the police, were important milestones in breaking the silence and invisibility of black women's experiences with policing. A 1989 case researched by Chigwada in Surrey illustrated some of the most glaring convergences of police misbehavior and a judicial system that exhibits institutional racism. A white policeman convicted of raping a young black woman in his patrol car had his 7-year prison sentence overturned by the Court of Appeal on the grounds that the judge in the original trial had failed to direct the jury towards the good character of the police-officer (1991: 141-145).

The Brixton rebellion and the rebellion at Broadwater Farm in 1985, two critical crises in British race-relations, were also linked to the violent policing of black women. In the first instance, Cherry Croce was shot in her back during a home raid and, in the second instance, Floyd Jarret suffered a heart attack following a police assault in her own home. No disciplinary or criminal action was undertaken by the state against any of the police officers involved. Notably, in both cases police aggressively broke into these women's homes in order to investigate alleged criminal behavior by their sons.

In more recent periods there is the case of Joy Gardner, a Jamaican woman who overstayed her Commonwealth visitor's visa and who was restrained by the police during an immigration raid. No police officers were convicted of any wrongdoing in the wrapping of thirteen feet of sticking tape, which gagged and killed Joy in front of her five year-old British-born son. This follows a pattern in the phenomenon of deaths in custody and police abuse where, since 1990, though eighteen police officers have been prosecuted for cases involving deaths in custody, not one has been convicted. The contemporary record on police treatment of black women appears to have changed little, even though the context of policing has changed.

In the 1978 landmark study *Policing the Crisis* (Hall et.al 1978) the authors theorized police racism and the criminalization of African-Caribbean people as the product of capitalist crisis. The dynamics of a crumbling social welfare state, no longer supported by a growth economy was giving rise to a racist ideological mediation that configured black people as the ‘object correlatives’ of British social breakdown. The British state then sought to resolve its crisis of legitimacy by unleashing a ‘law and order’ campaign that introduced a staple diet of crime stories and criminal issues that demonized black people as criminals and potential criminals.

A later study by the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies study (1982), which included Paul Gilroy’s(1982) seminal essay, ‘Police and thieves’ moved beyond this political economy-centered analysis to propose that forces autonomous to socio-economic crises were also at work in producing the over-policing of black people. Gilroy’s early work was instrumental in utilizing Gramscian concepts to identify the formation of a racist common sense in policing that was linked to white nationalist exclusions. Studies of the period also indicated that this racist common sense was institutionalized in the fraternal ‘canteen culture’ of a largely white and right-leaning police force (Cashmore and McLaughlin 1991; Bowling 1998; Holdaway 2004).

The criminalization of black people I would argue emerges from the intertwined protocols identified above. Race in white dominated polities is an ideological mediation for the constant revolutionizing of production and the capitalist crises it engenders. Solid social relationships such as tight-knit local communities and family relationships are always becoming disarticulated by the processes of capital. As Marx and Engels (Marx, and Engels 2008) put it, ‘all that is solid melts into air,’ and these disarticulations of social life are organically situated

within capital's logic. But it is the historical racial formation of post-colonial Britain that leads whites to make sense of their disarticulated social life through racism and racist social action that reinforce separate social ontologies.

Cross-cutting these dynamics are also the sexualized dynamics of racial domination that re-inscribes patriarchal white male dominance. Especially salient is the authority of white male police officers, who through the exercise of policing powers sanctioned by the state exercise daily racial power over black women. While the social image of African-Caribbean women in Britain has changed to involve new complexities, many of the old sexual stereotypes concerning sexual availability and aggression remain. Advances made by black women in education and politics appear to provide proof of racial progress. For instance, there are now indications that African-Caribbean women's participation in education-oriented social movements has resulted in signs of upward mobility (Mirza 1992; 2009). In addition, African-Caribbean women as a whole have attained greater public visibility. There are more black women in mainstream politics: Baroness Valerie Amos, an African-Caribbean woman and former black feminist academic is now the head of the House of Lords of Britain. The long-standing Labor party MP Diane Abbot is currently contesting for the leadership of the party. And there are others.

These high-profile cases, however, have not necessarily resulted in altering the image of ordinary black women in the socially deprived inner-cities of Britain. In 2007, Toni Corner, a young 19 year-old African-Caribbean woman, suffering from a history of epileptic fits, was thrown out of a nightclub in Sheffield. As she attempted to make her way back in through a back door, police officers confronted her. One of them proceeded to punch her repeatedly until she was unconscious and they then dragged with her trousers down into custody. The chilling brutality was inadvertently captured by the nightclub's closed-circuit television and was

discussed widely in the British media as reminiscent of the beatings of Rodney King in Los Angeles or characteristic of the racism of U.S. 'deep South.' The incident, which is still under investigation, prompted black journalist Hannah Pool to comment:

You cannot separate who Toni Comer is from what happened to her. Very little is ever said about the relationship black women have with the police force. When the debate turns to police and ethnic minorities, it is almost always about white men versus black men. You would be forgiven for thinking that the only time black women and policemen came into contact with each other was at the Notting Hill Carnival. (Pool 2007)

Unfortunately, with respect to academic research on African-Caribbean women and the police force, the critique leveled by Pool is confirmed. There has been no major study on the impact on policing with regard to African-Caribbean women since Chigwada's work in the early 90s.

Prior to that time, in the 1980s the left wing-controlled Greater London Council's Police Committee Support Unit had for a short time published the *Women and Policing in London* newsletter starting in March 1985. This was a regular newsletter that monitored intersectional issues affecting women and policing in general. Articles in the newsletter covered topics such as 'women and immigration law', 'rape victims and the police', 'attacks on women's center', 'making London safe for women', women and public order, 'lesbians and policing project'. A key concept from this period of struggle was the notion of the 'cult of masculinity' that was prevailing in the police force (Women and Policing in London 1985: 1). This amazing effort was part of a parallel 'municipal feminist' movement that was prematurely halted when the Thatcher government managed to dissolve the Greater London Council in 1986 (Gelb 1989).

The long struggle to theorize police racism re-emerged during the political scrutiny of London's police force during the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry in the 1990s, but the question of gendered racism was clearly absent in these investigations. The report reached the conclusion that London's Metropolitan Police was institutionally racist, but did not make any mention of

gender. A recent expose by the BBC (2003) on racism at Police National Training Centre in Warrington, Cheshire, further confirms that the struggle against racism in policing is far from over. The documentary revealed trainee police officers routinely engaging in hate speech, openly expressing violent speech against Asian and Black people and even their own fellow black police officers. The officers were also found to be subscribing to extreme racist and far-right nationalist ideologies of the British National Party. As Pragna Patel (2003: 16) , however, has argued, ‘institutional racism is predicated upon the need to subordinate those in our society who are considered to be ‘different’ by virtue of their racial or ethnic background’ but she further elaborates, ‘institutionalized racism can and does intersect with patriarchal power to the detriment of both black women and racial equality.’

#### **AN EAST LONDON LIFE: GILLIAN’S STORY**

In the following presentation of Gillian’s life-history, I will utilize the insights of intersectional analysis to show how multi-faceted and interactive gendered racism festers itself in East London. Race, gender, class and nationality link together and express both the form and content of interpersonal acts of violence and state oppression. And these dynamics are intricately linked to the cycles of impoverishment of black communities.

*Hastings, 1969*

Gillian Smith was born on the island of St. Lucia when it was still a colony and came to Britain in 1969 at the age of five when her mother married a white English man and moved to Britain with him. They settled in the step-father’s home in Hastings, a predominantly white

seaside community in East Sussex, south of London. Gillian would often recall her childhood in idyllic terms, referring to her memories of rustic beauty that she took as inspiration for her own urban gardening.

‘We came from good stock,’ she would say, and ‘didn’t want for anything,’ referring to her step-father’s middle-class status as a self-employed owner of a petrol station. She took pride in her elocution, a prized South-eastern English accent that to her was proof to her of her early private school education and also her assimilated British-ness. ‘People usually think that black people have accents, but they hear me speak on the phone, and they don’t think I am black,’ she told me. She remembered that her step-father would always correct her if she got too Cockney and began to drop her o’s and h’s.

She did recall however, to switching into ‘a bit of Cockney’ now and then, mostly in order to fit into East London and not to appear uppity.

‘I’ve always gotten into trouble for the way I speak,’ she said. ‘People are thinking, who the hell does she think she is? You’ve got other black people coming along and speaking with accents so they don’t know what to do with me,’ Gillian continued, imitating an African accent. Gillian asserted herself as someone who socialized widely with white British people and lived an everyday life that could be easily described as comprising multicultural. Her long-term partner was a Jamaican man, James. Her brother had married a white British woman and she also noted that her son Mark liked to date white girls.

‘He likes the white side of things,’ Gillian declared. Mark was at present dating a light-skinned, mixed-race girl.

Gillian recalled her time in Hastings as the ‘happiest days,’ full of a quintessential small town ‘quiet life,’ something she felt to be the provenance of those lucky enough to be born white

in Britain, and basically beyond the reach of most black people. Before knowing the full details of Gillian's story I had hastened to judge these remarks as indicative of an absence of a stronger sense of black consciousness and illustrative of the contradictory effects of Anglo-affinity. I decided that I would simply put it to her and see what her response might be. When I questioned Gillian about this during an interview she replied,

‘Yes, black is beautiful. And I am a strong black woman. Very black. But sometimes you see what you go through. And you ask God, why is it that they have nice hair and I have to put things in mine. Why they have a quiet life and are not bothered?’

When Gillian was ten years old she received a rude introduction to anti-black racism in England. A boy named Kevin singled her out for racial taunts and bullying, calling her ‘black this and that.’ One day he beat her black and blue, leaving her unconscious and abandoned by the side of the road.

‘He left me there for dead,’ Gillian said.

Being the lone black girl in her East Sussex town, a passerby recognized her and took her home. Her mother went to the boy's home, outraged at what had happened. But neither the parents of the perpetrator, nor the school, nor the police did anything about the attack.

The following day, Gillian took her mother's advice on how to deal with the situation. When the boy attempted to taunt and harass her again she grabbed his ‘willie’ and squeezed hard. Yelping in pain, the boy ran off, never to bother her on the way to school again.

Gillian's relationship with her step-father also became strained as her mother's and his marriage broke down. ‘It was fine when the love was there. When love was not there...there was lots of racism between them,’ she observed. Eventually Gillian's relationship with her step-father broke down when she became entangled with the police and waged a much publicized campaign

against the abuse she had suffered at their hands. By this time, she had become an independent adult and made the decision to move to East London. Her step-father never believed what the police did to her, preferring to retain his absolute belief in the goodness and fairness of the white police officers above what Gillian said had happened to her.

‘He had friends in the force,’ Gillian explained, and he always insisted that ‘the police don’t do that.’

*Newham, 1992*

When Gillian Smith arrived at One Love Centre on December 2, 1992, over a hundred people had gathered to hear her give her first ever public speech. The public meeting in support of Gillian was the result of Newham’s black anti-racist groups mobilizing a coalitional local campaign to debate the issue of the police abuse of black women in Newham. Activists from the Newham Monitoring Project, the East London Black Women’s Organization, Newham Asian Women’s Project and the Defend the Deane Family Campaign<sup>1</sup> worked to galvanize community-wide support for the ‘Justice for Gill Smith’ campaign.

While ethnic fragmentation was taking place in other anti-racist circles in the 1990s, in Newham the strategy of linking together and focusing on joint campaigns appeared to be gaining momentum among Blacks and Asians. Though the campaign was about getting Gillian individual justice through the police disciplinary system and the courts, the campaigning strategy utilized her individual case to highlight gendered issues of police abuse in the borough. As NMP (1993: 40-41) stated then, ‘The case of Gill Smith clearly demonstrates that it is not only young black men who suffer police racism and brutality... The Justice for Gill Smith campaign resulted

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<sup>1</sup> The Defend the Deanne Family campaign involved an Indo-Caribbean mini-cab driver from the island of St. Vincent and his son who was brutalized by the police at the Forest Gate police station. See NMP Annual Report, 1991.



in Gill being found not guilty and the wider issue of policing against black women being raised an issue of concern in Newham.’ Borough-wide leafleting, public meetings and mass pickets which packed the public gallery at Gillian’s trial helped to disseminate the strategy of joint black community self-organization and solidarity as an effective weapon of struggle against police abuse in Newham.

Gillian was nervous about making her speech. In a piece of notepaper she later noted her feelings: ‘This was my first ever public speech. I must admit it was very nerve racking.’ What had brought her to make this speech was her treatment at the hands of the police. Two months earlier she had been out shopping on Woodgrange Road near the Forest Gate Train Station. She met a friend and a conversation turned into an argument. During the dispute between Gillian and her friend, officers from the Area 2 Territorial Support Group (TSG) were patrolling the area in a riot van. Seeing the heated exchange between the women, two officers got out of the van and approached. A NMP account details what happened next:

On seeing the two women arguing, two officers got out of the van and approached the women. One officer moved towards the back of the pavement, grabbing her hand and saying, ‘if you’re not quiet, you’re nicked.’ Gill explained that she was quiet and began to move to leave, but the officer blocked her path and forced her arm behind her back. The second officer returned after having spoken to Ms C who had told him that there was no problem between the two women. The first officer said to his colleague, ‘we’ve got her on a Section 4’ and forced Gill onto the floor. The two officers then handcuffed Gill, began to drag her towards the barrier at the edge of the pavement, and forced her over the carrier causing injuries to her stomach. At this point, Ms. C, witnessing the attack, began shouting to the officers to let Gill go and stop hurting her. The officers ignored her protestations and dragged Gill towards the van where she was lifted up by her arms and legs and thrown onto the floor of the van. As she struggled to get up off the van floor, the officers began racially abusing her, saying ‘You black dog, get on the floor’ and ‘You bitch, get down, get down.’ One officer then grabbed Gill by the back of the neck and tried to push it to the ground. The other officer began to stomp on her legs and her back. During this ordeal, Gill suffered injuries to her body, had her jacket ripped and her jewelry snatched off. Gill was then taken to Forest Gate police station still lying on the floor of the van whilst the officers continued to abuse her racially and laugh at her discomfort. (NMP; 1993: 39)

Gillian's ordeal did not end there. When she finally arrived at the police station she was subjected to a strip search whilst the officers who had assaulted her watched from a distance and made sexual and lewd comments. Gillian turned to the white female officer and asked that the search be stopped.

'Why are you doing this? You're a woman as well.'

The question seemed to have some effect and at this point the officer discontinued the search and left Gillian in a cell. Four hours later she was released after having been charged for threatening behavior and refusing medical attention for her injuries.

Without the intervention of black anti-racist groups in Newham, Gillian's case would have become another statistic in the continuous pattern of police violence against black women. Already in 1992 black women were experiencing disproportionate rates of arrests and incarceration, which had resulted in a phenomenal growth of black women prisoners. Black communities as a whole, including African-Caribbean, African and South Asian communities, constituted 4.9% of Britain's population at the time, racial and ethnic minority women as a whole comprised 36% of all female prisoners (NMP 1993: 40). In the ensuing decade, the rate of incarceration of African-Caribbean and African women in Britain would swell by 113%, and for South Asian women prisoners by 75% as compared to a 34% rise for white women prisoners (Home Office 2003/4). By the year 2000, racial minority women made up 4% of the population but 25% of the female prison population. African and African-Caribbean people who make up some 2% of the population of England and Wales on the whole account for 15% of the total number of prisoners (Home Office 2000).

Anti-racist campaigns against the police, however, are fraught with danger for victims, who rightly fear that the police would carry out reprisals against them. But there were also other

constraining considerations as well. For instance, another NMP case I assisted with involved an African-Caribbean postal worker whose 11 year-old daughter had been smashed with a police truncheon during a raid at their home. The mother was the sole provider for the family and although she wanted to mount a campaign to highlight the issue of police brutality against black children, she did not want her employers to know that she was in trouble with the police. She had been charged with interfering with the police during the course of the raid in her home and was going through the court process to clear herself. A public campaign would have immediately spotlighted her potential criminal conviction and if she was convicted it would have placed an immediate bar on her Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) record. This would have resulted in the loss of her government job. It would have also produced barriers to obtaining another job that required a CRB check.

With these kinds of considerations in mind and emerging from the physical trauma and mental anguish of her experience, Gillian nevertheless decided to become political with her case. She delivered the following speech to address the community of activists and concerned residents that now had gathered around her case at One Love:

Thank you for coming to support the campaign. My name is Gill as you all know. For legal reasons I personally cannot talk about the details of my case. I can say that on the 9th of October, 1992 I found out what being black meant in accordance to what the police did to me. The fear, the embarrassment, and the shame they made me feel on that day will stay with me forever. No woman should have to suffer such degrading treatment. After all, we are the women of today and fighting for the women of the future.

Show Respect.

This happened to me, it has happened to thousands of women before me, and unless we wake up, stand up, it will happen to thousands more.

We must all remember our history and think back to how people reacted in the past to these same issues of harassment and racial harassment in our community, such as the Brixton Riots before. For as long as there have been black people in this country, whether

from Asian, African and West Indian origin, they have always had to fight for their rights and justice.

This campaign will go on not only for the men and women in this community who have suffered at the hands of the police but for our children.

I do not want my sons and daughters to be stripped naked by police officers, beaten and abused and sent to prison for being black in Britain.

This is an excellent public meeting; for every person in here there are ten more supporters outside. We are not alone.

There is a powerful organization without any doubts in my mind who can help fight the police in Newham. Personal respect to Hoss for the support and work of NMP. No Justice, No Peace!

When Gillian's case made it to the Newham East Magistrate's Court on February 2 1993, a year later, the campaign had generated enough local interest to have eighty supporters pack the public gallery—an unusual show of interest and public monitoring for what otherwise would have been a routine magistrate's court affair. It is at the municipal level that the over-policing of black women and black communities takes place with the resulting effect of convictions and sentences that continue to incarcerate more and more black women. Gillian recorded what happened that day in her own notes:

Finally we arrived at the Court House. We waited almost two hours for the arresting officers to arrive. Finally the police barrister stood up and asked the judge for more time. My barrister stood up and protested against the fact that this case should never have come to court. The judge stood up and said to the police barrister: 'No more time. Case is dismissed.'

In short, the arresting police officers had failed to show up in court to present their evidence. The victory was seen as a result of mobilized public interest that had influenced an otherwise racially biased and pro-police process.

*Newham 2003*

When I first met Gillian in the summer of 2003 it was almost ten years after the success of that campaign. I had recently arrived in London to begin initial fieldwork and I was conducting a focus group discussion among current and former ‘clients’ of NMP in order to ascertain the need for the setting up of the ancillary Befriender Project. NMP was seeking funds to start a project to enable volunteers to provide additional support for people who were victims of racial and police harassment.

At this meeting, when Gillian described how her case began, she described that she had been having a dispute with a long-time friend in public. Though it wasn’t a fight, the police took the opportunity to grab her and start assaulting her. In telling her story, she kept repeating that it was ‘for nothing, for nothing.’ I would hear this phrase repeated again and again by the many victims of police violence I would encounter during the course of the year. Gillian clearly knew that there was no reason for what she had been forced to experience, no reason except the spurious logic of race.

In postmodern academic debates concerning the epistemological status of race there is often the argument that folk or demotic discourses of race unthinkingly naturalize and essentialize racial categories and identities. But it is clear that even at the demotic level people are self-reflexive about racial consciousness and they are aware of their socially produced and reproduced racial being. Black people in Britain understand that the intersectional impact of the racial, gender and class background mark them for possible violent treatment at the hands of the police, and that the phenomenon is not based on any inherent quality within themselves.

Race is understood simultaneously as a ‘nothing’ and as a something that virulently forces itself on their lives. The experience of institutional racism by the police is a racializing

and essentializing process that fixes Gillian's racial position as a black woman who is subordinated and excluded from social and civic respect. The experience of exclusion derived from experiences of police racism, however, was not a one-off incident of racism in her life and it was not only limited to victimization in a single instance or through her relationship with a single public institution.

*Newham, 2005*

Two years later, I worked with Gillian again, this time more extensively as her principal caseworker on more recent abuse that she had experienced from the police. I recall feeling frustrated that she never seemed to be free of having these kinds of problems. In fact, for many people who have had no history of police oppression, the constant presence of the police in their lives comes across as far-fetched and inevitably lead to blame-the-victim type rationalizations. Repeated encounters with the police have the social effect of reducing respectability even within black communities that have been long-subjected to histories of police victimization.

These everyday rationalizations also emerge from the weak history of success for complainants against police abuse. Both disciplinary and judicial convictions against the police are known by black communities to be rare. And yet over 5000 complaints against London's Metropolitan Police were filed in 2006 to the Independent Police Complaints Commission, and long term trends show a steady increase in allegations of oppressive police behavior<sup>2</sup>. Nearly one third of the complainants were female and 20% all complaints came from Black people, and another 6% from Asians. The facts also showed that while 91% of the complaints were made against white police officers, only a third of those complaints were deemed by the IPCC to

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<sup>2</sup> All police complaints data cited are from the Independent Police Complaints Commission's 2006/7 Annual Report (Glesson and Grace 2007).

warrant investigations. Most discouraging of all, only 6% of all complaints lodged against the Metropolitan Police in 2006 were substantiated, whilst only 15% of those complaints involving sexual assault were substantiated.

A common experience after months of work assembling a police complaints case at NMP would be the dreaded arrival of an IPCC envelope that contained yet another decision that struck down multiple allegations of oppressive behavior with the repeated phrase ‘no case to answer.’ These hugely discrepant figures would seem to provide a picture of a pandemic of frivolous allegations and complaints against the police, but when we look into the difficulties of establishing a case against the police, as in Gillian’s experience, a different conclusion can be reached.

An acceptance of police impunity pervades common sense thinking within disempowered black communities and this often results in a turn away from anti-racist struggles against the police, including disincentives to even make complaints in the first place. A progressive political narrative of militant struggles against police racism, characteristic of the 1970s and 80s, and has largely disappeared from the popular culture of black communities. Furthermore, the concomitant increase in visibility of Black popular culture and new openings and opportunities for upward mobility for black people have also drawn cultural and political attention away from chronic struggles with the police.

Hence, being a black person who is unable to take advantage of these new opportunities carries a more profound loss of respect and credibility within black communities. Repeated encounters with the police and the protracted nature of pursuing police complaints and lengthy court struggles raise suspicion in the eyes of friends and bring about harsh judgments of being

dysfunctional. ‘Are you still going on with that, Gillian?’ was an oft-heard refrain from friends and neighbors whenever she would try to talk about her case.

The protracted struggle against the police also affects the perception of a caseworker as well. By year’s end I felt exasperated that something always kept happening to Gillian that required NMP’s attention. It was the NMP ethos of working militantly on behalf of victims of police abuse, and treating clients with respect irrespective of their guilt or innocence, that helped me to check my own assumptions and the weakening of my solidarity. What I considered as professional-political casework was day-to-day survival for Gilian.

NMP’s casework strategy of ceaselessly filing formal and repeated police complaints was important in order to send a minimal political message that Newham’s racial minorities would not tolerate extra-legal and racially discriminatory police culture. Community-based anti-racist groups like NMP are basically both the first and last resort for constructing responses to police racism at the present time where local campaigning has also appeared to have died down. Gillian herself had already gone through fourteen years of continuously battling the police.

But she told me that it was this very determined resistance that, in her experience, allowed her moments of freedom from police abuse. It was only when a complaint had been lodged by NMP and an investigation was in process, that she noticed that the local police would cease from harassing her or her family. The period of the complaints investigation made the police behave well towards her and her family for the corresponding time. This mode of survival and resistance was often poorly understood by her friends, neighbors and even her teenage children, who wanted normalcy and hoped that the police would simply back off their lives if they could just avoid police contact. But the reality of the routine racial profiling of black



communities in Newham proved otherwise, and Gillian had an advanced political understanding of the situation.

And yet it was Gillian's success with her 1992 justice campaign that made her a fixed target for reprisals from the local police. Her barrister, Gareth Pierce, drawing from her work with Irish victims of police counter-terror operations, had warned her to expect this. Gillian was continuously reminded to 'just call NMP' and lodge complaints as a survival strategy. I would spend hours visiting with Gillian as I worked on her case. Oftentimes it was in the comfort of her living room or her beautifully tended garden, sharing laidback conversation as we worked together on police complaints, witness statements and so on. Making police complaints was a part and parcel of her everyday life.

Our relationship progressed to a comfortable level of familiarity, and I recorded some reflections Gillian had concerning her initial impressions of NMP when she had first approached them to seek assistance with her 1992 case.

When I first came to the NMP, and you discover what it is about, you see the posters and all. I was really nervous, I saw a lot of Asian people, I met Houssein. I was nervous you see, as I was thinking whether they would help me or not. I don't know what planet I was in, or what I thought, I thought that only Black people got harassed or arrested, and then you met people who also went through what you did. It helped to hear that Houssein had been arrested for nothing, I mean they knew how it felt. Even today, hearing all of this and everybody's story it feels like I got to know people. You see that Turkish people and whites, I mean lots of people who go through this. And you saw how people here worked your case, I mean Hoss was great, things were moving. Many organizations claim to do the same thing that the NMP does, but nothing happens. Things happen at the NMP. The only thing I was waiting for in the four years was the court cases, and that is out of your hands. But with the NMP you will get action and you will "win."

My initial unfamiliarity and uncertainty with the concept of political blackness in Britain had much to do with the paucity of lived experience the brutal everyday conditions that ground such a practice. I realized that the question of black community mobilization and solidarity-building

resistance in Newham was not an abstract academic discussion about identity politics or playing oppression Olympics. My exchanges with Gillian provided an insight as to how anti-racist politics functioned within the sinews of people's lives. And it inspired me to dedicate myself to the anti-racist work that the constituents of political blackness needed and required of me.

Gillian's own testimony of coming-to-consciousness with the idea of political blackness took place in an anti-racist organizational space where Blacks and Asians meet in order to collaborate and build alliances through campaigns and casework. Her sense of victimization as a African-Caribbean woman in the sense of a specific racial and ethnic identity become unmoored as she discovered the racism experienced by other black people, such as her Iranian-British caseworker Houssein and the other people suffering racism that NMP served.

She also began to conquer her doubts about NMP's concept of a non-ethnically defined and social movement based black 'community of resistance' as she began to experience the commitment and militant activism waged on behalf of her case and campaign. These two features that characterized coalitional black anti-racism appeared to provide a transition from her initial doubts and fears to her self-assured endorsement of NMP's form of black anti-racism, and she would herself develop as a community voice in Newham about the issue of police abuse and black women's experiences in forums and workshops.

When I myself began to enter into the space of black anti-racism in Britain Gillian's words and her constant reminder to me that 'We are all black here' would solidify a sense of recognition and acceptance crucial for my own embrace of a black political identity. This political sense of blackness engendered solidarity in my relationship with her despite our racial, ethnic and gendered differences and the obvious gap between her seasoned experiences of anti-

racist resistance and my own fledgling search for a sense of belonging and acceptance as an anti-racist activist in Britain.

The option of black was accessible through the space opened up by this anti-racist work. This engendering of solidarity was repeated again and again as NMP caseworkers forged similar relationships with many other victims of racism in Newham and constructed cooperative strategies for resistance. The political and activist work gave substance and meaning to the circulation of an activist identity of black, and it came to occupy a place besides other contemporary racial and ethnic identities self-description in Newham.

My specific casework with Gillian in 2005 began when I shadowed Zareena Mustapha, a senior NMP activist, in assembling a police complaints case concerning an incident that involved her 18-year old son Mark. He had been arrested by the police on suspicion of burglary, and the process of his arrest had resulted in the use of excessive force.

When Gillian reached the scene of Mark's arrest, which was near their home, she saw that he had been pinned down on the road by a number of police officers. His hands had been cuffed and his legs were being repeatedly beaten by the police officers. Gillian tried to reach Mark but two white police officers blocked her way and held her back. She tried screaming at them not to hurt Mark, but it did not stop their brutality.

Gillian then tried to get close to Mark again, but this time a police officer delivered a frontal 'rugby tackle' which flung her down to the road. As she fell another officer grabbed her sweater top with such a force that it was pulled off her body. Her upper body was completely exposed. The humiliation was further confounded when instead of attending to her exposure, the two officers simply held Gillian in a choke-hold.

Only when a black female officer arrived on the scene did the two white male officers let Gillian go, and the black officer then told Gillian to put her clothes back on.

The police complaint that NMP was assembling pertained to the excessive force used in the arrest procedure against Mark and the excessive force used against Gillian during the course of her own 'arrest' for alleged interference in police work.

Mark's arrest occurred coincidentally because the police were actually questioning three of his friends on charges of a knife assault. The three neighborhood friends were all white. As Gillian and Mark worked on the police complaints case it was proving difficult to seek their cooperation in providing witness statements. The friends and their families seemed to privilege their racial solidarity with the police officers rather than give support to Gillian and Mark. The lack of support that Mark received from his friends became a disturbing issue for Gillian and reshaped the way she viewed the cohesiveness of her neighborhood community.

Her neighborhood in North Plaistow was a mixed neighborhood with a good concentration of white, Black, and Asian families. Right in front of their terraced council home on London Road was a mammoth Newham council tower block whose residents were similarly from mixed backgrounds.

Mark and his white friends were heavily into hip-hop and worked on styling themselves accordingly, especially in cultivating a dress-style and a fearless street-wise masculinity. Hip-hop may not have been the Cattle Report's concept of a unifying cultural fabric, but among the youth of Newham, no matter what their racial or ethnic background, hip-hop was the cultural idiom of choice. Their cross-community interest in hip-hop easily signified all the elements of inter-cultural activity that the official discourse of 'community cohesion' desperately wanted to engineer.

Gillian's circle of friends and family and her community of neighbors who live around London Road in North Plaistow ostensibly present a compelling picture of inter-racial mixing or living cheek-by-jowl that can be seen to discredit the analysis of 'parallel lives' that the Cattle report asserted was the cause of bad race-relations in socially deprived inner cities.

Gillian, however, continued to have great difficulty in mobilizing solidarity for her police complaint, and her hopes of being able to call upon the neighborhood relationships with Mark's white friends and their parents was not materializing. This also started to cause tension between Mark and his mother as Gillian's prodding was beginning to upset Mark.

'I have to speak to them innit? If they don't want to come, then there's not much I can do about it,' Mark declared once and stormed off.

Gillian felt that Mark couldn't really understand why his friends were not backing him up and somehow the blanket recalcitrance was a sign that there was something wrong with Gillian's actions against the police.

'He's so confused,' Gillian explained. 'He doesn't know how to deal with it. He thinks that it's just another beef on the road.' Gillian herself had gone around to her neighbors trying to persuade them but she was also failing and becoming angry.

'Sam's mother knows what I've been through. They've seen what's happened to us. If I was in the church I'd say they were heathen.'

'If they were all black...but they come here all the time and say Oh, I just got nicked for half an ounce or whatever. If it was Mark, that would be it. That's when you see the colors. I'm a very black person I know what we go through.'

'They haven't got the understanding we have and they don't take you seriously.'

They're all white. I don't know if they're just saying it's another black thing. One of them, her son is in the force. People don't understand. Why you kicked off or why the police did you. If they were Black or any other nationality they'd know what we're going through. So they look at you when you say that happened to you. Huh?'

'But I'll get the job done. I'll get a bottle of wine and go down there to Sam's mom.'

As the days passed, however, Gillian had as little success as Mark did. None of their white friends or neighbors wanted to come forward as witnesses. It did not seem that the workings of convivial culture extended to instances where white and black people were differentially positioned in relation to policing and state violence. Neighborhood conviviality and banal inter-cultural contact were neither enablers of any form of shared understanding of police racism nor did they facilitate organic anti-racist solidarities.

Eventually, though, it was the courageous actions of another sympathetic friend who was at the scene that resulted in the production of an eye-witness testimony for the complaint. Kiranjit was a 6th form student in East Ham College and a 'childhood mate of Mark's' since primary school.

Initially, however, Kiranjit was afraid, largely of her parents' reaction to her getting involved with any kind of police matter. 'I love Gill, she's like my mum, but I can't get involved,' she told us at first. And Gillian later would explain that her young friend was from a strict upbringing and was going through some difficult family relations. 'They're fantastic family but strict religion,' Gillian opined.

In Gillian's estimation Kiranjit's struggle to come forward was somehow tied to the orthodoxy of her South Asian family's Sikh religion.

‘I admire Asian people,’ Gillian said. ‘They have their culture and show respect. Cover their hair. Me? I’m not showing respect.’

However, what enabled Kiranjit to have the courage to come forward was some assurance that there could be a way for NMP to take her witness statement directly and not have to submit herself to direct contact with the police. This strategy was pioneering innovation by Zareena, and since there was no explicit legal restriction on this method of writing up witness statements without the police themselves present, internal affairs grudgingly went along with it for a while.

Kiranjit had herself been harassed by the local police and routinely stopped and searched in the borough. As a young urban college student she preferred to dress up in hooded sweatshirts, virtually a uniform for the hip-hop obsessed youth of the borough. But it was also the subject of a burgeoning moral panic about youth and crime. Youth were using hooded track tops to mask their identities from the surveillance CCTV cameras that were now ubiquitous in Newham, and a public debate raged about the potential criminal use of ‘hoodies.’

Kiranjit recalled that she herself used to dress up in fashionable track pants and hoodies, but this seemed to make her an instant target for stops and searches by the police on the streets of Newham. It was the reason she reverted back to wearing salwar kameez again. The stereotypical image of a ‘traditional’ Asian girl on the streets offered her protection from the police harassment. Police common sense about Asian women’s reserve and multicultural training offered a protective buffer and Kiranjit increasingly self-constructed herself via the gendered stereotype of a passive and traditional Asian woman in order to escape police harassment. But it was this experience at the hands of the Newham police that led Kiranjit to sympathize and

understand what had happened to Mark and Gillian. She eventually violated her parent's wishes by coming over to Gillian's to help NMP draft her witness affidavit.

On the walls of the living room in Gillian's home is a smiling picture of a ten-year old Mark dressed in a scout's uniform. Adjacent to the picture were framed certificates awarded to Mark for perfect attendance and punctuality. These certificates were a part of the efforts of inner-city schools to recognize the uncommon successes of their students who were more apt to be labeled as 'problem' students. Gillian was very proud of these certificates and proud of Mark and yet she talked about them in a wistful nostalgic tone about the time her son had been 'a very happy normal boy.'

These memories contrasted with the last years of Mark's secondary schooling, which had been spent fighting a series of detentions and exclusions that prohibited him from attending school. He was finally simply expelled from Eastlea Community School in his last high school year. The image and certificates on the wall of a bright young boy and the image of Mark as an adolescent trouble-maker constructed by Eastlea could not have been more different. According to Gillian, for the longest time Mark dreamt of becoming a barrister and had done well in the arts. He had even brought the school recognition through an award winning performance in a school drama that was staged at London's prestigious Royal Arts Festival.

Mark's growing conflict with school authorities, however, played against a hidden backdrop of him falling victim to a racist attack. He was beaten by the father of a white friend in the neighborhood who did not like his son hanging out with black people. The father worked at a local police station canteen and his attack on Mark resulted in yet another NMP case on behalf of the family. This time, Mark and NMP won the case and the perpetrator was evicted out of Newham Council's social housing and sent away from the borough.



Such hard-won victories over racism, however, did not mitigate the damage that had been done to Mark's education. With the help of NMP again, Gillian tried to mount appeals against Mark's disciplinary exclusions from school. She petitioned for other forms of interventions for Mark, such as pastoral support services and so on, but none were offered. Mark was running afoul of hostile teachers and administrators who treated him as an undisciplined young black male.

During the time Mark was expelled from school most of his friends had graduated and moved to college or the workforce. Mark had instead spent time in the local Territorial Army doing volunteer training as a way to pass the time and as a way to lend some structure to his life. Eventually he won his case and was let back into the school system. His final year performance, however, was mediocre.

The declining opportunities for social mobility seemed to have a decisive negative impact on Mark's aspirational dreams and Gillian was devastated. 'He's left school with no qualifications, nothing.'

Later in 2005 Mark was charged and convicted of common assault and would spend a year appealing the conviction again with the help of NMP. He did not often appear motivated to pursue his case and on many occasions threatened to derail his own chances of success by failing to appear for his hearing appeals and missing his probation meetings. As one of his caseworkers, I had to scramble for doctor's notes to provide extenuating evidence to justify his absence at his probation visits and to assist him in avoiding further arrests.

The long shadow of police harassment on the family and his failed school experiences were making Mark resigned and cynical. When I approached him to undertake an NMP anti-racist workshop on stops and searches and legal rights, he was hardly interested, despite his

many experiences with the phenomenon. He brushed off any attempt I made to talk to him about schooling options and the like.

‘He’s given up,’ Gillian declared to me.

Mark, unlike Gillian, had been very reluctant to go through with the process of the police complaint. It was only his mother’s urgings that made him provide his affidavit to the internal affairs. In Mark’s view, the long running battle with the police had only brought rack and ruin on the family and had made him the target of police reprisals. He resented his mother for being as strong-willed as she was about challenging every instance of police abuse, which he interpreted as the reason his own personal dreams to lead a normal life and to become successful were dashed.

During his interview with the investigating officers from internal affairs over his 2005 police complaints case, I came to understand how Mark had become so cynical about the bureaucratic and institutional processes of seeking justice against police abuse. NMP had insisted on sitting in on the interview with police officers in order to provide support for him. My notes from the meeting recount what took place as two white female detectives from internal affairs came to take down Mark’s testimony.

I initially did not think that she was asking questions in an overtly antagonistic fashion. However, I began to get the sense, the underneath the very smooth line of questioning was a police officer’s logic and sympathy at work. The application of ‘excessive force’ was weighed in with the logic of an officer’s ‘risk assessment.’ At one point she remarked ‘you’re not a small guy’ in response to Mark’s description of how he was roughly handled and later was thrown into the ground and had smashed his head. Mark replied ‘I wasn’t big, I was not as big as I am now.’ He had been about 2 inches shorter, at 5” 8.’ The police officers were of equal if not slightly taller height than he was then. He was 18 years old now, and the incident happened last year.

Mark’s frustration at trying to present his victimization was evident. The lead white female detective immediately began to shoot holes in his testimony. Under the guise of objective

questioning, she was using implicit racial codes to structure her report. Mark's physical appearance was an immediate reason to cast doubt on his account of an assault. A tall and well-built black male was portrayed as someone less susceptible to being assaulted. And this was despite the fact that the police had, in their favor, both the force of numbers and the legal sanction to apply violence.

Other examples included when Mark was wincing and moving in pain because he was standing tip-toe as the officers hand-cuffed and restrained him. When he made the complaint that the officers did not respond to his pain or pleas, the detective countered by suggesting that Mark might have been moving his shoulders, thereby necessitating the extra force. Again the common-sense of the white female internal affairs detectives were drawing on gendered ideas about menacing black masculinity in constructing their report on the police complaint. When Mark tried to clarify that an overwhelming number of about five to six officers had been involved in restraining him, the lead detective quickly asked if there were any of his friends in the vicinity and wrote down that the scene constituted of three other friends. Only when we protested that this was not accurate since the friends arrived subsequent to Mark's apprehension by the police did she strike-out the detail.

Continuing along the trope of characterizing Mark as a potentially aggressive black male, the detective began to query him about the veracity of the sexual assault on his mother. The detective's duty was not necessarily to take Mark's side, but it was to write down his point of view. A basic understanding of the difficulties involved in having a teenage son describe a sexual assault on his mother should have at least warranted a sensitive approach to the topic. As Mark had already experienced during his schooling years interpellations of human feeling and

vulnerability were not experiences he could count on. This is from my field notes taken at the internal affairs interview,

This was the most difficult part of the interview. The sergeant kept needling him to provide a description of what had happened exactly. She wanted to know what top his mother was wearing, what color, and if the top had come off slightly, all the way, if she had been wearing a bra. Mark grew very distressed and reluctant to speak. 'Can we move past this bit?' He vacillated between becoming very stiff and reticent to talk and often moved his forehead to the edge of the table. The sergeant persisted without showing any empathy for the emotional aspect of what he was going through or wanting to recognize his anguish....There was no understanding or even perception of his capacity to have difficult emotions. He was not seen as a 'victim' and in fact had to continuously justify his allegations with clinical details. I wondered if this would have been a reaction to a crime victim who was white and female and blonde.

The specter of police abuse in Gillian and Mark's life had been unrelenting, and it had delivered humiliating assaults on their individual spirit and their family relationships. Earlier in 2004 the police had raided the home again looking for Mark on suspicion of burglary. No charges were ever sustained, but during the raid Gillian had been molested by a police officer.

In the course of the internal investigations for both the 2004 and 2005 complaints, however, internal affairs failed to find any fault with the police officers. Gillian's 2004 misconduct and sexual assault allegations were not upheld due to the officer in question's explanation that he placed his hand on her shoulders to calm her down. She was alleged to be out of control and shouting abuse at the officers. Furthermore, no other police officers corroborated her story and, without any other person present in the kitchen at the time of the alleged assault, it was a classic case of a complainant's account versus the police's collective reconstruction of the event.

It was widely accepted in anti-racist circles that police officers accused of misconduct would often write up their notes in collaboration with one another in order to corroborate an accused officer's story. In such cases the outcomes hardly ever favored the complainant. In fact

in the 2005 complaint, the final investigation report concluded that some of Gillian's allegations against the officers may have been due to one of the officer's having a 'very strong regional Southern Irish accent, which at times can be difficult to understand'<sup>3</sup>. With the absence of any other form of evidence there was no way to provide a substantial basis to support a clear finding of misconduct against the officer.

These incidents show how numerous white police officers have routinely constructed Gillian's body through a patriarchal white male imagination that licenses physical violence and sexual violation on black women. This rank and file police discourse reveals processes of dehumanization and defeminization that construct black women as bodies without legal and social integrity. These state agents do not apply the state's own abstract codes of liberal individualist propriety with respect to how it polices black women. As so many black victims of police abuse repeatedly asked me, 'Would they do this to Tony Blair's daughter?'

The continual loss of bodily integrity and respectability came to haunt Gillian in more interpersonal ways as well. The sustained bodily violations wrought by state violence seemed to circulate through an intimate cycle of violence. Mark's decline saw him getting further and further in trouble with the law and one day he came back home in a rage, thrashed his room and physically assaulted both Gillian and one of his teenage sisters. He was out of control and Gillian felt she had no choice.

'I called the police on him. Do you hear what Gillian is telling you, Mohan? I called the police on him!'

'Inside my body I'm calm as you like, outside I'm shaking like a leaf. James (Gillian's partner) and Mark have been abusing me for years. I've been abused in my own home. I'm not such a perfect family after all. I've been with this man for 23 years and I've been threatened and

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<sup>3</sup> NMP case notes and official IPPC letter.

threatened. I've had to take so much shit for people around and from my own family. Mark is so twisted and confused. I've faced it for you and why have you got an element of doubt? I've got to hold it together for the girls. 13 years on, I'm up at 6 in the morning to see if the police are coming!'

My last casework action for Gillian was to see her re-housed at an adjacent borough. The multicultural neighborhood community of which she had lived for 20 odd years needed to be left behind so that she could secure the safety of herself and her daughters. They had been recently subjected to a break-in and assault as some people who were looking for Mark smashed their way in with guns and threatened the family. I was terrified for Gillian's safety.

Ironically when once I was Mark's advocate, I found myself having to represent the local housing authority's Red Panel Team that required that Gillian no longer house her troublesome adult son. This was the condition for providing new quarters for the family. Along with Gillian who had called the police on her son, I was also felt that I was playing an oppressor's role by negotiating the state's discourse of disciplining dysfunctional welfare recipients in order to secure Gillian the new council flat that would be safer for her and her daughters.

## **MULTIPLE MEANINGS OF BLACKNESS IN BRITAIN**

The intersectional racist violence experienced by Gillian questions the narrative about multicultural British society as comprised of an organic convivial culture and it also challenges community cohesion discourse. Racism, in its intersectional connection with gender, class, sexuality and racist nationalism, has continuously shaped Gillian's life since her childhood. As we have painfully seen, the fact of her black female body nullified any advantages that

integration and acculturation is purported to provide. In multicultural East London, her black female body over-whelmed any other sign of cultural assimilation, and racism further rendered her body a site for works of violent atrocity. The violent domination of the black female body did not bother to reference English or British acculturation and assimilation. In fact, it rendered such an acculturation incongruous and irrelevant.

The ways in which the black female body is rendered prone to sexualized racist violence during inter-racial encounters with state agents like police officers is doubly enabled by the objective bureaucratic and administrative processes of the British state. The police complaints process is based on racial solidarities with white officers and these processes themselves mobilize racist codes and discourses to make justice a highly difficult and largely improbable prospect. This persistent structural impediment is itself an axis of racialization that continues to separate white and black in Britain. The British state structures daily black subordination through face-to-face forms of violent domination and complicit bureaucratic practices that routinely deny racial justice.

Repetitive state violence helped to deteriorate the class positions of both Gillian and Mark and solidified the low socio-economic position that they both occupy. People do make their own individual choices within a set of given social constraints, but it is difficult to examine the emergence of Mark's violent and oppressive patriarchal actions against his mother and his sisters outside of the history of racialized state violence and racist antipathies which he himself had been repeatedly subjected to. This is not to excuse the domestic violence, but to situate its intersectional conditions of emergence.

The state position that I had to reluctantly adopt as a practical caseworker is not the position that I now occupy when trying to understand how the intersection between state and

interpersonal violence is socially produced, rather than the result of pure individual actions. My caseworker dilemma only minutely echoed the far greater dilemma that Gillian had to face in cutting Mark out of her life in order to secure safety for herself and her daughters. There was no elegant resolution that was obtainable in this story.

Gillian's positive self-ascription as a strong black woman and as a black anti-racist activist in her community arises out a history of physical brutalization and survival. Her anti-racist political agency is lived within community contexts that are characterized by Newham's on-the-surface conviviality and inter-cultural sociability. Gillian's anti-racist consciousness and involvement in black anti-racism provided her with a means of struggle and helped to mobilize crucial community support. She appeared to have formed a rigorous theory and practice of resisting police abuse that contrasted with her son's ineffectual approach. Mark's lack of a progressive gender and racial politics, his social mobility desires and his identification with consumptive forms of global black culture did not appear to help him make an empowering analysis of what was happening in his life.

But the 'myth of the strong black woman,' as Michelle Wallace (1999) pointed out, is a harsh valorization that rationalizes the social unavailability of forms of genteel femininity (and codes of respectful treatment) granted towards privileged white women. Gillian's dogged strength to unrelentingly fight unrelenting police abuse also served to alienate her from Mark who, governed by unquestioned patriarchal codes, wished for a more feminine and 'normal' mother and a 'quiet' middle-class English life that was not available to him.

The identity of being a strong black woman for Gillian is hence not always comfortably inhabited. In her understandably weak moments Gillian succumbed to feeling inferior as a black woman, and this inferiorization, most acutely observed in the realm of self-image and



respectability, enact white supremacist judgments about deficient phenotypical characteristics (hair straightening) and cultural behavior (seen through her valorization of the apparent modesty of South Asian women in the Newham - modesty being an attribute that has been systematically denied to her).

This contradictory identity making process, caught in the dialectic of constructing self-representation as a strong black woman/inferior black woman, presents a prison-house of racial identity in the context of continuous decades-long oppression. The multiple meanings of blackness discerned in Gillian's story signify overlapping and simultaneous responses with frequent oscillations occurring between being a repeat victim and exercising political agency.

This account of the anti-racist casework that I participated with Gillian and Mark is an example of what regularly takes place in the course of the daily work carried out by community organizations such as NMP. Victories and clear resolutions, as I found out in my apprenticeship as a black anti-racist caseworker, are not always available and when they are sometimes realized, the reality of black life in Britain is that another encounter with racism is waiting just down the road.

## Chapter 4: Groundings in Racial Harassment Casework

On December 13, 2006 I appeared as a caseworker at the Bow district court at a hearing to review an interim injunction granted in a racial harassment case. The case involved Amina, a British Muslim woman in her thirties, born and raised in Newham, and a single mother of a four-year old son, Adil. Amina had suffered two years of persistent verbal abuse, threats, intimidation and attacks from two sets of neighbors – the Smiths and the Robsons. As a result of the constant harassment and anxiety provoked by the harassment, Adil had become virtually mute and had rarely spoken in more than a year. In the course of this time his mother had been subject to frequent racist name calling: a ‘black cunt,’ a ‘Paki-whore,’ ‘wog’s meat,’ ‘black wog’ and told repeatedly that ‘all wogs should go home to your own country!’

Racial harassment, as a mode of explicit and overt racism, mobilizes gendered and sexualized symbolic language, and these speech acts themselves are not merely indicators of individual prejudice, but rather authorize a will to gendered racial domination (Collins 1998; Alexander 2005). In British criminal discourse it has also become a legal offense, especially since the Crime and Disorder Act of 1998 and racial harassment broadly refers to historically occurring social actions such as ‘unprovoked assaults including common assault, actual bodily harm and grievous bodily harm, damage to property, the daubing of slogans and/or graffiti of a racial nature, arson or attempted arson, the insertion of rags, paper, rubbish and/or any material which can be and/or has been set alight [into houses], the insertion of excrement, eggs, paint, faeces, rubbish and/or other noxious and/or offensive substances through an opening in the house concerned or within its perimeter, the sending of threatening and/or abusive correspondence of a

racial nature, the making of threatening and/or abusive telephone calls of a racial nature, verbal racial abuse, demanding money accompanied by verbal racial abuse, repeated vandalism of a property belonging to the person concerned or any member of his/her household, threatening and abusive behavior including spitting, participation in any activity which is calculated to deter the person from occupying a particular property and attempted murder or murder' (Monitoring Group 2011).

Re-centering the political purpose of racial harassment is important to counter an emerging hegemonic analysis that rationalizes racial harassment, especially at the verbal levels, as reflections of non-elite forms of white working-class cultural resistance. These whiteness as non-elite/ethnic difference arguments claim that a new configuration of power within multiculturalism and anti-racism leads to counter-narratives of 'unfairness to whites' (Hewitt 2005:77-78). As this dissertation has argued, however, white backlash logics are not isolated and marginalized expressions, but rather have state formation purposes that aim for cross-class white racial solidarities. British political culture has become very sensitive to white working-class counter-narratives against anti-racism. In 2009, for example, the Department for Communities and Local Government produced a research report that claimed white working-classes were feeling betrayed and abandoned by mainstream politicians who favored immigrants and used the concept of racism and political correctness to stifle their point of view (Doughty 2009). This counter-narrative of white working-class backlash is posited as a social fact which carries emic truth claims and form barriers towards inter-racial understanding and community cohesion. It is also seen as the product of the excesses of anti-racist discourse that has led to the alienation of whites (Bonnett 1996).

Within the context of Amina's experience, constant referencing of her sexual difference and her violability as a woman was interwoven with dehumanized racial differentiation in escalating narratives that progressed to threats and assaults. She suspected that among the reasons she was targeted for attack was that, following her separation and divorce from her husband, she had rebuffed flirtatious behavior by her white male neighbors. Neighbors who watched as a childhood African-Caribbean friend visited her concluded that she preferred having a sexual liaison with another nonwhite person; hence, the denigrating label of 'wog's meat.' Amina's sexual inaccessibility to the white males in her apartment block was interpreted as an affront to heterosexual white desires for inter-racial sexual mixing. In addition, her unresponsiveness to sexual innuendo and entreaty by white males in her block was interpreted as snobbery, as a prejudice against white working-class male attention, and a provocation for teaching her a lesson in racial humility. Amina's situation was an example of how unfairness-to-whites discourses and white backlash narratives can be mobilized in ways that reconfigure and reauthorize violent domination.

The harassment also involved Amina's friend and a fellow neighbor on the second floor landing, Harry, a white gay man who lived alone and who had worked together with Amina in central London's nightclub scene. He'd been called a 'pussy boy' and a 'queer boy' by the Smiths and the Robsons, and was further victimized for his relationship with Amina and her son, to whom he was very close. His lack of interest in socializing with other white males, including the Robsons and the Smiths, and his preferred closeness to Amina was puzzling to them and was expressed via homophobic labeling and harassment. White working-class and masculinist based cohesion demanded from him heteronormative behavior that he refused to participate in. Harry's

potential departure from the block to escape his situation also terrified Adil who felt some measure of safety with Harry's friendship and protective presence in the housing block.

To protect himself from potential assaults, Harry would try to closet his gay identity. When questioned by his neighbors and tormentors, 'Are you queer, is that your boyfriend who comes to see you?' Harry would deny it. 'I don't feel I look gay, but people have chatted,' he would say.

The relationship between the Smiths, the Robsons and Amina started to become particularly confrontational when the Robsons were discovered to have forged DSS (welfare) claims and were prosecuted. They felt victimized and betrayed and seemed to think that someone in the apartment block had 'grassed' on them. Their suspicions turned towards Amina.

During the course of the previous two years the Robsons and the Smiths had grown in friendship through regular socializing oriented around drinking. Their loud and public soirees seemed to exert a form of social control on the low-rise and close-quarters walk-up flats, many of whose residents had to tip-toe around the presence of this clique. Amina and Harry had stayed away from these specific socializing events and activities, but their distance created an impression that they were standing aloof from the Smiths and the Robsons. Initially, there were inconsiderate and deliberate late-night noise provocations and drunken partying and these eventually escalated to incidents of racist name-calling, graffiti and constant threats of racial and sexual violence.

East Londoners in Newham are themselves the best source of theorizing these complex changes in social relationships and the presence of racism in their racially mixed housing areas and neighborhoods. As Gillian pointed out in the previous chapter, there are critical events and moments that invoke racial differentiation, polarization and hierarchy in Newham. Her comment

‘that’s when you see the colors’ alludes to an awareness that there are two levels of inter-subjective exchanges taking place in inner city race relations. Moments like police abuse or racial harassment can quickly decompose everyday inter-racial sociability and realign social solidarities along racial lines. Her insight points out that everyday racial common sense in East London has developed an uneasy and unstable tension between a performance of color-blindness and deep-seated racial antipathy or a ‘hyper-consciousness’ of color and race that lurks underneath ideologies of racial mixing (Vargas 2004).

This case was special to me because I had the opportunity learn how to develop a racial harassment case from its beginnings. I worked with the collective support of NMP, and under the tutelage of a senior activist, Zareena Mustapha. The process of learning how to do casework was nurtured by a network of present and former NMP caseworkers who always made themselves available. NMP had an important archive of knowledge distributed among this network of activists and intricate bureaucratic knowledge concerning the functions of local government and the police with respect to victims of racial harassment and racial attacks.

NMP also had a militant approach about racial harassment casework, which assumed that racial minorities could not rely on the local state and the police to protect their rights. These state institutions were seen as fundamentally antagonistic towards victims of racial harassment, and they had to be pressured, embarrassed and cajoled into doing their job of providing basic protections for Black and Asian people.

For the court case, both the Smiths and the Robsons were provided with legal aid. Amina was represented by a barrister who was taking up an Anti-Social Behavior prosecution on behalf of Newham Council. Since the initial injunction had been granted ex-parte, the Robsons and Smith had been represented through solicitors but they did not appear yet to have a barrister.

Amina's council appointed barrister was a young, ambitious and up-and-coming white councilman from Southwark, and one of his first comments to me concerning the case was that he was surprised that such racial harassment incidents were still happening at the present time. As a councilman in a neighboring inner-city borough, he had scant knowledge of the extent of racial harassment and attacks and thought they were something from a bygone era.

I accompanied Amina and Harry along with another NMP caseworker, Newham Council's Anti-social Behavior officer, Allen McIntyre and the barrister to the courtroom. We were depending on the weight of the evidence -- pages and pages of affidavits by witnesses and the ruling of the lower court judge who had initially granted the injunction -- to see us through. Despite the massive evidentiary base, however, from the very beginning it appeared as if our own barrister was half-hearted about Amina's case. It puzzled me to see him gesturing and communicating with the defendants to give instructions about how to rise and sit in the court.

The judge also appeared to be annoyed and cross at the case, and opened the proceedings by strangely stating, 'I take issue with these allegations.'

'What exactly is the charge?' he demanded, and then added, almost in a scoff, 'criminal damage?'

'Yes,' our barrister replied, to which we all reacted, and rather impulsively shouted out to remind him of the 'racially aggravated' qualification. The judge scowled at us, but did not appear to have heard our interjection and our barrister, out of seeming deference, did not press this important point.

The judge then proceeded. 'I have read the opinion of the previous judge, and I don't think that the defendants have experience with these hearings. Are they willing to comment? Do you want to say anything?' He then addressed the Smiths and the Robsons directly.

The Robsons spoke first. ‘Since we got the injunction, we have been too frightened to go back home. We’ve moved out. It is Christmas and we have had no way to put up Christmas decorations for our son. I was not involved in Mr. Smith’s case and I live above them. I have nowhere else to go.’

Then the Smiths spoke. ‘Sir, first of all I am on £400 a week and have no reason to break my bail. I am a prisoner in my own home. I cannot go out. If I broke my bail, why don’t they phone the police and have me arrested?’

Thomas Smith was on bail because he was facing criminal charges for one of the more recent attacks on Amina. The case would be heard in January at Snaresbrook Crown Court. But inexplicably, he had been charged and released, without any bail conditions. A logical bail condition would have been to restrict contact with the victim. This liberal bail condition was doubly strange in the context of the racially aggravated nature of the alleged offenses and the supposed hard-line on crime and anti-social behavior that the local and national state was pursuing.

In support of our injunction, the barrister responded by saying that injunctive relief was appropriate for the matter and had served its purpose of prohibiting further contact between the Smiths and Amina. And since the standard of proof in criminal charges was higher than in a civil issue, the barrister argued that, upon a ‘balance of convenience test,’ the injunction served to preserve the status quo until the Smiths’ trial could be heard. At that time all the state’s evidence against Smith would be presented to the Crown Court and a final judgment delivered.

The barrister went on to clarify that that the injunction only prohibited contact, but did not require the Smiths or the Robsons to move out. Hence, the granting of the injunction against the harassment was reiterated as being appropriate as an interim remedy.



The judge listened and then responded by saying, ‘I have to deal with this as a matter of impression. I have doubts about whether the balance of convenience test has been met.... There is something to be said about giving the Smiths and the Robsons the opportunity to show that they will not behave in an anti-social way. The claimants, meanwhile, are not particularly disadvantaged.... There is nothing to prevent the claimants from coming to court again,’ the judge added.

It had taken five months for Amina and Harry to build their case through applying unrelenting pressure on the relevant local bodies that were charged with the positive duty to protect victims of racial and homophobic harassment. After all this work, the protective injunction had been granted a mere three weeks ago, during which time they both finally experienced relative peace in their homes and the harassment incidents had ceased.

As Amina and Harry’s caseworker I had filed detailed official complaints against errant housing officers and police detectives who had initially botched the case, spent hours collating information for affidavits in support of the injunction, closely monitored and reported incidents of repeat harassment to the police and to the council and strained to get any kind of robust response from any statutory agency. I couldn’t count the numerous times I had rushed to Amina and Harry’s flat with fellow NMP caseworkers, in order to calm their fears about an impending danger.

‘Let’s give all the parties every opportunity to live in harmony,’ the judge proceeded sagely.

‘If worse comes to worst we can reinstate the injunction.’ The judge then granted a stay to the injunction we had fought so hard and long to obtain. He reserved costs for all parties and

finished strangely by addressing only the defendants. He did not even look at Amina and Harry, and he proceeded to give the Smiths and Robsons counsel.

‘It is important that all four defendants keep in touch with their solicitors,’ he said kindly.

Our team exited the court room sunk in despair and frustration and the following conversation ensued with our barrister.

Amina, who was near tears, said to the barrister, ‘It looks like it came down to their word against ours.’

‘What can I do about *that?*’ the barrister retorted defensively. And then, backing up, he tried to console Amina by saying that if there was to be any repeat behavior on the part of the perpetrator we could submit yet another application to renew the injunction.

As a parting shot he added, ‘To be honest with you, Mr. Smith and Mr. Robson do not come across as thugs!’

## **POLITICAL AND PRACTICAL CASEWORK**

To seek racial justice in Britain requires a combined political and practical approach where the liberal state and its agents need to be conceptualized as antagonists you have to work with and against. I learned this as a caseworker with the NMP, where the concept of anti-racist casework is not simply derived from a belief in a race-neutral social contract between the liberal state and its citizens. The state in such as social contract formulation is understood to be naturally predisposed to provide protection to private persons and property.

NMP, on the other hand, assumes that the state does not function in a social contractarian manner with respect to working-class Black and Asian people, hence it argues for the necessity

of racializing and politicizing its engagement with bureaucratic state processes and the militant assertion of equal rights towards state protection against racial harassment and attacks. For example, the ideal for carrying out racial harassment casework when it reaches a courtroom stage is to mobilize mass dissent outside the courtroom, like it was done in the ‘Justice for Gill Smith’ campaign discussed earlier.

NMP argues that these processes have to be overtly politicized in order for state actors, such as judges, to recognize the harm in racism, and to forcibly demonstrate to elites the ‘public interest’ regarding racist behavior. During the injunction review for Amina, I had not done this. Such mobilizations require lots of resources of personnel and time and are easier to mobilize for high profile cases such as racist murders. The sheer workload of cases often mitigates against utilizing these strategies all the time.

My experience in Amina and Harry’s case and in other cases showed me that these institutional channels, bureaucratic frameworks and judicial remedies are the very terrain of anti-racist struggle that occurs within and against the systemic tendencies of the multicultural British state. In spite of several significant anti-racist reformist gains, such as the official acceptance of the existence of institutional racism following the release of the report of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry in 1999, obtaining racial justice is still painstaking and very rare (Commission for Racial Equality 1999; Yuval-Davis 1999).

Left to their own tendencies, British state institutions did not seem to work towards providing racial justice. In fact, they exert a countervailing tendency against movements for anti-racist reform. The barrier against racial justice for victims of racial harassment is often not the result of a single failing institution or a particularly errant state officer. The production of racial injustice can and does cut across several institutional domains. For example, the quality of the

police's response and investigation of racial harassment and racial attacks closely connects with the role of local government agencies in enforcing eviction clauses in social housing tenancies against perpetrators. The role of judicial activity in providing interim injunctions is also a strategic and protective course of action for victims, as complex cases and the due processes of criminal and civil actions take their course.

One of the key skills I learned as a caseworker with NMP was to anticipate state institutions and state actors as exemplifying the tendency towards institutional racism, and therefore not presenting themselves as liberal allies in the anti-racist struggle. As a caseworker, my response to the insight that the state tends toward opting out of its anti-racist duties was to patiently keep track of how institutional responses inevitably become botched up, and to utilize complaints processes in order to change those institutional behaviors. As I carried out my casework I would track for months the lackadaisical responses of the agencies and officers that I would encounter in my cases. After accumulating sufficient data I would then file detailed police complaints or public complaints against the local council. This was not an approach or model for state-community relations that were welcomed by either the local government or the police. These two local institutions consistently preferred community groups to participate in more friendly frameworks such as 'community consultation' and 'public-private partnerships.' Groups like NMP were seen as recalcitrant players in the local race-relations industry.

## **10 YEARS AFTER THE STEPHEN LAWRENCE INQUIRY**

One of the omitted historical facts concerning the release of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry is the role played by the campaigning and militant community-based organizations that

worked with the Lawrence family to force the parliamentary investigation into the conduct of London's Metropolitan Police Service (Met). The state, under the Conservative government, initially refused to do so. It was this agitational campaigning process that lasted from the day Stephen Lawrence, an African-Caribbean teenager, was racially attacked and killed at a South-East London bus-stop in 1993 until the release of the report in 1999. The racial justice campaign took a total of six years of collective activist work and resulted in the official recognition of the problem of institutional racism in the Met that failed to adequately investigate Lawrence's murder. The groundswell of the campaign for an official inquiry into the conduct of the police in investigating the racist murder was also picked up by the Labor Party, then in opposition, who made it a part of a campaign promise and black vote mobilizing tactic. They delivered on the promise of initiating an official inquiry when they came into power in 1997 and the new Home Minister, Jack Straw, moved the proceedings.

The concerted oppositional and agitational work undertaken by grassroots political groups was in a large measure responsible for introducing into public discourse the question of institutional racism, and pushing the concept into mainstream British public discourse. The conclusion of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry into the indifferent and obstructionist investigation of the Met made publicly visible what grassroots groups working with victims of racism had been experiencing at the hands of the police for years. The victory trickled down to popular consciousness as ordinary black and Asian youths I met, who were often the targets of ethnic and racial profiling on the streets, would sometime invoke the name of Stephen Lawrence to rebuff the police. 'Why don't you go find Stephen's murderers!' was the cry I often heard youths hurl at harassing officers.

The concept of institutional racism and the imperative to reform British institutions away from this systemic tendency has since been legally established in the following manner:

The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their color, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behavior which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people...It persists because of the failure of the organisation openly and adequately to recognize and address its existence and causes by policy, example and leadership. Without recognition and action to eliminate such racism it can prevail as part of the ethos or culture of the organization. (Macpherson 1999)

This definition, as Reena Bhavnani (Bhavnani 2001) argues, represents an advance over individual and perpetrator definitions of racism, and it opens up the possibility of reforming the interconnected relationship of racism across different institutional contexts. But the definition engenders new contradictions. The legal definition of institutional racism ‘incorporates the ideas of black-white racism, of culture and ethnicity; and takes account of racism being ‘unwitting’...and yet it excludes ideas of differing racisms based on gender, class and nation’ (Bhavnani 2001: 8). The question of gendered racisms, therefore, is still relatively invisible even with the framework of reforming institutional racism. While Amina’s case was progressing, for example, she had a difficult time communicating the sexualized nature of the harassment she was facing. Council officers would try to fix her grievance as an issue of her sensitivity as a ‘Muslim’ who objected to the English practices of social drinking and loud partying.

The absence of the official recognition of the sexualized nature of racial harassment had a role to play in the defeat of the injunction in court, as the matter was perceived by the judge as a question of cultural incommensurability and unfairness towards marginalized working-class whites. Such sympathies were mobilized by the Robsons concerning appeals about their inability

to celebrate Christmas and so on. The invisibility of gendered dimensions of racial harassment made for a quick unraveling of the argument against the racial power imbalances.

The focus on institutional racism itself has only provoked a grudging willingness for reform within the Met, who felt their actions intensely scrutinized along this framework. Similarly following the Christopher Alder report (IPCC 2006) on the conduct of the police in city of Hull, the verdict of ‘unwitting racism’ against the police officers involved in that case gave further credence to an emergent public perception of Britain’s police forces as endemically afflicted with internal problems of racism. When the highest ranking black officer in Britain, Assistant Commissioner Tarique Ghaffur, resigned amidst charges of racial discrimination within the Met, the credibility of the Met’s institutional culture became seriously questioned.

The impact of the Lawrence report did not only limit itself to police forces. There was also the Zahid Mubarek justice campaign which involved the murder of a South Asian teenager in the prison system in 2000. The Mubarek report found the Feltham Young Offender Institution to have systematically failed in its duty of care, when it placed a known white fascist sympathizer and a person who was in prison on the charges of racial harassment to share a cell with Mubarek. Mubarek was a first time offender who had robbed a convenience store of a few pounds worth of shaving blades. On the night before he was to be released after serving his prison time, he was clubbed to death in his sleep by his cell-mate following six weeks of sharing the cell in an institution that was rumored to be practicing a form of ‘Gladiator’ game, whereby inmates were paired up to produce conflict for the entertainment of the prison guards and officers (Lucas 2007). The Zahid Mubarek Inquiry report further developed the discourse against institutional racism when it added this perspective to the Lawrence Inquiry’s earlier findings:

The Prison Service's own inquiry into Feltham found that it was institutionally racist, and the Commission for Racial Equality reached a similar conclusion about the Prison Service as a whole. But where racism exists on an institutional level, you are likely to find pockets of overt racism at the individual level. It is a matter of great regret that not even the institutional racism was recognized for what it was at the time. There was a culture within the Prison Service - and maybe on the part of the independent watchdogs as well - to treat race relations as divorced from the basic operational requirements of prison work (Zahid Mubarek Inquiry 2006).

The Mubarek report in 2004 pointed towards a critique of the color-blind assumptions of British institutions or a simple assertion of a race-neutral social contract that grassroots groups had already been refuting.

And yet the momentum generated by the Stephen Lawrence reforms has not ultimately achieved the kind of hegemonic hold on the altering the lack of accountability between British state institutions and racial minorities. The reforming imperative unleashed by these various public inquiries and recommendations created a political visibility on the question of institutional racism that held some promise for a time. But hopes for comprehensive reforms have seemingly run aground.

By 2009, a short ten years following the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry report, a new political narrative concerning the anachronistic character of the reform imperative against institutional racism has gathered force. The chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, (the EHRC which had replaced the previously race-focused Commission for Racial Equality, CRE), Trevor Phillips, argued in an important speech that the police service had turned a corner in addressing institutional racism, and that the term was no longer valid and effective in the light of changing racial attitudes in society and within institutions such as the police.

Once a former black student leader himself, Phillips' comments were in line with the dominant political consensus shared among the major political parties concerning the question of



Britain's institutional racism. This new political narrative sought to distance itself from the issue of institutional racism and productively engaged the drive to divest and retrench the state from carrying out anti-racist functions. Soon after Phillips' speech, Scotland Yard's Commissioner, Paul Stephenson, also declared that he did not consider institutional racism to be to be an appropriate concept to characterize the problems of the police force. In 2010, the Justice Secretary Jack Straw reversed his earlier political stance by proclaiming that the Metropolitan Police Service was now no longer institutionally racist. These narratives were cast in terms of racial progress and came to characterize the self-congratulatory last years of the New Labor government. It was a familiar center-left triangulation electoral strategy of appealing to black voters on and the basis of hailing an already accomplished track-record against institutional racism but at the same time muting the discourse in order to respond to disgruntled white backlash.

During the 2006 Race Hate Conference put on by Newham Council's race-equality unit, REIN, I raised a question concerning the poor investigation record on most of these racial harassment cases by the local police. In my own observations as a caseworker I had often witnessed the police trying to quickly achieve a quick clear-up or disposal rate with respect to racial incidents through discouraging the recording of racist elements in a case, or disavowing the criminal nature of a racial incident by positing it as a neighborly dispute. This form of downgrading racist incidents worked to disguise the real extent of the problem and the police's ineffective responses.

In terms of the more robust policing responses of providing cautions, arrests, charges and convictions, the police success rate in racial incidents was very low, both locally and London-wide. The question I raised was addressed to then Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan

Police, Tarique Ghaffur. He had been addressing the conference about his forthcoming role in the provision of counter-terrorism security for the upcoming 2012 Olympic Games in East London, a speech that was strangely cast as addressing race-hate. I posed a question to him about the discrepancy between the so-called positive duty amendments that had now come into place concerning racial equality following the Stephen Lawrence inquiry, and the poor record of the police against racial harassment.

His response was stated somewhat defensively, and in part sympathetically. He argued that there was a systemic reason for why the police did not do well with racial harassment cases. This was a result, in his argument, of 'performance indicators' for the police that did not prioritize anti-racist objectives. He told the audience that clearing-up race hate crimes was not a major component of the law and order agenda in the public discourse, and instead the police were publicly assessed for their work in protecting private property. The main indicators or priorities for police performance had to do with clear-up rates in car theft and burglary cases. In the same breath, he also strenuously argued for consultative cooperation by grassroots groups with the police and directed me to the largely ineffectual Police-Community Consultation Group. He also derided the use of 'ideological' and 'aggressive' methods, presumably in reference to groups such as NMP.

The police ideology of subsuming community-based oversight into consultative approaches was heavily promoted in Newham. In my role as a caseworker I had to engage a number of Detective Superintendents and Detective Inspectors of Newham's police, many of whom I often had a fraught relationship. But during the course of the year I was approached by the police to help them filter and sort out the reported incidents of racial harassment in the borough. The argument I was presented was that this was necessary in order to provide greater

efficiency so that the police could concentrate on the ‘genuine’ cases that constituted real ‘crimes.’ I explored this informal proposal put forward by a Detective Inspector, and it entailed having Newham’s race equality unit, REIN function as an third party mediator between grassroots groups like NMP and the police.

If I was to agree to this system I realized that the result would be to create yet another gate-keeping mechanism that would reclassify the majority of racial incidents reported to the police as non-serious incidents and non-crimes. I would thereby deny those suffering racial harassment any recourse to police attention. Once an incident is defined non-criminal in nature it no longer becomes the police’s responsibility, and they are off the hook. And, the fewer such crimes reported the better the statistics looked for the local council’s official race relations body, REIN, who was charged to ensure the council’s urban regeneration goal of making ‘Newham a place where people want to live, work and stay’ was met.

This ‘gate-keeping’ tactic against racial harassment (Bowling 1998), also trickled down to the front-line officers, the Detective Constables, on many racial harassment cases that I dealt with. They also often felt that working on racial harassment cases was not in line with serious ‘police work.’ Racial harassment cases, for these constables, did not fit-in with self-defined images of what constituted real police work and they felt that it was more appropriate as ‘community-relations’ problem. Some DCs even openly confided in me that they thought that many people who reported racial incidents were merely playing the ‘race card,’ and hence they also wanted some form of mechanism to filter out the large number of reported racial harassment incidents in the borough.

Running counter to the state’s retreat from the issue of institutional racism is the painstaking work done by black research groups such as the Institute of Race Relations to keep

track of the true picture and extent of violence racial harassment in the last twenty years (Institute of Race Relations 1987; Relations 1991). There has been a growing academic consensus that has argued that generational, cultural and institutional reform during this period has altered the virulent face of British racism. Such violent racisms are readily acknowledged as having been once prominent but are now seen as a residual social force. The recently released IRR report (Athwal, Bourne, and Wood 2010), *Racist violence – the buried issue*, however, disputes this claim. The report follows in the tradition of grassroots research that was done by trade unions and concerned church activists in the East End in the 1970s to first bring racial harassment to the public eye with the landmark report, *Blood in the streets* (Bethnal Green and Stepney Trades Council 1978). *Blood in the streets* was seminal in framing the ‘horrifying story of harassment-attacks on ethnic minorities and the apparent inability of those in power to control the situation’ as an important issue within the British public sphere, and a reflection of the lack of democratic accountability towards racial minorities.

Similarly, the 2010 IRR report challenges the dominant political perception that ‘raw, crude racism is over’ in Britain. According to figures tracked by the IRR in the last 20 years an estimated 104 people have been deliberately murdered on account of a ‘known or suspected racial element.’ And contrary to the mythology of racial progress, the figures in the first decade of the 21st century (2000-2009) show an increase from 40 cases to 64 cases recorded in the previous decade (1991-1999). This is an average of five deaths per year, except for 2006, the year I was doing my fieldwork. The year recorded a high of ten racist killings nation-wide.

Throughout Britain’s post-world-war two period South Asian males of different nationalities have comprised the largest group of people who have been racially attacked and killed. This entrenched cultural and structural pattern of violent racial harassment and virulent

racial antipathy continues with a growing emphasis on Muslim South Asians. An examination of the list of racist murders monitored by the IRR for the period 2000-2009 shows that 50% of all racist murders involved South Asian victims, and 21% involved people of African-Caribbean or African descent. The remainder figures involved people of Chinese, Turkish, Polish, Iranian, Iraqi, Kosovan, Traveler and Mixed-race backgrounds. There was one instance of a known racist killing of a white British youth by an Asian gang. Some 44% of all those who have died as a result of racist killings since 1993 are also Muslims.

On the level of the Newham borough, the patterns are also broadly congruent. According to a study commissioned by Newham Council in 2006<sup>1</sup>, between January 2004 and July 2006, the Newham police flagged 1,324 incidents as racial and involving 1,179 victims in the borough, most of which occurred within 100 meters of the victims' homes. 90 of the cases, or 8%, were repeat victims of racist incidents. In total, according to the Newham Council itself, one in five Newham households has experienced racial harassment. These figures represent the extent of hard-core racial terror experienced by ethnic minorities in the borough, with South Asians being the most likely (42.6%) to be repeat victims, followed by African-Caribbeans (32.7%).

One important aspect of these statistics, however, is that the proportion of racial incidents that are classified as crimes is much smaller. For example, in 2010 there were a recorded 9,747 crimes classified by the London-wide Metropolitan Police as race and religious hate crimes, of which 243 occurred in Newham. Official statistics include those racist incidents involving Black- or Asian-on-white crimes as well. But the record on the whole shows that whites comprise two-thirds of the perpetrators of all nationally recorded race hate crimes. The IRR report estimates that in an examination of 660 cases of racist violence reported in the press, 93% of the cases

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<sup>1</sup> This is an unpublished study carried out by A.J.Brimicombe, a geographical statistician in the University of East London. He presented this research at the 2006 Race Hate Crime conference, organized by REIN, November 30, 2006.

involved white perpetrators, 3.8% Asian and 2.8% Black.

An enormous gap of incongruity is created between the state's statistical knowledge of institutional racism, the police force's role in reinforcing white dominance through its treatment of Britons of color and invisibilizing the issue of racial harassment and attacks. It is this contradiction that organizations like NMP aim to challenge and it gives rise not to adventurist or polemical militancy but rather a strategic militancy that aims for practical everyday results.

### **THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF RACIAL HARASSMENT**

Amina's ordeal came to NMP's attention when her brother-in-law, himself a police officer, recommended that she contact the organization. She had had very little success previously as she tried to get the police and Newham Council to take action on her case. The case began with a phone call in the middle of June, only a week after the devastating Forest Gate anti-terror raids that had virtually paralyzed neighborhoods in Newham and which are discussed in Chapter Six.

The police cordons along several roads off Green Street were still in force, with residents requiring police escorts to and from their own homes, and NMP was buried in the work of supporting the families and individuals caught up in the raids. For a small anti-racist organization the pressures on personnel were acutely felt as regular casework had to take a back-seat to the monitoring of a large anti-terror operation that had targeted an entire local community. The increased visibility of NMP in the borough, however, through its Forest Gate work, was causing the 24-hour help-line to ring off the hook. In the midst of this community crisis, Amina called the 24-hour Emergency Service helpline, and I answered the phone. 'I don't even know where to

begin,' she said, and 'I don't know if all this is even believable.' I urged her to tell her story. I knew that victims of racial harassment often felt an acute sense of self-doubt and uncertainty concerning the believability of their victimization, and also felt that their repeat victimization and the amassing of details throughout the long periods that they had kept silent was too overwhelming to narrate.

It was not uncommon for me to explain to Americans who'd ask incredulously if violent racism, which is assumed to be a phenomenon of the past, or a peculiar institution associated with the pre-civil rights era of the U.S. Deep South, would actually be in existence in contemporary Britain. And unlike the history of the U.S. where African Americans had been the overwhelming target of racist violence, the situation that British South Asians were disproportionately the target of hate crimes appeared as a strange anomaly in the prevailing common sense about the history of western racism. I would soon discover that racism-denying attitudes and sanctioned ignorance were also widespread among the very ranks of local Newham Council bureaucrats and even the barrister who was assigned to our case. As a result, the fear that victims of racist violence have of not being believed is a product of structural-ideological circumstances, and not merely a result of individual traits or culturally influenced timidity, and it resonates with studies concerning other socially invisibilized oppressions.

Amina explained that the latest incident of harassment had taken place on a Saturday night when she returned home to her flat and went to put Adil to bed. She had recently separated from her husband, a white British man from Hoxton and felt that she quickly became a target for harassment once her marriage was broken and her husband had moved out. That night, she was on the phone when she overheard some noises which got louder and louder. She went to look through the door's spyhole and saw her neighbor, Mr. Smith, standing right outside her door,

apparently drunk.

‘Get out of here, you Paki! Go home to your own country, you wogs! All of you black bastards are the same!’ He started as he had many a night before.

He then threatened to bite her, claiming that he was HIV positive.

‘I’ll have you! You better watch your back,’ Smith continued to shout through the closed door and was banging hard. And he continued to threaten sexual violence. Amina could see the door coming loose from all the kicking and punching he was doing.

‘I’ve infected you! I’ve touched your son with my wounds!’ he shouted. Amina realized that Smith was referring to the fact that her son suffered from outbreaks of cold sores, something Smith had obviously noticed through his surveillance of Amina’s comings and goings in the block.

After threatening her, Smith made his way upstairs where he kicked at the door of an immigrant Sudanese man who he had also been harassing, but found no response. Smith, according to Amina, had assaulted the man before. She had witnessed an incident where he had pinned him against the wall and shouted, ‘I am talking to you as white man to a black man!’ Smith then came back down to her landing and somehow smeared Amina’s door with his blood, possibly by cutting himself.

This incident was only the most recent of many. A couple of months earlier, the word ‘Paki’ had been scrawled on her door. It happened after she had witnessed Alan Robson also kicking her door a few days earlier. Rubbish had been deposited on her doorstep repeatedly. Her washing on the communal clothes line, including underwear, disappeared frequently. Someone had also stuffed her letterbox with McDonalds curry sauce. The message was clear. It was a veritable commentary on her race, gender and culture.



Amina had telephoned the council to ask for help in removing the racist graffiti, something that council was obliged to do ever since the National Front waged a racial terror campaign on London's inner-cities in the 1970s and 80s. The spray-painting of their initials – NF -- and other racist slogans on black people's homes in the 1970s and 80s was a key intimidation tactic, and it led to the struggle to have Newham Council provide the service of removing such offending graffiti. In this case, however, the council denied Amina's request.

She then called the police who, when they arrived, ordered her to clean up the blood on the door herself. She asked them several times if she should be doing this herself or if the police needed to take photographs. One of the attending officers told her five times to remove the blood. She then gave the rags with the blood to the police, and when she inquired what they were going to do about the incident, they retorted, 'What do you want us to do?' When she was in the process of giving her statement about the incident, they challenged her, "Why don't you just move?" She was told by one of the attending officers, who himself was African-Caribbean, that basically she had made the free choice to live amidst people like Smith and, by staying, she had only herself to blame.

The one critical component to Amina's case, which made it a case that could not be easily dismissed or hidden away through these gate-keeping strategies by the local council or police, was the fact that during Smith' harangue at her door, Amina had had the presence of mind to pick up a video camera that she usually used to film her son's childhood and turned it on the spyhole. Enough footage was captured on tape and it was given to the police as evidence.

When I heard about the tape being given away I became alarmed. It was not uncommon to hear of video evidence going missing with the police, especially with regard to cases of police abuse. CCTVs which had been installed as part of crime-control measures had a tendency to fail

to capture incidents of police abuse. This was the danger that NMP workers had come to expect with police evidence.

But fortunately this did not become an issue in this particular situation. The evidence was used to bring criminal charges against Thomas Smith. The fact that he had been caught on tape using racial insults made it difficult for the police officers to de-racialize the crime or to misclassify the violation, as was done by the officers in my cousin Kumar's case discussed in Chapter Two. At this step of the process, the combination of the evidence and the police following through upon examination of the video evidence provided by Amina herself had resulted in the invocation of the 'racially aggravated offenses' sections of the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act.

This milestone act was passed upon the election of New Labor in 1997 and represented a campaign promise that was made when the Labor Party was still out of power and seeking to build a broad base of electoral support to topple the long-standing Conservative government. It was at the opposition party's response to a rising wave of racially motivated violence that was occurring in the early and mid-1990s, estimated at almost 140,000 incidents nationally a year. There were 11,000 reported cases in 1996, which represented an alarming 25% increase from the previous year, and more than a dozen cases of racist murder in the preceding three years, including the murder of Stephen Lawrence (Fitzgerald and Hale 1996). The standing Conservative government was seen to be doing nothing, and the Labor Party seized on this disenchantment among minority voters to offer the legislative reform as a policy response if they were to be elected. But even then, the Newham Monitoring Project had forewarned that the creation of the new category of criminal offense would in no way alter what they saw to be an issue of actual enforcement and prevailing police practice. In light of Smith having carried out

more than two hostile actions against Amina, the offense of racially aggravated intentional harassment was also brought to bear.

In the legal framework available, the invocation of the racial harassment charge is tied to the meeting a standard of proof whereby it is possible to demonstrate repeated conduct that is intentionally targeted at causing people alarm or distress due to a demonstrably racist motive or hostile action, such as the use of racist slurs like ‘black bastard,’ ‘wog’ or ‘Paki.’

In most cases, however, the evidence for being able to show strictly invidious racism is difficult to substantiate relative to commonly heard police interpretations of neighborly disputes. It is often dismissed in practice as a question of one party’s word against the other, if there is no evidentiary basis. Pursuing criminal justice in cases of racial harassment can therefore be very difficult. In this particular case, however, the presence of the racist element had documentary substance.

And yet, given this unusual circumstance brought on by Amina’s own fortitude, her struggle to free herself from the racial harassment of her neighbors was by no means plain or simple. Instead, it was just one aspect of a complexity of institutional, bureaucratic and everyday factors that prevented her from obtaining even remedial justice.

After the occurrence of the incident with Mr. Smith and the departure of the police following their half-hearted investigations, Amina was left cleaning the door. It was then that another white neighbor, Helena, came downstairs to Amina’s landing and began abusing her, in reaction to Amina having called the police on her white neighbors. But this time there were no cameras rolling.

‘Pakis, all these problems is their cause. You’re not even allowed to call them Pakis,’ she hollered. ‘They can call each other nigger, but if you do it, then it’s something really bad and you

can get arrested for it.’

Helena’s commentary framed Amina’s experience of racial harassment and her desire for racial justice within the logic of white backlash. Such racial attitudes towards the lived experiences of nonwhite racial minorities challenge the argument that virulent racism in Britain is a mere residual social force. The argument made by Paul Gilroy that British social relationships have moved towards an everyday anti-racist mode of cultural conviviality that negates racism is refuted by the lived experience of people like Amina, and of Gillian in the previous chapter, whose stories reveal that integrated social contexts actually provide an exacting context for violent domination.

The widespread cultural tolerance and racial solidarities of whites against the racial justice pursuits of Blacks and Asians also provide a new means of re-establishing racial hierarchy on an everyday social plane. In Helena’s case, although she was not a perpetrator of racial harassment, her comments and expressive racial solidarity with the Smiths and Robsons, rather than with Amina’s suffering, reveal a shared anti-Asian and anti-black white identity. In close, integrated and community contexts, the result of such white racial solidarity is to further racialize, alienate and isolate the victims of harassment.

#### **NEOLIBERALISM AND RACIAL HARASSMENT CASEWORK**

Everyday racial solidarity among whites is also expressed through the logic of white backlash against the state developing or maintaining any form of official anti-racism. And this backlash comes at a time when the local state is itself interested in neoliberalizing its operations and releasing many of its social welfare obligations in order to create smaller governments. A

neoliberalizing context forces the provision of social goods and services, such as protection against anti-social behaviors like racial harassment, to become outsourced and privatized. Hence the local state's anti-racism increasingly operates within a contracting environment, rather than through internally responsible state-based agencies. The neoliberal state logic that contracts out the responsibility for tackling racial harassment creates a weakened context for obtaining racial justice or even securing temporary procedural remedies against ongoing racial harassment.

Racial harassment in the borough of Newham is typically dealt with on two levels – on the criminal and the civil levels. While at the level of the police there is less movement towards neoliberal privatization of responsibilities, on the level of the council, the momentum for privatization through the franchising of services to outside vendors is aggressively pursued. At the level of the police, racial incidents are first dealt with on a beat level by the Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs). PCSOs are civilians who help the police to create a visible presence on the streets. These have also been the units where the most number of ethnic minority recruitment occurs.<sup>2</sup> The investigative and evidence-gathering response to racial crimes is commanded by the Community Safety Units, usually headed by a Detective Inspector, and comprised of a team of detective constables. The police bring criminal charges under the direction of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), which reviews the cases and authorizes the charges. The power of the CPS to bring charges occurred in 2003 and was supposed reform how the police frequently committed errors in misclassifying crimes.

The local council racial harassment system, in 2006, was comprised of Housing Services and the Anti-Social Behavior (ASB) departments. The ASB department can engage the council's legal team to pursue civil action against perpetrators of racial harassment, such as through evictions or by obtaining restraining orders. Both the police and local government also

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<sup>2</sup> In 2006, Britain's police force itself was only comprised of 3.7% black and ethnic minority officers (Butt 2006).

ostensibly supply ancillary support services through the Witness Support program, or by providing support workers employed by the council. Newham Council has also engaged the non-profit firm, Conflict and Change, to provide conflict resolution services through the referral of racial harassment cases. Taken together, these institutions are supposed to form the basis of what is known as a ‘multi-agency’ approach to tackling the recognized scourge of racism in Britain – racial harassment.

The police investigate racial incidents on a criminal basis and the council typically becomes involved through the monitoring of tenancy agreements in social housing. Social housing tenancy agreement began to explicitly include racial harassment clauses in the late 1980s. The institutionalization of the terminology of racial harassment in Britain emerges from the context of the historical experience of African-Caribbean and South Asian people’s presence and settlement into what are naturally perceived as white ‘host’ areas. But it is the forgetting of empire that in fact enables the immigrant-host analogy to emerge, and which works to conceive of the British state as abstracted from its imperial and colonial social relationships.<sup>3</sup> The antipathy against black people’s settlement in East London also cannot be simply read off economistic arguments concerning resource competition. White resistance towards black settlement in the borough was a political project that actively mobilized racial hierarchies. It

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<sup>3</sup> An example of the dominant immigrant-host analogy is found in the work of Ted Cantle, the academic charged with crafting a new race relations framework for Britain. Cantle describes working-class whites perceiving Black and Asian settlement as impinging on their hard-won and exclusive social rights. His narrative argues that nonwhite settlement in Britain produced for whites social welfare and economic competition for ‘the same factories, using the same public transport, shops, schools and social facilities [and that] this was a change that challenged the very idea of the ‘rightful place’ of the British amongst the other peoples of the world.’ Hence, he concludes the state developed a new role of mediating between whites and blacks so that ‘New policies, backed by new legislation and procedures to regulate these new relationships’ were made. Such a bounded notion of the British state’s historical development and the absence of the consideration of the imperial citizenship rights of Black and Asian settlers, helps to entrench a narrative of racial conflict that sees nonwhites as provocative interlopers within a whites-only polity. It also of course renders disparate the mutual formation of white working-classes in the dockyard wards of Newham and their absolutely dependent relationship with British imperial trade and colonialism.

sought to articulate post-war municipal socialism with the disenfranchisement of black people from their rights as equal British empire citizens.

Black and Asian people's integration into inner city areas proceeded from struggles against the discriminatory practice of the 'color bar' in housing in the 1950s to confronting the more violent practice of racial harassment that emerged after the color bar in housing was deemed illegal. This occurred with the passage of second Race Relations Act in 1968. What is special about the experience of African-Caribbeans and Asians in Newham is that the racism they experienced in the second period of struggle for settlement emerges from a context of spatial intimacy, rather than legalized or *de jure* segregation. Black and Asian people were generally met with violent antipathy and rejection when they settled into white dominated neighborhoods or social housing blocks.<sup>4</sup>

And the scale and longevity of these antipathies has to play a role in thinking through the experience of black people within the now dominant race relations framework of community cohesion. Racial harassment becomes visible as a social problem in municipal social policy in Britain because of the patterns of residential and spatial rejection experienced by Blacks and Asians. It is also this historical contextualization that needs to be recovered against the discourses of white backlash and the retreat of the British state from anti-racism.

As part of the move to retrench the social welfare state the responsibility for responding to racial harassment cases was no longer the purview of the Newham Council's Housing Department in 2006. The emergence of the neoliberal policy of 'choice-based lettings' had the indirect effect of weakening racial harassment protections by transferring swathes of public housing property into the private sector or placing them under the jurisdiction of private housing associations.

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<sup>4</sup> See NMP, *Annual Reports*, 1982-2002.

This shift in policy was pertinent for Amina, as she had been long-time council resident at her flat and was in due course given the option to exercise her right-to-buy. Through the help received from family members and securing newly available mortgages, she was able to do this. The selling-off of social housing and the retrenchment of the local state in delivering municipal anti-racist services has had a fragmenting and numbing effect on the anti-racist protections that were fought for and pushed into the tenancy agreements in a previous era.

A result of decade-long campaigning, the racial harassment clause in social housing provided some means for black and Asian victims of racial harassment to seek remedies against white perpetrators who were often times their neighbors and also fellow social housing recipients. In fact, a majority of the council's socially housed tenants in 2010 are still white (54%), in a borough that is comprised of almost two-thirds black and ethnic minority communities. After the neoliberal restructuring of the local council in 2005, social services was split up into adult and children's service with only six departments remaining. Housing services were privatized and an agreement was signed to contract Newham Homes, an 'at arm's-length property management organization' (ALMO) to provide the previously in-house housing services for the council. This privatization also followed the closure of the council's own racist monitoring body, ALERT.

Racial harassment cases involving public housing reverted to individual community housing officers within Newham Homes and racial harassment became lumped together with an assortment of other anti-social behaviors (ASBOS) that includes "violence, harassment, graffiti, vandalism, fly tipping, noise nuisance and abandoned vehicles." The relativization of racial harassment into the discourse of ASBOS is part of the process by which neoliberal logics of local governance has rendered a false equivalence between racism and a range of social ills. Individual



officers within the retrenched Housing services departments have also been subject to a de-skilling process as the jurisdiction for dealing with racial harassment in social housing becomes blurred. Flats supervised by a particular officer may still remain under their purview or become excluded through private property ownership. The uneven development of private property ownership amidst public allocation can reorganize class patterns within a single housing block.

This was the case with Amina who was in the process of buying her flat, but the perpetrators, the Smiths, were still council tenants. The council's initial rejection of help in removing the racist graffiti on Amina's door, for example, was done on the grounds that she was now no longer a council tenant. Ironically, the only way NMP could engage the council in racial harassment protection was no longer on the grounds of protecting an ethnic minority resident, but through prosecutorial moves to caution the Smiths who were violating the racial harassment clause in their council tenancy agreement. Private ownership of her flat rendered Amina less protected by the local state against racial harassment, and recognizing this, she felt her move to buy the flat was a mistake. As a result, she was anxious about finding a way to get out of her mortgage and personal loan responsibilities so she could sell the flat and return to Newham Council's social housing list.

During the course of my dealings with the council's housing services I developed a distinct impression that neoliberal reforms had masked the retreat of the local government on anti-racial harassment work. Newham Council dutifully publishes a periodic Race Equality Scheme which details how it aims to meet its statutory responsibilities required under new race relations laws, but it was the question of how these schemes actually functioned in day-to-day practice that seemed to point towards the reproduction of institutional racism. The actual instances of the Housing department robustly investigating and pursuing with full force its

powers against racial harassment were rare, and this was astonishing considering that Newham has been both historically and contemporaneously one of the leading municipalities facing the problem of racial harassment and racial attacks.

The end result of the state's multiple neoliberalizing efforts is that people who are victims of racial harassment and violence by neighbors find that there is virtually no effective recourse for them. The multiplying and overlapping hodgepodge of public and private bodies add up to no one taking the responsibility for addressing these kinds of situations, in spite of the presence of the very real and persistent problem of racial harassment and violence.

#### **THE STORY OF 'PAKI ALI'**

Amina's own story and that of her family illustrates how the history of racial harassment and attacks has decisively shaped the lives of black people in modern Britain. Oftentimes the counter-history of Britain's post-war black and Asian settlement of imperial citizens is clouded through what Paul Gilroy (Gilroy 2005a) has termed postcolonial melancholia, and a selective remembering of the white working-classes as the principal and only heroic figures in two great wars of the 20th centuries. In this narrative, whites are seen to have lost their small and tightly-knit *gemeinschaft* in a direct causal relationship to the immigration waves of African-Caribbean and South Asian people from the New Commonwealth that occurred throughout Britain's decolonization period from the 1950s – 1990s. Counter-histories to the dominant place-claiming narratives of London's East End can be easily recovered through the collective memories of black people themselves. It is through their stories of settlement and their own family histories, routed through the processes of empire that another historical consciousness emerges.

Amina's own story and that of her family illustrates how the history of racial harassment and attacks have decisively shaped the lives of black people in modern Britain, not just in the early 21st century, but over multiple generations. Oftentimes the counter-history of Britain's post-war black and Asian settlement of imperial citizens is clouded through what Paul Gilroy has termed postcolonial melancholia, and a selective remembering of the white working classes as the principal and only heroic figures in World War II. In this narrative, whites somehow lost their small and tightly-knit *gemeinschaft* in a direct causal relationship to the immigration waves of black and Asian people from the New Commonwealth that occurred throughout Britain's decolonization period from the 1950s – 1990s. Counter-histories to the dominant place-claiming narratives of London's East End can be easily recovered through the collective memories of black people themselves.

It is these stories which also serve as a potent reminder that the current situations faced by victims of racial harassment and violence are far more than a momentarily difficult phase for them individually or for larger communities. Rather, they are one moment in the racism that persists through generations and shapes entire histories.

Amina herself told me the story of her own family towards the end of our work together on her case in a moment when my official duties as a caseworker were over. I had concluded taping an interview with her, and only the interregnum of a non-research context made it possible to share her narrative with me.

She told me that father had come to London in the 1960s when he was a young lad in his early twenties. He told Amina that he basically came to the country to find work, and he worked many different jobs. He lived in many areas around London – Bishops Guildford, Woolwich and so on. He was from a small village somewhere between Surat and Ahmedabad in the state of

Gujarat in India where it was a very hard life and where people didn't know what they were going to eat until that day. Some of his friends were in London and they called him over, saying that there was loads of work that English people didn't want to do, like sweeping airport floors, cleaning things and working in factories.

When he first came over it was difficult for him to even rent a room because English people did not want blacks in their houses. They had notices that said 'No Wogs.'

He married and eventually had five daughters. He eventually secured steady factory work, and the family settled in North Woolwich, in the south of the Newham borough. As one of the first Asians in the area he was nicknamed 'Paki Ali' by his all-white neighbors in a social housing block.

'That was normal, they weren't trying to be funny. Whenever people talked about him, they would say 'Paki Ali,' that was the norm. Women used to like him, he was a handsome man. Old ladies loved my dad!' Amina explained.

'It is really easy to call someone Paki, even if that person is Sikh, Hindu, Malaysian, Sri Lankan or whatever. How sad' Amina reflected.

'I used to get told, what was it, 'oh-you're alright, we don't mean you, you're one of us. But I'm not, definitely, I'm not one of them. At the end of the day I have brown skin and I am very proud of who I am, of my background.... Black people were called 'gollywogs,' it was awful. People used to come around to have my mom's cooking. She was such a fantastic cook. And dad used to do odd jobs for people around there. He was such a good gardener.'

Amina remembers that at the time she was growing up in the 1970s and 1980s hers was basically one of three Asian families in the entire school she attended and there was one African-

Caribbean family. This was the numerical extent of the black presence that was the object of the racial antipathy of her neighbors.

‘I remember a song that comes to mind, it was ‘Ding dong the bell’s are ringing, we’re going a-Paki-bashing!’ The people upstairs, they were singing it. And you know we were probably the cleanest family there. I mean they talk about Asians being smelly and all, but we were the cleanest family there. Simply ridiculous.’

‘My dad did not see himself as a black man, other people - they just see a wog. I mean when push came to shove, they make everyone a Paki, or a black bastard. To them you’re not white, so you’re all these other things because you’re not white because they are superior.’

Despite the racism he did face, Amina’s father’s history was not characterized by desires for separatism or for leading parallel lives. He took a liberal approach with his daughters who were allowed to dress as they pleased and to widely mix. Amina characterized her own socializing as involving friends from many different racial backgrounds, including many whites from school. She herself would later marry a white person, while another sister married a black Grenadian man, and another to a Pakistani man, while yet another sister married and moved to South Africa. Amina presented her family culture and upbringing as being one where she was taught not to look down on anybody else, as it was not the right thing to do. ‘You’ve got to take people as they come,’ she remembers her father telling her.

According to Amina her father ‘didn’t care’ about the racism he faced. He did not allow racism to get in his way of becoming integrated into the ways of the local white-dominated communities where he lived and worked, whether in Bishops-Guildford where he initially lived or in North Woolwich, where hardly any Asian or Black families dared to live at the time or even today, a fact that is also a testament to the rough reputation for racism that the area has.

He would go down to the local pub and have drinks with these people, play darts and even bowl. Victoria Park, which was near where Amina lived, had a lawn bowling club that, through received practice, did not allow black or Asian people in. But she remembered her father would simply go and join in the games, uninvited.

In Amina's narrative of their history of settlement in the East End, the struggle for integration and belonging in the face of hostility and antipathy, as well as routine ignorance, finally reached their breaking point with an attack on their home.

'Well, the people who lived above us, in the flat above us, they used to call my dad names, racial comments and stuff like that. My dad would always stick up for himself and his family, you know, protect his family and whatnot. We come home from school one day, well, I come home from nursery and my sisters come from school and our mum was walking with us, and we could see smoke coming out. They had put all our things, well my dad's things, in the middle of the room, poured something on there and set them on fire. And put 'Paki' on the wall and things like that. Other people were making off with our other things.'

The year was 1978, and Amina was four years old.

'They basically wanted us out, wanted us out of the area. Before this I didn't take anything on board really. My sisters were tough cookies because they had become immune to being called names and things. My elder sister went to Cumberland school in Canning Town and experienced such bad bad racism, it was unbelievable – putting things in her hair, setting her bag on fire, calling her names all the time.'

Amina recalls, 'Things were really turning around for my dad before then, although men were threatened by him because, you know, in their eyes, he was black man or whatever.'

But after the fire, his life took a long nose dive. While she did not or would not get into the details, and I did not have the heart at the moment to press on, she revealed that he eventually ended up in prison. There, when Amina was nine years old, her father hung himself with his belt and socks. In his last letter from prison he wrote to his family to say that he was killing himself to spare his family any further pain.

Amina asks, ‘Was he right in doing this? Little did he know what would happen to us. I don’t know. Maybe it would have been worse if he had been around.’

She reflects, ‘I have been through a lot, haven’t I?’ and then cautions me, ‘Don’t take all of this on board.’

#### **PROTRACTED STRUGGLE AND IMPROVISING RESISTANCE**

During the course of the year there continued to be periodic repeats of harassment incidents against Amina, both in her apartment block and whilst she was on the streets. Both her childhood and adult experiences had become framed within the context of racial harassment. The wife of Thomas Smith started to stalk Amina, following her with a camera. A carton of apple juice was thrown at her while she was hanging up her washing. All these incidents, however were ‘low-level harassment’ and as such did not constitute new crimes in the eyes of the police, despite my efforts to report them as such or to link them to the previous context of the racial charges against Thomas Smith.

It was difficult to even get the police to connect these low-level harassment incidents with the existing charges, as they did not meet a sufficient ‘evidence base’ needed to bring new charges. I kept hearing the refrain that it was ‘not enough of a crime.’ Racial harassment

oftentimes takes the form of a long-term campaign of intimidation, but within the existing criminal justice framework, remedies are sought for each individual instance of crime.

In the meantime, Amina's sense of personal security and ability to ensure the security of her son was deeply impaired, and she was 'constantly feeling awkward' when she came home.

It was in this context that I explored the option of seeking an interim injunction or restraining order against Thomas Smith. It was one of the most significant actions that could be taken outside of a criminal justice framework, and I began working with the Newham Homes officer, Allan, an African-Caribbean career civil servant who had had extensive experience in anti-discrimination work on the local government level. He was the second Anti-social behavior (ASB) investigating officer assigned by Newham Homes to deal with Amina's case. The first ASB officer had quit in the midst of the investigation and the entire evidence-gathering and affidavit process had to be repeated with Allan. Allan was probably the first and only officer from the council that I dealt with who seemed to actually perceive what was happening with an adequate sense of urgency and concern. It was during the laborious process of working with him and that I was able to have informal conversations with him about the actual lack of interest in racial harassment in the council. In these conversations, I learned how high-sounding policy initiatives against racial harassment and anti-social behavior unraveled against neoliberal managerial concerns resulting in very infrequent enforcement of racial harassment laws.

In contrast to Allan's attention, Amina and I encountered numerous offices and individuals who served only to discourage and impede any pursuit of recourse or justice. For example, when Amina initially started reporting the harassment she was experiencing she had contacted the community housing officer, who was responsible for her block. The officer was



herself of Nigerian background and Amina had hoped that “being of color, being a black woman” the officer would be predisposed to respond to her situation with empathy and urgency.

However, it became apparent to Amina that the officer was not dealing with her case effectively and seemed to be taking the side of the perpetrators. Until the incident in June, the officer had frequently complained to Amina that ‘she did not know who to believe’ since there was a spate of allegations and counter-allegations. Yet, despite the counter-allegations, there was no evidence against Amina and nobody had brought charges against her. Despite this disparity, the officer claimed that she could not make a judgment or act to protect Amina from further harassment and basically seemed to feel that the case was a bother and distraction from her proper duties. As a result, she “fobbed it off to other people.”

After failing to get much cooperation or help from the community housing officer, I decided to take the matter up with her supervisors. The process of finding out how to go up the chain of command was incredibly exhausting, as the new private-public partnerships make for a maze of confusion. Privatization has in no way led to a reduction in red tape or the diminishment of the size of bureaucracies. Instead, the size of a privatized service-provision system now utilized by the local government, Newham Council, has only grown in size, density and absolutely obfuscating complexity. These infinitely complicated and confusing public-private partnerships are not what victims of racial harassment should have to navigate in order to receive an adequate response from the local government that purports to provide anti-racist protections and racial equality.

At one moment in our pursuit of Amina’s case, one of the things that happened was that an extra-governmental entity outside of the local council, a mediation organization called Conflict and Change, was summoned to mediate what was officially construed as a neighbor

dispute involving anti-social behaviors. The organization sent two white women mediators to investigate the dispute and to engage in listening to both sides of the supposed neighbor conflict or tenant dispute. The organization advertises itself to Newham Council as a ‘tool for housing management’ and their approach is described in the following way.

Mediation can be an effective tool for the housing manager in dealing with tenant disputes and anti-social behavior. Our experience indicates:

- some improvement in about 50% of all cases referred to us, whether or not the parties agree to face-to-face mediation,
- where a face-to-face mediation takes place, some improvement in 90% of cases, with about 50% reaching full agreement,
- improvements nearly always maintained at follow-up after one month.
- Mediation can be particularly cost-effective when a dispute is referred at an early stage, before escalation to more serious ASB requiring enforcement action. (Conflict and Change 2011)

A desired goal for Conflict and Change is to bring the parties in dispute towards face-to-face mediation, a tactic that, in the cases of racial harassment, has dangerous and distressing results.

In Amina’s case, she stated that she felt like she was ‘being used’ when she initially consented to go through the mediation experience. Furthermore, the mediation process, contrary to what is stated in their advertising, seemed to provide additional opportunities for harassment. The mediators did not seem equipped or ready to respond to the criminal weight of the harassment offenses, preferring to proceed on mediation terms. During the visit of the two mediators to her home and her neighbors, Amina overheard her neighbors, the Robsons, deliver further racial insults against her.

‘Well at least my son is not half and half. He is at least of one color, all white!’ the Robsons told the mediators. This anti-miscegenation slur was tolerated as part of the mediation process.

The claim that Conflict and Change has of providing ‘cost-effective’ service for tenant managers and community housing officers woefully ignores the suffering imposed specifically by racial harassment and racism. However, the cost-benefit language works very well with the goals of retrenching the social welfare state and providing efficiencies and savings, and it appears to be providing a quick way for housing officers to dispose of cases of racial harassment. Efficient case disposal runs counter to the lived experience of people suffering racial harassment, which is often repetitive, protracted, complicated and prolonged, often with the racial-political objective of ejecting the black person from what is construed as rightful white living space. This shift towards quick disposal, cost-effective and soft communitarian approaches aimed at restoring some idealized notion of ‘community cohesion’ enacts the misrecognition of the power-laden dynamics that place the victims of racism in unequal positions and relative disadvantage via-a-via their the perpetrators of racism. An anti-racist British state, whether at the national or local level, would have to seriously re-conceptualize its understanding of racism if it is to provide an adequate response and adhere to its obligations of providing equal protection to all its citizens.

And yet, under neoliberal reforms, the incentive to provide such services in the face of other priorities, such as cost-cutting in local government and unleashing private or non-profit surplus-gathering opportunities, which are then sold as more efficient modes of marketized public services, do not tend towards delivering racial justice. The cost for pursuing a single eviction case against a perpetrator of racial harassment could cost the council anywhere between 30,000 – 80,000 pounds. According to the more experienced caseworkers at NMP, it may actually take some ten years of court action to actually evict somebody, and during that time the legal costs will have to be borne. The lengthy process of court action as such is clearly not

amenable to the framework of neoliberal or marketized social service delivery. As a result, robust perpetrator actions do not form an attractive opportunity for the production of profit-making goals of private vendors and contractors. The fact that it was finally the council's own employees that had to take up the legal case to produce an injunction after active pressure from NMP shows that this particular area of social service was not easily amenable to privatization.

Nonetheless, in Amina's case I continued to pursue the most robust course of action possible, as this was the philosophy and approach of NMP. I learned from my own unfolding experience and drew on advice and counsel from more experienced NMP caseworkers and volunteer lawyers who were on hand or a phone-call away to provide advice. Along with trying to obtain an injunction against Mr. Smith, I also tried to get the police to install a panic alarm in Amina's home (which would be connected to the police station) and for the council to install CCTVs in order to have further evidence-gathering opportunities since there had been continuous incidents of harassment, albeit low-level ones. These technological fixes are often touted as great crime-solving or crime deterring measures, but their fetishistic appeal and publicity does not play out in real life when victims actually try to obtain them. As mentioned earlier, the cost of these measures make their actual use by the police or the council improbable, and I was often engaged in heated exchanges with officers in the Community Safety Unit of the police who insisted that the panic alarm could only be installed in 'life-threatening' situations, and that Amina's case did not constitute such a case, and that I was being very 'demanding.'

After much conflict with the police concerning the demand for the panic alarm, I was finally told by the police that they would provide Amina with some kind of 'personal attack alarm,' (which was more cost-effective) and that she would also be provided with a booklet on

measures to take in order to be safe. It would have been unacceptable to accept these throw-aways, and the only reason that I did not make further complaints about police inaction was that the persistent demanding led to the implementation of two measures that were in fact significant: they agreed to create a 'mid-stream comment' on the CAD system which takes calls for the police. Amina's number would now be flagged for response. The police argued with me that this would be as good as having a panic alarm. Secondly, they also stated that they would contact the beat level police in the Safer Neighborhood Team to make regular visits to Amina's flat. Given these latter two measures, it actually did seem to indicate that the police were making an attempt to rise to a standard of protection.

What is instructive here for anti-racist activists is that these potential protections for victims of racial harassment are not necessarily known strategies, and I discovered them as options only through the process of determined and persistent pressure, rather than through willing or immediate systemic response or engaging in accommodations community policing frameworks.

## Chapter 5: Groundings in New Political Subjectivity



*Justice for Nour Saeed Campaign picket of Plumstead Police Station, April 1, 2006*

*Source: Mohan Ambikaipaker*

### THE MUSLIM VEIL AND LONDON

One of the police complaint cases undertaken by the Newham Monitoring Project in 2006 involved the case of a young South Asian woman who wore the Muslim veil, the *hijab*, and was out and about in Stratford High Street doing her daily banking. As she entered her local bank branch, another customer violently pushed her out while hurling racial epithets. The woman called the police who, when they arrived, rationalized her assault by remarking, ‘Well, what do

you expect? Look at you.’ The attending police officers then failed to take seriously the woman’s charges of assault and racial harassment.

I remember during the Forest Gate anti-terror raid discussed in the next chapter, NMP white women activists, who were mobilized to leaflet mosques and provide rights literature, were also afraid of the veil. They feared that they would be asked to cover their heads and compromise their autonomy while carrying out this action. There had been no such demands from the mosques, especially because the women were outside the mosque and on public sidewalks, but their fear and suspicion was nevertheless palpable.

On another occasion during this fraught period, a white woman lecturer friend from the University of London was dining with me at a restaurant on Green Street, one of the most diverse high streets in the heart of the borough of Newham. Few white people came to eat at this restaurant and, when she noticed a Muslim family enter and take their seats, she grew in anticipation of how the woman, who was wearing a full version of the veil, the *niqāb*, would eat in public.

‘Let’s see how she does it. Will she take it off?’ she asked, with her hands covering her mouth. At first I could not understand the exoticism, as it was a banal occurrence in Newham, whose population was almost a quarter Muslim, to see women wearing the *niqāb* eating in restaurants and shopping on the high streets. This white woman academic lived in a predominantly white upper middle-class neighborhood in Swiss Cottage.

Her fascination seemed to be oriented around reading the Muslim’s women’s veil as a sign of her gendered passivity and oppression. The assumption of her lack of agency was so absolute that the white woman academic could not conceive of the veiled Muslim woman’s ability to eat in public.

How has the figure of the veiled Muslim woman come to elicit both violent antipathies and serve as an obverse sign of the superior agency of Westernized identities? The visible difference of the Muslim woman, marked by the practice of wearing the veil has become a highly politicized issue in Britain and the west as a whole (Abu-Lughod 2006). As Fawzia Afzal-Khan states,

[T]he notion of “Muslim womanhood” as a collectively ‘victimized’ category has been circulated effectively to perpetuate both discursive violence in the United States (and the West in general) against Islam, as well as to sanction the ‘War on Terror’...violence against women in different parts of the Islamic world and within Muslim societies everywhere has also escalated in the name of a ‘return’ to an imaginary theocratic past, posited as an identitarian necessity to ward off the evils of a Satanic West bent on destroying the ‘*ummah*’ (believers). (Afzal-Khan 2004: 187)

The cycle of the western state’s encroachments and military interventions into the Muslim world and the patriarchal-religious, as well as secular patriarchal-nationalist, responses of oppressed Islamic societies exert a negative pressure against ongoing Muslim women’s struggles for expanding their agentic voices and constituting themselves as political subjects.<sup>1</sup>

The struggle against patriarchal assumptions and impositions in the formulation of Islamic syariah law, specific ethnic community customs, and codifications of gender relations in personal status codes are some of the critical issues for Muslim women’s movements (Y.al-Hibri 2000). These are debates undertaken within the framework of argument and ongoing debates within Muslim societies and in Islamic jurisprudence itself, and not simply as a result of impositions of western models of women’s autonomy (Mahmood 2005).

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<sup>1</sup> Secular patriarchal-nationalist discourses in the Muslim world, such as in the work of Alloula Malik, as pointed out by Lila Abu-Lughod do call into question the western Orientalist constructions of Muslim women. But as Afzal-Khan (Afzal-Khan 2004: 186) points out such nationalist traditions re-insert the oppression of women within patriarchal-nationalist narratives. As she argues, ‘young male heroes, angered at the metaphoric rape of ‘their’ women by the white man’s penetrating “I/eye,” became once again the guardians of feminine virtue while women’s bodies became the sites of nationalist struggle, the stage upon which the patriotic fervor of the newly liberated (male) can be performed.’



The debate over codes of the patriarchal hierarchical construction of the duty of obedience in the home (*ta'ah*) by the wife is one site of struggle. As the legal scholar Azizah Y.al-Hibri (Y.al-Hibri 2000: 224- 226) argues, this code seeks to enforce 'the duty not to leave the home without the husband's permission' and has been met by both legal and everyday challenges around the scope and practice of this code.<sup>2</sup> The issue of obedience to patriarchal figures involves struggles around the question of the extensiveness of women's own autonomy and negotiation power in exercising their fundamental liberties in relation to fathers, husbands and male relatives. This struggle, however, becomes disarticulated as the pressure of western and external domination on subjugated communities increases. As Adrien Wing (Wing 2000: 332 - 333) has argued 'under conditions of 'outside' violence of colonialism, neocolonialism, apartheid, or occupation, the men of the oppressed group are not allowed to be men in the culturally constructed use of the term' and therefore seek to exert their maleness through the social control of 'their women in the 'inside' or private sphere.' This outside/inside dichotomy presents a terrain of struggle for Muslim women against simultaneous oppressions from both external conditions of domination and internal community patriarchal control.

The west's concern over the subjugation and oppression of Muslim women and the denial of their basic individual freedoms, however, is framed within an Orientalist perception of a monolithic, static and illiberal Muslim culture (Said 1997). As Gargi Bhattacharya has argued, 'the present War on Terror constructs the abuse of women and the denial of their public rights as a marker of eastern barbarism and as an indication of societal sickness, a sickness requiring military intervention' (2008: 18). This in turn mobilizes heteropatriarchal state narratives, and

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<sup>2</sup> See also the work of groups such as Sisters in Islam in Malaysia (SIS), <http://www.sistersinislam.org.my/BM/index.html>, and groups like the Revolutionary Association of Women in Afghanistan (RAWA), <http://www.rawa.org/index.php> See also (Brodsky 2004; Cornell 2004)

allied first world white feminist politics like that of Feminist Majority, of utilizing the western states' military power to rescue Muslim women.

These narratives of rescue are utilized in order to justify intervention, occupation and the re-authorization of the War on Terror (Abu-Lughod 2002, 2006; Cornell 2004; Eisenstein 2004; Alexander 2005). A recent August 9, 2010 Time magazine cover, for example, depicts a young mutilated Afghan woman, and underneath the photograph is the foreboding caption, 'What happens if we leave Afghanistan.' This slippage in the argument for justifying the War on Terror, from a struggle for national security and against political Islam's inter-state terrorism to struggle for Muslim women, appears to be gaining currency as the war become relatively permanent and necessitates constant hegemonic re-authorization within the west.

What is left out of these emergent formulations of the Muslim woman question in the west is the specter of anti-Muslim gendered racism within western societies themselves. It is apparent that the dominant public sphere appears highly interested in the question of Muslim women's freedom when Muslim culture is seen to threaten Western liberal principles. However, this same public sphere is not so concerned when Muslim women's basic liberties are hindered by everyday oppressions such as street-level racial harassment and institutional racism that has been fueled by the discourses and popular antipathies unleashed by the War on Terror. These two issues -- Muslim women's status in a western society and their gender specific struggles against racism -- are seen to be disparate, isolatable and unrelated phenomena in the present debate about the veil.

According to statistics published by published by the NUS Black Students' Campaign (2011) a reported 72 per cent of Muslim women in Britain have experienced verbal abuse and publicly threatening behavior related to their visible appearance as Muslims. Muslim women

experience racialization through their religious visibility that is brought about through wearing different cultural forms of the *hijab*, and this differentiation is also compounded by phenotypical difference as well, since the majority of Britain's Muslims are from South Asian and, in lesser numbers, African communities. As Alana Lentin has argued, 'These visual signifiers of racialized difference (skin color, dress, etc.) are intimately linked with the process of naturalization. In the case of the Muslim headscarf-wearing woman or the black skinned person, they become reduced to that single aspect of their outward appearance' (2008:38). The visual markers of racial-religious difference is highly correlated to negative experiences of aggression and violence experienced by Muslim women in Britain and Europe (Benn and Jawad 2003).

The emphasis on visual markers of differentiation historically follow the racialization of South Asian Muslims in Britain through the discourses of cultural racism that cast Muslims as fundamentalist Islamic illiberals, prior to War on Terror (Runnymede Trust 1997; Asad 1993). Furthermore, as critical race theorist Muzammil Quraishi (2005: 61) has pointed out, the construction of contemporary tropes of 'criminogenic people' or the 'racial criminal other' can also be traced to the British colonial attitudes, practices and policies such as the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 and other forms of racial ideologies that affected subordinate Muslim and non-Muslim communities in India and Pakistan. Muslim women's racialization in the current moment therefore is built upon the specific genealogy or 'citationary' (Abu-Lughod 2006; Said 1978) nature of these historical racializations of Muslims as Other to the social and civilization order of imperial Britain, and the west at large.

I further argue that what is absent in the west's debate about veiling is the impact of gendered anti-Muslim racism as a critical context in constraining Muslim women's everyday social and political resistances. The British state claims Muslim women's personal freedoms as

part of its heteropatriarchal custodial duties in antagonism to the power of subordinate ethnic patriarchal traditions. This framing, however, simultaneously erases its juridical concern when anti-Muslim racism impacts upon women's lives. Furthermore the state appears to have no interest in Muslim women's own agentic representations and self-determined political struggle. The veil is the preferred mode to write-off Muslim women's civic and political agency and this erasure helps to structure complicities between communal and state-based heteropatriarchy (Gupta 2003).

Such a contradictory articulation of state concern provides for a dialectic emergence where Muslim women work to constitute alternative political subjectivities and anti-racist critiques of the British state. The contradictory regulation of women's bodies in public spaces, however, is also not a new phenomenon in Western cities like London, and refers back to the spatial organization of women's visible presence and the anxieties that such urban free movement provoked for systems of patriarchal control. Elizabeth Wilson (Wilson 1991), in her study of women's mobility in Victorian London, argues that the city was a contradictory space for personal freedoms of women at the time. It was both a place which allowed for the deregulation of women's sexuality and also for the re-containment of that sexuality. Demystifying the Western city and especially one such as London, as a liberating and modern city with regard to women's freedoms is an important re-framing in considering the genealogy of challenges faced by Muslim women in Britain today. As Wilson argues, 'Although women, along with minorities, children, the poor, are still not full on citizens in the sense that they have never been granted full and free access to the streets...they have survived and flourished in the interstices of the city, negotiating the contradictions of the city in their own particular way' (1991:8).

The struggle to occupy visible space and presence within the city today requires one to grapple with the standpoint of women as political subjects, which is a critical feminist project (Afzal-Khan 2004; Collins 2000; Naples 1998; Naples 2003). But the particular standpoints of Muslim women in Britain within the crippling context of the War on Terror and contemporary racial harassment must further extend the horizon of what it means to be political.

### **MUSLIM WOMEN AS CRITICAL FLÂNEURS OF THE CITY**

Parts of Newham which today are closely identified with Muslim communities, such as the commercial high streets of Green Street or East Ham were once home to white working class-communities. These areas started to see social decay as prospering white working classes abandoned the crowded inner-city, even as black immigration was bringing in new residents.

However, Asian and African-Caribbean immigrants and, more recently, African immigrants began to transform these dilapidated high streets, turning these urban centers into vibrant places for multiple ethnic businesses. A walk from the north end to the south-end of Green Street today will involve a veritable journey through a global emporium of goods, foods, and ethnic cultural entertainment, punctured only by West Ham Football Club's enormous stadium in the south end.

Currently, Muslim women are a very visible presence on these high streets and shopping for daily household necessities, clothes and wedding supplies, and enjoying the pleasure of restaurants, the Green Street public library, or Bollywood films at the Boleyn cinema are some of the many activities that Muslim women openly and autonomously engage in within the public-areas of the inner-city. These everyday activities and 'spatial mobilities' (Mernissi 1987), to be

out in public is something not often seen in other areas where there is not a strong Muslim presence. This visible presence challenges the Orientalist concepts of sequestered Muslim women who are kept hidden from public view and public participation.

My work with Muslim women that occurred through anti-racist casework, however, also reveals that these movements that are concentrated within the inner city are the result not only of personal choice or of the largesse provided by liberal attitudes within families and communities. Instead, the collective presence of Muslim women occupying public space in the inner city is a result of struggles for everyday personal and public freedom. Saba Mahmood (2005) argues that Muslim women's freedoms do not necessarily route themselves through western models of autonomy, freedom or resistance models, but rather construct themselves via culturally relative forms of pious subjectivity. The status of Muslim women within the west, I argue, suggests a more complicated politics of cultural differentiation, claims for cultural inclusion, and resistance. Resistance against ontological insecurity is a daily affair and anti-Muslim antagonism is not only a cultural or theological discourse, it is also a discourse located within everyday racist violence. As such the location of Muslim women's position necessitates a political response that does not obtain itself solely from what Mahmood has termed as a 'politics of piety'.

Walking through the inner city streets of Newham and the experiencing the joys and pleasures of urban life are engaged in by a diverse array of Muslim South Asian and African women whose religious and cultural identities and practices are heterogeneous. Some women are dressed in salwar kameezes, *hijab* or full *niqāb*, while others are dressed in jeans and jackets while out in public. A few Muslim women also run some of the stores, restaurants and beauty salons and seem to have economic opportunities that are not found in central London and other white-dominated commercial spaces.



*Reading in West Ham Park*

*Source: Mohan Ambikaipaker*

Muslim women's visibility and mobility in these public spaces have increased greatly since the 1970s when the feminist writer Amrit Wilson (1978) recorded a prevailing sense of isolation for first generation South Asian women during the era of initial mass settlement in Newham. The impact of racialized isolation and an ever-present fear of racial harassment and attack was a common experience in Wilson's research with Asian women. These constant threats were discerned as a structural impediment that constricted both the public and personal lives.

Isolation is seen from the outside as a result of women not speaking English, or of their being forced to stay at home for cultural reasons. But it is much more than this. It is a state of mind, one of shock and withdrawal. Weakened by the separation from their families, suffering often the loss of mother, sisters, and close friends, these Asian women find themselves in a strange unknown society. The realization that this is a racist society, a society which wished them dead for the color of their skin accentuates their loneliness, and their isolation in turn makes it harder for them to fight against racism. (Wilson 1978: 20-21)

Wilson's study also found that young Asian female students were particular targets for racist attacks and bullying by other girls in schools, similar to the position in the racial hierarchy occupied by Asian boys, which is below that of whites and 'West Indians.' As with Asian boys, Asian girls were initially seen to be passive and but also bound by oppressive religious customs, and therefore not likely to retaliate when attacked.

Victims of racial harassment who today live in council estates in the more white-dominated wards of south Newham such as Canning Town, Custom House and the Royal Docks may still experience similar debilitating barriers to their physical mobility and their ability to go out in safety. I encountered a number of cases where people would plead with NMP to help them with council housing transfers to the north of the borough in order to escape the daily harassment they were subject to in the south. But even on seemingly safe streets in the north, such as Green Street, harassment and attacks on Muslim women are not unknown.

One persistent local issue has been the harassment of Muslim women who wear the veil that takes place every time there is a West Ham home game. West Ham F.C. is a major English premier league soccer club and it has its stadium located at the south end of Green Street, adjacent to a Catholic church and round the corner from Boleyn cinema. During the football season and during home games, thousands of West Ham fans, who have a dubious reputation as having one of the worst football hooligan followings in England descend onto what is otherwise a high street for Asian, African and African-Caribbean local businesses. Older African-Caribbean and Asian residents tell me how their parents would forbid them to attend West Ham games and recall how in the 1970s and 80s West Ham fans would fashion spikes out of pennies and hurl them at black people who came to watch a game.



Even though it is their local team, open support for West Ham F.C. is rare in Newham. However, in the adjacent borough of Essex, many of whose families were once Newham's white residents, support for West Ham is an identity that is displayed proudly. Virtually every house in wards such as Barking and Dagenham display West Ham flags alongside the English flag of St. George from their windows. This phenomenon is hardly seen in the black and Asian neighborhoods within West Ham F.C.'s home base.

Many Muslim women, especially those who wear the veil, frequently experience harassment and attacks after the matches as the game's crowds disperse and the white fans make their way back to subway stations and bus stops, walking through the commercial high streets. Muslim women report that they are frequently taunted with calls of 'Ninja!' and have to fight off attempts by some people to pull off their veils on subway trains and on the streets.

It was in this context that part of the outreach and community development work of NMP involved working with the sections of the Muslim community in the neighborhood that experienced this form of racism. One such workshop was held in a room at the Citizen's Development Centre on Katherine Road. About seven women showed up for the workshop that Estelle, a white NMP activist, and I had organized. Later on I also brought in a visiting activist from the Malaysian group, Sisters in Islam to help conceptualize the workshop.

Planning this meeting had taken months of coordination and discussion over the phone with the center's director, Rohima Rahman. Rohima would later go on to win the council seat for Green Street East in the May 2006 elections on a Labor Party ticket, securing one of the largest majorities of the elections, and becoming one of three Muslim women councilors from the borough who wore the *hijab* (There were also other Muslim women councilors who did not wear the *hijab*). Originally from Bangladesh, Rohima had started the Citizen's Development Centre

from her house two years earlier. The center ran classes on sewing, dress-making, health information and welfare benefits advice for single and married women, most of who were in their twenties and thirties. The women who utilized the center were drawn from a range of South Asian ethnic groups, among them a large number of Urdu and Bengali speaking women, as well as second generation British Asians who were primarily fluent in English.

As Estelle and I started the workshop, we were rather disappointed with the turn-out. It appeared that a rumor had spread that we were somehow associated with the local police, and only seven people had dared to show up. There was a great deal of fear and insecurity about approaching the police, the women explained. Muslim women anticipate their own potential criminalization since the image of the veiled Muslim woman has become ostensibly linked in the popular imagination following the July 2005 suicide bombings that were carried out by three men of British Pakistani descent and one of British Jamaican descent.

Muslim women feel that in approaching the police they will be cast as objects for scrutiny rather than as citizen subjects requiring protections. These fears and anticipated interpellations results in the withdrawal of Muslim women from engaging with state bodies, even when their lives are at stake. The common institutional antipathies towards the Muslim veil also result in the under-reporting of cases of racial harassment as Muslim women become discouraged citizens.

All the women who did show up for the workshop were dressed in a range of the *hijab*, from simple head-scarves to a full *niqāb*. There was a clear and urgent issue about racial harassment on the streets. As women who wear the veil, they discussed being the targets of street-level taunts, jeers and racist comments. These encounters also sometimes turn into attacks, as the women recounted being knocked off streets and in one incident having a man try to throw

a bottle of milk on her in order to ‘whiten’ her. The racist use of the word “ninja!” on these women was common and they usually were accompanied by gestures that tried to simulate kung-fu moves that were threatening even when done in a jocular fashion.



*Racial harassment workshop at the Community Development Centre*

*Source: Mohan Ambikaipaker*

It was shocking to me to hear how the women had come to accept their daily victimization, spatial restrictions and lack of practical remedies. They were in agreement that their spatial movements were severely restricted to the inner city due to wide-spread racial harassment. This was especially with regards to going into ‘the city,’ into central London. ‘The city’ was a space where causal racist verbal abuse and negative commentary on Muslim women’s dress was

omnipresent. The women both laughed and became angry at recounting the negative comments openly hurled at them when they had been in central London or on subways going into city.

‘Oh my God! You must be boiling!’

‘No one told me it was fancy dress party!’

Due to repeated experiences of such incidences, these women reported that they would rarely venture out of the community bounds of the inner city, and with the events following 9/11 and 7/7, they felt that their presence in central London was even more subject to malevolent racial profiling.

While the women constructed a distinction between the unsafe space of central London and the more comfortable refuge of home in Newham, their idealization of safety within their own neighborhood community was contradictory. As stories unfolded during the workshop, it became clear that ‘home’ was not free of racist harassment either. The women recounted numerous stories of harassment and attacks on streets like Katherine Road and Romford Road which lie in the very heart of the predominantly nonwhite neighborhoods of north Newham. Another key site of frustration for the local women after 7/7 was the racism they faced on the local buses. Muslim women wearing the veil would frequently experience buses not stopping for them and they would inevitably confront harassment while they rode the buses.

Story after story gave a picture of resignation and acceptance of everyday racist verbal abuse or discrimination and a perception that the police would not be interested in their issues. There was also the discouragement faced as a result of the long and tedious process of making a report at the police stations. Most of the women were not aware of the anti-racist laws that protected them, at least on paper, or that even racist verbal abuse was against the Race Relations Act and hence a serious offense that the police had a positive duty to investigate.

The absence of equal protection for Muslim women's safety and freedom on the streets and the rise in the gendered forms of anti-Muslim harassment and discrimination by racist elements in Newham has had a pincer effect on Muslim women's mobility in the inner city. The antipathy toward the symbol of the *hijab* as a signifier of potential terrorism marks one of the ways in which the accessibility of the street and the freedom of Muslim women in the public sphere is disciplined in the current political conjuncture of the War on Terror. The continuum of stereotypes, from more benign ones like 'you must be boiling' to the comic sensibility of labeling Muslim women 'ninjas,' and finally to the more threatening configuration of 'terrorist' or potential suicide bomber are determinate forms of racialized othering that construct Muslim women in ways that limit their personal liberties and freedom of movement. These pressures are in fact leading women to becoming more cloistered in domestic spaces.

These dominant state and societal responses toward Muslim women's freedoms is compounded by the way in which their families and community institutions respond to their recounting of racial harassment experiences in public places. During the workshop the participants revealed that their attempts to speak of their experiences of racist harassment on the streets are usually met by men in the family and the wider community by critical admonishments for exercising their independence in leaving the home.

As one of the women, Sukaynah, reported during the workshop, 'My father would say, 'Why are you going out on your own? Why do you need to go out?'

Her fellow participants identified with her story and many laughed in sisterly solidarity. Sukaynah qualified herself by stating, 'When it is a dark thing. No way I'd go out on my own.' But at the same time, Sukaynah was insistent that the need and right to go out was important to

her in terms of maintaining her autonomy and independent status within the gendered politics of her own home:

‘I don’t want to ask my brother or somebody to go get my food for me,’ she emphatically stated.

The act of going out, then, was a political issue for local Muslim women who aspired to exercise autonomy from the patriarchal supervisions of their domestic sphere. For the women, occupying public spaces such as a neighborhood or a street did not appear to be an apolitical act. Their visible presence on the streets, however, risked the gendered anti-Muslim racism of the streets. And these vulnerabilities then fed back to reinforce gendered social control at home. Muslim women in this context were fighting battles for freedoms not simply along binary lines of being against traditional Muslim values and for liberal western values.

### **MUSLIMS AS THE BRITISH STATE’S ANTAGONISTS AND COLLABORATORS**

While the status of Muslim difference has developed acquired new political salience following the events of September 11, 2001 and the July 7 2005 bombings in central London, the preparations for the backlash response was already prefigured in the complex politics of the Salman Rushdie affair that erupted in 1989 over the Ayatollah Khoemini’s fatwa against the British-born Muslim writer. Supporters of Salman Rushdie’s rights as a writer and of freedom of expression confronted a Thatcher government that only grudgingly offered state protection when the fatwa was delivered against a dissident member of a racial minority community. This event also constructed images of Muslim communities in Britain and Muslim culture as a whole as comprised of ‘fanatics’ and ‘fundamentalists.’ While the Rushdie crisis was a complex issue, one

of the important effects of the crisis was to demonstrate that the liberal premises of the British state which purported to treat all peoples equally did not do so with respect to religious equality. Sections of Muslim communities who were offended by the publication of Rushdie's novel, *The Satanic Verses*, saw the state's inaction as violating its own religious blasphemy laws which had exclusively privileged the Church of England as a religious institution above all others (Allen 2005).

The discourse about Muslim difference and their essential outsider status within traditional notions of Britishness, whiteness and even 'good' multiculturalism has emerged as a persistent trope in Britain. But in order to apply surveillance on Muslim communities for fear of domestic terrorism, the British state is also at the same time cultivating strong (although sometimes acrimonious) consultative and financial sponsorship links with Muslim bodies such as the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), which is the largest national umbrella and mosque-based body in the country. The relationship between the MCB and the state that emerged from the Rushdie affair has been in recent years geared towards the state's interests in counter the spread of extremist ideologies within Britain's Muslim communities and to promote legitimacy and support for Britain's participation in the war on terror (Birt 2005) .

However, one of the key dangers of the state's close relationship and elevation to quasi-official status of groups like the male-dominated MCB, as has been pointed out by black women's groups such as Southall Black Sisters, is a dynamic that constructs new and powerful structures of multi-sited (state-community) heteropatriarchal control of Muslim women (Gupta 2003). The conjunction of religious social control and state authority allows patriarchal and fundamentalist discourses that restrict sexual and personal freedoms of women to become

enforced and entrenched as communitarian norms and unquestionable hierarchies of gender relations (Sahgal and Yuval-Davis 1992).

This collaboration between the state and communal patriarchal forces in direct or indirect ways also runs counter to the emergent popular discourse that imagines Muslim communities as simply caught up in a binary culture clash the British nation-state. In Britain and Europe today the practice of wearing the *hijab* is increasingly posited as the very antithesis of Western liberalism and a signifier of the ongoing ‘clash of civilizations’ (Huntington 1996). The Muslim veil has been raised to the status of a cultural barometer that correlates with the dominant white fears of cultural loss and cultural infiltration, by racially different bodies and communities. It is seen as an attack on the premises of individual freedom and personal autonomy that is crucial to both liberatory discourses of state-aligned western feminism and to the national security and cultural integrity of western polities as a whole. Trapped within these contradictory societal reflections, Muslim women in Britain are constrained in how they explore experiment and construct themselves as political subjects within the west.

#### **ANTI-MUSLIM RACISM, THE VEIL AND POLITICAL BLACKNESS**

What follows is not an attempt to speak for Muslim women, or to provide a cultural defense of the practice of wearing the *hijab* or taking up barricade position such as that espoused by political movements like the Europe-wide Assembly for the Protection of *Hijab*, or *Pro-Hijab*, which argues that ‘As Muslims we are proud of the *hijab*, we are not oppressed’ (quoted in Dear 2004). Neither is it about supporting the opposite position such as that advocated by groups like



British Muslims for Secular Democracy in that ‘The veil is so steeped in subjugation ...it's retrograde’ (quoted in Perlez 2007).

Instead, what I will do is to allow for diverse Muslim women’s voices and political experiences to unsettle the stifling political antipathies that have formed around the symbolic figure of the Muslim woman in the west. The wearing of the veil has reached a hysterical crescendo in recent years, as prime ministers and media commentators in Britain argue drive a campaign that make claims such that wearing the fuller form of the veil, such as the *niqāb*, is either a ‘mark of separation’ or an ‘abusive walking rejection of all our freedoms’ (Perlez 2007). Jack Straw, the former Justice Minister, even went so far as to exclude women wearing the *niqāb* from attending any of his parliamentary surgeries and receiving his constituency services unless they first unveiled themselves. Wearing the veil itself is regarded in this discourse as a violation of the citizenship norms of the west. But do Muslim women see it in the same way?

It is important, for example, to conceive of Amina, the British Muslim woman we encountered in the previous chapter, as engaging in an agentive struggle to achieve freedom for herself and her son within contradictions that are continually presenting themselves through the reconfigurations of British racism. Amina is a Muslim woman who does not wear the veil, but her relationship to the issue is very different from the hysterical antipathy and exclusionary demands that the British state is constructing.

Amina’s everyday experience of resisting racial terror enables the development of lived ‘political experience’ that is authentic to and emergent from the organic context of Muslim women’s lives in Britain. The late anthropologist Begonia Aratxaga (1995), in her study of Irish Republican women living in 1990s Belfast, argued that the notion of the political needs to be reconceptualized to take into account the ways in which women participants in colonized

situations of oppression craft political viewpoints and lives. The mainstream markers of political analysis and ideology, as they are constructed through elites and males, which enforce strict separations between the domain of the domestic and the public, are less salient for Muslim women engaged in anti-racism.

The private home and the private space as evidenced by the experiences of racial minority women is not an ontological certainty. This was the case with the experience of Irish women living under British domination in Belfast and it is also true for Muslim women today in East London. As Aratxaga argues, women in resistance ‘explicitly blend their lived experience into a political view of social relations’ and this is the form of “political experience” that guides Amina in her struggle against racism (Aratxaga 1997).

These political experiences also make for dissonances between ethnographer and subject, and between anti-racist activists and the community or social bases they work with. My own engagement with Amina was routed through the Newham Monitoring Project’s ideology of political blackness that aims to mobilize different communities suffering racism into joint resistance, and it had a well-worked out daily modus operandi of casework, community outreach and, when needed, high-profile campaigning as its critical tools.

As a non-Muslim I was able to engage and develop organizational relationships with Muslim women in Newham through the work against racial harassment and civil liberties. Political blackness as an inclusive space of resistance against differential forms of racism enabled such relational organizing to occur. It was not in NMP’s culture, however, to do heavy-handed political consciousness raising on its signature ideological positions, due to its commitment to meeting and working with black communities from a ‘where they are at’ principle. The goal and desire to have African, Caribbean and Asian victims of racism and their

communities to identify with political blackness is not something that is insisted upon as criteria for working with the group. But NMP hoped to build, through practical experience of struggle and within the context of a solidarity-based form of mobilization, future black political subjects engaged in building a long-term resistance and social movements against racism as a whole in Britain. As Rowena Arshad (2008) has argued for the British context, ‘the political meaning of black is a necessary step for anyone interested in working towards an anti-racist agenda because to see black in its political context is to site it squarely within the structural manifestations of racism.’

The following exchange occurred between Amina and me during the context of an interview in which we were reflecting on half a year of collaboration on her struggle against racial harassment. It exemplifies the mutual learning, debate and political sharing that occurred on the ground of struggle between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim, black-identified, anti-racist activist. The encounter between different racialized groups in the context of practical struggle opens the space for mutual learning that exceeds the imaginaries and expectations of either party, and it is these pedagogic and learning moments that are critical for the development of a democratic and mutually respectful ethic of collaboration.

In effect, these encounters are political preparations and negotiations between activists and their social bases, and they involve points of division, unresolved debates, the forging of temporary consensus, and strategic alliance-making around questions of challenging power. In another sense, they are ‘the very basis of what can become ‘real’ and thus accessible to consciousness and change’<sup>3</sup>. Here is our encounter:

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<sup>3</sup> (Drucilla Cornell quoted in Aretxaga 1997: 9)

*You know that NMP has this notion of blackness that is inclusive of everybody, and that's why we work with all the different communities.*

Yeah

*And a lot of people have said that it is an outdated approach, that we are politically black, all black in the sense that we are trying to be united in the fight against racism. We all come from different cultures, but—*

Yeah, we all come from different cultures, but we're not all black you know. In certain white people's eyes we are all black, but we are not all black because black people definitely do not see us as black.

They don't. I'm not black. I'm definitely not black. I like who I am and I am proud of who I am and my background. And I wouldn't want to be, you know, tarred with the same brush and put in one, you know, I am who I am, and you're not black. I don't see you as black. I don't see you as black. I think it's easy for them to tar us all as one, and that we are all this, that or the other. No, we're not, we're all different. We got to make them use their brain cells a little, make them stop and think, this person is from here, this person is from there.

*I think our approach is different from the white point of view. I think we're trying to say that we've got to be united against racism, all the communities.*

Oh yeah, hundred percent! Yeah, we do need to stick together

It's happened a lot, it's happened in Newham even, you know. Now some Asians are saying well, we don't want to be called Asians because it's the Muslim lot that's creating all this trouble. We want to be Sikh and Hindu. Recently there was that killing in Glasgow of that white boy by a Muslim gang. And a Sikh group that come out and said that whole policy of tarring us as Asians, that's wrong. It's the Muslims that are doing this.

But more so now, everybody is an individual. We might all be brown, shades of brown, or black or whatever, but we are definitely are not the same, and our problems are all different. You have racism among Hindus and Muslims and blacks and Asians. It's really sad, because they should be concentrating on different levels of racism, the bigger problems.

*In the 80s we started with this notion that we are black communities united, not that we are all the same, but of coming together for a purpose.*

I think it's a real big shame. Before, it was easier for us to stick together and fight our corner together. I think because it's always being publicized on the telly, it is causing problems against Muslims. I think personally that Muslims are being attacked, not just

because I am Muslim. I was waiting for this day to come. I knew it would. They are so scarred of anybody's peoples turning to Islam because they don't want to make it any bigger than it already is, because they are fearful that it would overtake the world. They are scared that it's happening in this country now. They see more headscarves and all but they don't realize that they're pushing people to become that.

I am even in a dilemma because I'm thinking to myself, my god, do I want to show people that I am not like them, that I am this other person. How would I do that? Do you understand?

Because they don't see me as different - only when they chose to. But push come to shove I am a Muslim. That is where it would take me. If I had to fight against somebody because of my faith I would stick up for the Muslim religion and I would stick up for the Muslim people. You know, I just think that it is the television and the media that is making people - they creating race hate against people in this country, against Muslims. Muslims this, Muslims that. I think it's ridiculous. I think they're scared and they don't know anything about Islam and it's easy for them to just tar them off with the same brush. Because there is a minority, you know. I think it's really sad.

*Have you felt this pressure recently?*

Yeah, yeah. I had this friend of mine, Black person, make terrible comments about Muslims. And I just thought, how sad. You're grown up and you've played football with Asian Muslims, and you have this attitude, like oh my god, these bloody Muslims, why can't they shave off their beards.

*When did you start to feel the dilemma? After 9/11 or 7/7?*

Well I felt it. I got married on September 13, two days after September 11. I felt it straight away because my husband started praying, and where he came from, in Hoxton, it wasn't the done thing to even change your religion, let alone go to the mosque. And then he went to perform the hajj in Mecca and his own mother said to me, 'Oh my god, he's going to mosque and he's involved in terrorism! Is he a terrorist?'

I mean how sad. He's gone to pray not to learn about making bombs. People started being horrible to him, people who've known him all his life. People couldn't understand that this has just happened, 9/11, and why have you become a Muslim? Why have you taken to that faith? Of all faiths why have you become a Muslim?

And I thought, oh my god, is this problem ever going to end? If it's not one thing, it's another.

I think Muslims are the ones oppressed. I don't think they're the ones oppressing, maybe other countries, but here, they're the ones oppressed.

If I had more guts, you know, I am me, but if push come to shove, Mohan, if all Muslims had to wear a headscarf to prove a point then I would put one on my head.

*To prove what point?*

If ever there was a point to prove. If it was the case that girls were not allowed to wear headscarves in school, or that all Muslims were asked to wear headscarves to say we're not taking our headscarves off. We're Muslim women and we're strong as a nation and whatnot, then I would put a scarf on my head to prove that point. I think it's unfair. We were taught as children to not point fingers and to take people as they come. Why can Jewish people have Jewish schools and practice what they practice and no one raises an eyebrow? And Christians and Catholics do exactly the same thing. But when it's Muslims?

I quote this recorded conversation at length because it is important to arrive at the question of veiling, as Amina does, not from an isolated, ethnicized, culturalized and ahistorical context. Instead, we need to see how the question of veiling also arises from the context of the structural manifestations of racialization and racism that overlay Muslim women's lives in Britain. The question of veiling herself or continuing to remain unveiled is linked to a continuum of racialized oppressions that has over-determined articulations, condensed into the scream of 'When is it ever going to stop?'. The 'it' in question is racism, yes, but racism in its interlocking determinations: 'If it's not one thing it is another.'

For Amina, the question of veiling incorporates a tension between personal choice and a collective experience of injustice. She is engaged in what Nancy Naples has noted as women's simultaneous struggles to 'gain control over definitions of self and community, to augment personal and communal empowerment (1998: 180). The barriers to the unleashing of the free creative activity of self-definition and self-valorization for Amina have been the arc of personal and collectively experienced racism spread over a lifetime of experiences and cutting across the differential shifts in racism's forms. Her narrative shows us the movement of racism as it develops historically, but never outside the temporal framework of a single person's lifetime or

only within one reified aspect of identity. While the categories of race, class and gender are analytically nonidentical, and their logics cannot be deduced from a reading of one from the other (Freedman 1984), empirical lived reality however demonstrates interconnectedness and interdependence of oppressions.

Amina's experience also lets us understand that when we talk about shifts in racism, whether they are discursive shifts that move from an emphasis on race to an emphasis on gender or Muslim identity, these are not epochal transitions in the articulation of racism. Rather the shifts in racism's focus operate within the context of a single person's lifetime. Amina has been contemporaneously racialized as a 'wog,' she is a 'Paki,' and she is also perceived as a potential Muslim terrorist. Although only in her thirties, Amina has experienced a host of differential racisms that structure exclusion and rejection narratives in daily existence and ordinary social relationships. Anti-immigrant backlash articulated through the rejection of all black people moving into white Britain, rejection by other non-whites as being non-Black, and rejection as a Muslim are rejections that are not only historically confined to being features of 1970s racism, 1990s racism and so on, but in lived realities are interrelated and develop from each other.

Amina experiences a continuum of differential racisms: she experiences anti-black racism, anti-Asian racism and anti-Muslim racism. She experiences these racisms at the hands of whites but also through the devolved racisms of other racial minorities. All these political experiences taken together reproduce her existence as a perpetual outsider to Britain. For Amina, such rejectionist experiences are not only external in the public sphere, but also wrought within very intimate spheres, such as the rejection meted out by her white husband's family. The family's reaction towards his marriage to her and his conversion to Islam does not bring about greater cohesiveness or inter-cultural understanding, but rather a displacement of Amina and

Muslim culture as an interloping threat. National narratives are powerful discourses that weave their way into intimately integrated spheres of personal and family relationships.

These political experiences frame Amina's concrete understanding of what racism is and what it does in terms of structuring the key social relations of her life. Racialized rejection is a routine fact of life even in moments that should speak of inclusion. As such, Amina comes to understand that inclusion is conditional and tenuous, 'Because they don't see me as different - only when they chose to.' This statement captures Amina's analysis of the dialectics of white recognition and inclusion. As someone who is perceived to have created appropriate distance from the 'bad Muslim' aspects of her identity, she had been included by whites and found to be accessible. As an unveiled Muslim woman, someone who wears non-Asian clothes, speaks Cockney and who once worked as a cage dancer in a nightclub, her cultural behaviors are seen as the polar opposite of separatist ethnic minority behavior.

But inclusion is not a settled affair. She is accepted as 'one of us' only because there is the alterior 'them' that she is defined against, and that is the non-assimilating and non-accessible Asian and Muslim woman. She is also the ineradicably black in the eyes of whites, someone who carries within her assimilation the trace of an alien race. Inclusion is temporary and it is at the power and discretion of whites to grant that status to the interloper or the outsider, albeit on a case-by-case basis. And it is white racial order that has the power to take that inclusion away, to reject and to forcibly eject her from the space that they see is symbolically, territorially and politically theirs.

The ever-possible moment of rejection and forcible expulsion through the use of racist violence, symbolic and physical, is experienced as ever-present. Amina comes to understand the underlying social structure, its racial order as serially unchanging. It is in the context of resisting



that moves her to consider taking up the veil and recasting her resistance identity as a veiled Muslim woman. Her dilemma is whether or not to use her personal body as a weapon against the onslaught of racism's logic, and to declare a politics of identification and solidarity with fellow Muslims who are becoming constructed as the liminal outside of the national body. And yet what is also significant in this encounter with Amina is the ways in which the politics of Muslim identification routed through the symbolic taking-up of the veil presents one political option among and alongside a number of uncertain possibilities. Amina's political analysis of racism makes her open to the processes of multiple-identity alliance-building, even though she does not entirely embrace NMP's and my explicit ideology of political blackness.

The reasons for this disavowal, though are important for anti-racist activists to take note. Amina's ambivalence towards the political position of political blackness arises from a concern for both a sense of particularistic self-identity, which is not felt to be captured by the identity of black. It has been argued that the ideology of political blackness in the 1970s and 80s worked to invisibilize the specificity of Asian culture and identity and therefore constituted a harmful choice in politics for Asian communities (Modood; 1994). But Amina has entered into the space of black politics on her own volition, and black groups like NMP do not engage in ideological indoctrination or provide any kind of a litmus test in order to engage in the practical politics of anti-racist struggle. As activists, distinctions and respect is accorded to the gaps between NMP's organization viewpoint and the particular 'community' or individual that it works with. As earlier chapters have shown, NMP's politics is to engage in the practical struggle first and to evolve and discuss political identities as they move within the context of an already engaged struggle.

Amina's questioning of political blackness also has to do with the ways in which local racism manifests itself. She is highly against the lumping together, or essentializing moments of the differential forms of racism that she predominantly encounters among working-class people in East London. These forms of racism are usually seen as more low-culture and unsophisticated compared to elite forms of racism (Bhavnani, Mirza, and Meeto 2005).

However, middle-class white British people also operate within the terms of 'sanctioned ignorance' but with a difference. Estelle, the white NMP caseworker, who comes from a middle-class and white-dominated area in Hampstead confessed to me that her early days in East London was spent not being able to discern differences between a Hindu, Muslim or Sikh person. And during the Forest Gate demonstration I was bewildered when a group of local white reporters from the Stratford Guardian approached me to request if I could point out a 'British Muslim' for them to interview. There were a crowd of hundreds and hundreds of Muslim people all around us, dressed in identifiable Muslim skull caps, *hijabs* and *niqābs*, but the reporters could not tell the difference between one racial minority group from another. But white elites aspire to overcome their lack of epistemic control and they pursue knowledge to acquire nominal multicultural authority. And in so doing, they create social distinction between themselves as color-blind liberals and crude racism.

In contrast, white working-class racism creates a defensive form of distinction between its common-sense racism and that of the white elites. The blanket rejection and lack of discernment is a distinguishing feature of the discourse of white working-class racism and projects an anti-intellectual style of racial domination. This is the racism that confronts Amina on a daily basis in East London, and hence she reacts by resisting its essentialisms and recalcitrant anti-intellectualisms.

For social movement organizations such as NMP, therefore, the question of racism is not essentialized and do not lead to conclusions that discrimination has centrally shifted from color discrimination to religious discrimination in an absolute sense (Allen 2005). The phenomenon of anti-black racism, as a form of racism directed towards African-Caribbean, South Asian, African and other people determined as nonwhites by white British people, remains socially salient. Furthermore, the emergence of new forms of differential racisms has not eclipsed prior questions of gendered racism and Muslim women's struggles. The invisibility of gender usually operates within certain arguments for Muslim racial nationalism and a gender-blind 'equality is a difference-affirming equality' concept of multicultural politics (Modood 2005; 2006: 42).

NMP encounters racism both at the level of working-class racism, in the form of racial harassment and racial attacks casework, and at the level of elite racism which it navigates the realms of state agencies and the public sphere. In such realms, as we have seen in the previous chapter, elite and institutional racism is not dependent on categorical essentialism, and in fact may rely on multicultural discourses of difference and recognition to enact racial domination.

Amina's engagement with the politics of Muslim identification and the politics of anti-racism therefore need to be engaged through nonreductive analysis. Her political subjectivity needs to be understood in relation to the matrix of racializations and racisms that shape her life. And yet it is a testament to her political agency as a Muslim woman that these complex oppressive political experiences do not necessarily predetermine the direction of her political actions. Her political participation with local black anti-racists and with Muslim politics of veiling is not *a priori*, but considered and thought through. It is an open politics that welcomes dialogue, is comfortable with dissent and yet engages in collaborative anti-racist actions. The

question of the veil or black anti-racism for Amina, therefore, is not necessarily antithetical to each other or culturally predetermined.

### **REMEMBERING EMPIRE: FANON'S 'ALGERIA UNVEILED'**

Considering the agentic and contingent aspects of Muslim women wearing the veil, why then is the act of wearing the *hijab* such an affront and source of anxiety for the west? As Franz Fanon noted the Muslim veil carried 'maximum psychological attention' for the west. Writing in the colonial context of French Algeria, Fanon's much heralded and controversial piece, 'Algeria Unveiled' (Fanon 1965) posits a colonial analogue that is useful for understanding the historical development of the present-day western hysterics surrounding veiling practices among ethnic minority Muslims. After all, only a small (but growing) percentage of Europe's and Britain's South Asian and African Muslim women actually adhere to the law of the *hijab*, and fewer still adhere to the cultural practice of wearing full veils.<sup>4</sup>

In Newham, a quarter of the borough's population is Muslim and about 80 % are comprised of different South Asian nationalities and 20% comprised of African nationalities such as Somalis, Nigerians and Tanzanians (Hariss 2005). On the whole it is not uncommon to see Muslim women wearing different ethno-national forms of the veil and being out on the high streets and parks of Newham. As one commentator, participating in an online discussion, concerning the banning of the veil in France, describes everyday social reality of the presence of the veil in Newham:

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<sup>4</sup> In France it is estimated that only some 2000 women actually wear the *niqab* (BBC News 2010). There are no official estimates as to how many of Britain's 1 million Muslim women actually wear the *hijab*, but some online discussions estimate about half the population, but the percentage wearing the full veil, the *niqab*, are still rather a small percentage in Britain as well.

517. At [7:37pm](#) on 13 Jul 2010, [nail-k](#) wrote:

I live in Newham East London, and there are plenty of niqaabis here who work, are very active in community projects, and so on. The niqab is only a barrier if people make it, otherwise if you are talking to a niqaabi on the phone you wouldn't even know would you? lol so i don't see how in office jobs, admin jobs, catering jobs, telesales, etc. it would matter if the women wore niqab or not.

I have never seen a woman wearing a burqa outside of pictures of Afghanistan.

Also these women in Newham manage to pick up their kids from school fine. Believe it or not you can tell who someone is from their eyes, height, voice etc., and it is not that hard! If you meet a niqaabi once, and then you see her again you are likely to realise it is the same person from body language voice, eyes etc! (BBC News 2010)

From the emic point of view of this Newham blogger, the social fact of the ubiquity of the veil in Newham does not elicit the heightened moral and political antipathies congruent with the views expressed in dominant European public spheres. Even wearing the full *niqāb* is not perceived as being an obstacle to accessing the liberal register of women's individuated empowerment, including labor market employment – a key indicator of women's liberation from the domestic reproductive front.<sup>5</sup>

But the politics of veiling and unveiling the Muslim woman has been turned into a symbolic ground in the politics of contemporary European states, much like Muslim women were configured during the period of empire in North Africa. As Faegheh Shirazi (2003) has argued, the veil has acquired a 'flexible semantics' throughout history, starting from its earliest known record in the Assyrian laws of the 13th century BCE, before the advent of Islam, where it was conferred as a status symbol and restricted in usage to wealthy families whose women did not have to work.

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<sup>5</sup> But the socio-economic picture of Muslim women in the borough is not as free-wheeling as the author implies. The fact of the matter is though that some 76% of all Muslim women, inclusive of veiled and unveiled women, in the borough are economically inactive compared to 50% of the overall female population. Some 46% of Muslim women state that their primary occupation is home-work and family-care (See Hariss 2006) .

Young Muslim women like the blogger above and another group that I encountered in the Newham Youth Parliament perceive the practice of wearing the veil as noncontroversial. The Muslim high school students participating in the local youth parliament pointed me towards the presence of the veil in iconic Judeo-Christian sculptures of the Virgin Mary that were plentiful in church compounds in the borough. They also complained that it was Muslims who were being targeted for their religious practices and drew comparisons with the orthodox Jewish community in nearby Stamford Hill in Hackney. Nobody seems to complain about them, they argued with me.

The veil comes to acquire a political signification in the Western imagination, only within the context of nineteenth and twentieth century moments of European colonialism and through the process of its defeat by anti-colonial nationalist movements. It is at this moment, Fanon points out, that wearing or not wearing the veil becomes a symbolic terrain of struggle in Muslim colonies. The campaign to unveil the Muslim woman, in order to liberate her into a Westernized sphere of cultural behavior, is a signifier of the colonial state's ability to reproduce its hegemonic social command on non-white and non-European subjects, and to maintain the power and authority of the colonialist.

Every rejected veil disclosed to the eyes of the colonialists horizons until then forbidden, and revealed to them, piece by piece, the flesh of Algeria laid bare. The occupier's aggressiveness, and hence his hopes, multiplied ten-fold each time a new face was uncovered. Every new Algerian woman unveiled announced to the occupier an Algerian society whose systems of defense were in the process of dislocation, open and breached. Every veil that fell, everybody that become liberated from the traditional embrace of the *haiku*, every face that offered itself to the bold and impatient glance of the occupier, was a negative expression of the fact that Algeria was beginning to deny herself and was accepting the rape of the colonizer. Algerian society with every abandoned veil seemed to express its willingness to attend the master's school and to decide to change its habits under the occupier's direction and patronage (Fanon 1965: 42-43).

This was the colonial fantasy or the ‘dream of total domestication’ whereby the figure of the Muslim woman became the very symbolic ground upon which the colonial state and the European colonizing mission was able to inscribe itself. And in so doing it could also unravel the gendered social relationships of native society and the patriarchal authority of the native male. Such a political project creates its own dialectically emergent antagonist.

Fanon notes in the context of the Algerian revolution at least two tendencies in the responses of Muslim women. Firstly, there is a defensive cultural-nationalist move towards ‘counter-assimilation’ by returning to the pre-Islamic practice of wearing the *hijab*. Taking up the veil is therefore not simply a matter of cultural fidelity or acquiescence; it is also an act of resistance whereby Muslim women relearn to wear the *hijab*. The other tendency that Fanon noted was the move of voluntary unveiling by armed Muslim women revolutionary combatants. These women ventured from the Muslim quarters towards the segregated European parts of North African cities in their capacity as infiltrators and subversives disguised by their very appearance of cultural assimilation into the Westernized order. Fanon explains:

It is the white man who creates the Negro. But it is the Negro who creates negritude. To the colonialist offensive against the veil, the colonized peoples oppose the cult of the veil. What was an undifferentiated element in a homogenous whole acquires a taboo character, and the attitude of a given Algerian woman with respect to the veil will be constantly related to her overall attitude with respect to foreign occupation (47).

The politicization of the veil within the historical context of colonialism led to the development of a dialectic resistance discourse. Muslim women’s agentic behavior concerning veiling or unveiling creates a ‘dialectic of the body’ that dumbfounds the desired logics of the colonialist oppression. Diana Fuss (1994), however, has argued that the veiling of Muslim women as an anti-colonial resistance act forces women into a politics of identification that imposes loyalty to an oppressive patriarchal community. But as Madhu Dubey (1998: 14-15) has argued, Fanon’s

incorporation of the politics of veiling in a decolonizing framework, is done in a context, where he refuses to grant nationalism's claim to 'static cultural traditions' and dislocates the equation between anti-colonial resistance and the 'most conservative and patriarchal aspects of Arabo-Islamic culture.'

And yet, as Fanon insisted, the act of wearing or not wearing the veil becomes meaningful in a colonial- power laden situation, not through mere individualistic terms or choice, but rather the politics of the veil becomes semantically flexible in terms of linking up collective and individual agency, and both acts of wearing or not wearing can be articulated as anti-colonial resistance.

#### **THE NEWHAM YOUTH PARLIAMENT DISCUSSES THE VEIL**

On April 20, 2006 I attended a meeting of the Newham Police and Community Forum (PCF), a community relations panel that had been set up to bolster police-community communication in the aftermath of the race riots of the 1980s and following the recommendations of the Scarman report. PCFs were the mainstay of the concept of 'community policing' introduced by the then MET commissioner Kenneth Newman, and was introduced in order to provide a communications channel to restore the police's credibility and legitimacy within the inner-city while bypassing more radical demands for community or civilian control and oversight of the police through strongly empowered police monitoring bodies (Rowe 2004). Not participating officially in community policing initiatives was one way that NMP attempted to locate itself as an independent antagonist to the state, preferring instead a monitoring and watch-dog predisposition. Hence, I attended the meeting as an individual observer.



This particular meeting was also the Annual General Meeting and, following the elections of the officers, many of whom were drawn from various community and ethnic-oriented civic organizations in Newham, there was a skit presentation by Newham Youth Parliament. The youth parliament was a local council initiative that drew youth to participate in mock democratic debates, elections and other activities that would provide civics education for 14-19 year olds. The members of the youth parliament were tasked with devising theatrical skits that could communicate what Newham inner-city youth felt to be their primary issues of concern to this police-community forum, in order for the adults to listen and take heed.

The students presented two skits that tried to communicate inner-city youth perspectives on the issue of anti-social behavior. It is the inner-city working-class youth that, after all, is seen to be the symbolic embodiment of anti-social behavior and the parliament had much to say about this topic. The first skit presented was about the ways in which Black and Asian males were constantly stopped and searched by Newham's police on suspicion committing crimes like stealing cell-phones.

The skit tried to present the youth talking back to this police harassment by drawing a distinction between what were normal 'young people's groups' that hung out in places like Stratford Mall or the parks. Such social behavior by inner-city youths was being criminalized through the moral panic against anti-social behavior and gang culture. The youth pointed out that there was a difference between inner-city youth hanging out in public, and proper 'gangs'—a distinction that they felt was lost on the police who tended to lump together and criminalize all inner-city youth.

The second skit was introduced as a 'true story' that took place on the #262 bus that crosses Newham from the white-dominant area of Beckon to the main transport hub in Stratford

Station. The skit cast a young African-Caribbean student playing the role of the bus driver. He sat on a chair and pretended to be driving a bus. As his bus approached a bus stop he spotted two young Muslim women with headscarves wanting to get on. The period was set immediately after 7/7.

As the bus driver approached his pick-up, his happy demeanor changed and he became afraid. The waiting Muslim women in their *hijabs* elicited his fear, but he picked up his waiting customers nonetheless.

The Muslim women sat down and tried to mind their own business. They played teenage youths who themselves wear headscarves but appeared to be fairly ordinary. The two friends were seen gossiping in their bus seats about topics such as going out with boys and getting married. They carried out a discussion about the issue of the denial of racism within the Muslim community, especially when it came to questions of communities selecting marital partners. They talked about rifts within the local Muslim community and how their parents, who are Asian, would never consent to them marrying Somali Muslims.

As they conversed, a toughie non-Muslim Asian girl got on the bus and spotted the two Muslim girls. She was a fast talking, rapping tomboy and was the leader of a pack of youths who also boarded the bus.

The toughie walked up to the two girls sitting in their seats. She was dressed in a track-suit and as she pulled her 'hoodie' over her eyes she exclaimed,

'Guess what I am?'

'Terrorist!' her mates shouted. She then proceeded to taunt and harass the two girls for the duration of the bus-ride.

The situation was only brought under control when another Muslim girl, who was unveiled, bravely intervened and fought the toughie off.

The skit ended and the theatre troupe performed a summing-up rap song against the practice of stereotyping. They aimed their critique at the police who should not categorically stereotype inner-city youth as ‘yobs’.<sup>6</sup> They also tried to rally the audience to affirm that everyone, no matter their race, religion or dress was unquestionably British.

‘We are all one community!’ they exclaimed.

This morally uplifting theatrical fare by idealistic youngsters seemed to me like an unobjectionable and laudatory presentation. It was also scheduled just before refreshments were to be served at the AGM and was not a part of the official agenda of the forum. And yet, the youth parliament performance quickly became the subject of heated exchanges for the rest of the meeting, completely taking me by surprise.

A dam of pent-up emotions appeared to break when the newly elected chair of the PCF, an elderly white woman, rose to thank the students and allowed for an open Q&A session. Immediately a white male in the audience rose up in an agitated fashion. He was a local teacher and he proceeded to demand, in an angry tone, for the two Muslim girls who had just acted in the last skit, to explain to the audience why they wore the *hijab*.

The chair also chimed in and also wanted to know what the headscarves were called. As the girls tried to explain the intricacies of their cultural practice, the chair turned to the audience and sardonically retorted, ‘Well there you go!’, and received a good laugh from the allied audience who were comprised largely of white people.

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<sup>6</sup> Colloquial term for rude young people, and part of a discourse on the current moral panic around the rise of anti-social behavior.

Earlier on she had also delivered a call to resurrect the practice of celebrating St. George's Day, the signature cultural practice that embodied the nostalgic tight-knit and nationalistic togetherness of the old times in the East End when the borough was solidly white and immigrants and their cultural practices were nowhere to be seen.

As the girls continued to explain some of the misconceptions surrounding the wearing of the *hijab*, and they referred to how they felt when white people would constantly stare at them. At this, the chair became impatient and defensive and turned to the girls, addressing them in a matronly voice. She admonished them to not jump to conclusions and to take a positive approach to the questions being posed to them.

She then proposed that the correct response that the girls should give to white people who stared at them was to politely ask a question like 'Is there a question you want to ask me?' 'You could break down a lot of antagonism like that,' the chair explained.

She also then admonished the Black and Asian boys who had presented the first skit to fess up that they often talked 'rudely' to the police.

The youth appeared chastened, and grudgingly agreed that sometimes they did speak back when they were being stopped and searched.

The chair beamed at them with approval and told them, 'Thank you for saying that and being brave!' She turned to the girls and told them to also take the advice that she had dispensed to them.

The girls agreed that they would try the approach of asking people who stared at them if they would like to ask a question of them and the chair beamed with complete satisfaction.

But no sooner than this exchange ended, than a white woman in uniform rose up. She identified herself as an officer from the British Transport Police.

‘We are terrified of you!’ she protested. ‘This has nothing to do with you personally. I was part of the group of people who stopped every Asian with a back-pack on 7/7,’ she proceeded to tell the two Asian girls. ‘And I worked 14 hour shifts that week!’ she cried.

She then continued to explain why she felt that racially profiling Asians was necessary. ‘London has more black people!’ she said defensively. And she compared the city to more serene places like Newcastle, where she was from and where there were not so many black people.

Finally, a middle-aged African-Caribbean man, the leader of the Dominica Association, got up to protest the direction that the Q&A was taking and the backlash that the students were experiencing. He tried to reason that ‘perception,’ as the students had tried vainly to present, was the problem. But his efforts seemed to fall on deaf ears.

Then, members of the audience then noticed that the Newham police’s chief inspector in charge of community-public relations was in attendance, and he was summoned to present his views.

The Chief Inspector proceeded to lower the temperature by calmly responding that he felt that the skits did challenge popular assumptions, and by testifying that the performance had challenged his assumptions, although he did not mention what the assumptions were. He smiled and appealed to everyone present that they could learn something from the students’ valiant efforts.

The difficulty the students had in conducting a discussion on their own terms arose from the barrier they encountered in the re-containment impulses of the white adults who sought to re-establish paternalistic authority and control. The students’ attempts at speaking about their experiences of racism and discrimination were subordinated and replaced by a framework of

discussion that privileged how whites felt threatened by the differential cultural knowledge of the students and their drive to re-establish epistemological and moral control of the issues discussed.

The continuum of meaning that was given by whites in Newham to the wearing of the *hijab* by Muslim women was constructed along two registers that we have repeatedly observed – as cultural difference and as a national security threat. During the more banal and low-intensity moments of conflict, the meaning of the *hijab* is framed within the powers of what Gayathri Spivak (Spivak and Harasym 1990; 1999) has called ‘sanctioned ignorance,’ whereby the role assigned to the students was only that of a cooperative and amiable native informants. The students were re-slotted into a colonial anthropological frame, whereby they had to adjust themselves to function as mirrors for the epistemological anxieties of whites. It was in this capacity that they had to be schooled to respond and shape their subjectivities. In the more high-intensity register of conflict, the *hijab* was mobilized as a signifier of terrorism and as a racialized danger to the body politic brought about through the de-stabilizing presence of black people within normative white spaces. The *hijab* was read by whites as a sign of this abortive cohesiveness, as an obverse sign of something that was lost and whose erasure is yet to be materialized. Within this dynamic, the veiled Muslim woman becomes a figure who reminds whites of their failure at epistemic, spatial and political control.

## **MUSLIM WOMEN AND ANTI-RACIST PROTEST POLITICS**

Finally, I want to explore how the space of anti-racism in Britain provides for a potential reconfiguration of the uneven power relationship between Muslim women and the white public sphere, and the emergence of the open participation of veiled Muslim women in protest politics.

In the neighboring borough of Woolwich, in southeast London, three black men were killed while in custody of the police in 2006. This police division was the same one that was responsible for investigating the Stephen Lawrence murder in 1993 and was found to be ‘institutionally racist’ by the MacPherson report. Paul Coker, Nuur Saeed and Frank Ogburu who were of African-Caribbean, Somali and Nigerian backgrounds, respectively, died in what were perceived to be suspicious circumstances at the hands of the police. Coker died in a jail cell whilst being detained at the Plumstead police station for a minor violation of breach of peace. Nuur died, according to the Plumstead police, by accidentally falling from a third-floor balcony of a flat where they were carrying out an investigative raid. Ogburu suffocated while being pinned down and restrained by the same Plumstead police force during a domestic incident. Just like the Lawrence family, all these families of the deceased mounted an anti-racist campaign to seek proper investigation into and justice regarding the police’s conduct, along the lines of the Lawrence precedent. On April 1, 2006 the Justice for Nuur Saeed campaign called for solidarity from all London-wide anti-racist groups to picket the Plumstead Police Station, and I attended.

Saeed’s death took place against a backdrop of rising harassment of the Somali community at the hands of the Woolwich Police. Common perceptions held that officers in the area were engaged in a racist vendetta after two of the suspects allegedly involved in the shooting of a woman police constable, Sharon Beshenivsky in the Northern town of Bradford, were two Somali men who had prior links to Woolwich. Many young Somali men were reporting that the Woolich police were intensifying stop and searches and wantonly using excessive force during policing operations while also openly boasting they were out for ‘revenge.’ It was in this context that Nuur was killed after a raid on the social housing block he lived in. He, however, allegedly fell from the balcony of a flat that was not his own and was never a specific target of

any police investigation. Most of his injuries were inconsistent with the police's account that he had fallen to his death.

The campaign had already mobilized a massive demonstration in February shortly after Nuur's death, and 600 people, largely galvanized from the local Somali community and solidaristic supporters from around London had attended the rally. When I arrived at the Plumstead station, the protest consisted of about a hundred people, and was overwhelmingly overpowered by the immense riot-control police presence in the area. I counted a total of seven police vans ready to make mass arrests, thirty-two white police officers and one Somali Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) who was individually placed directly between the crowd and the entrance to the police station itself. The protesting crowd was deploying characteristic chants common to many anti-racist campaigns:

This is our reality! Stop the police brutality!

What do we want? Justice! When do we want it? Now!

Stop the racism! Stop the racism!

No justice, no peace!

Stop the war on our streets!

The crowd was mostly comprised of Somali youth, and many of the young women were wearing the *hijab*, mainly headscarves worn in many different styles, colors and tastes, along with modern fashions. Elderly Somali women were more apt to be dressed in the traditional style of the black *chador*. Listening and talking to many in the crowd, it was clear that it was the younger, second-generation Somalis, especially family members, who were most active in the campaign and the demonstration. As I was taking photos and making a short video, one of the protesters gestured me towards the second-story window of the police station where three police



officers were watching our protest. What was notable was that the officers were smiling and laughing. ‘Look at that!’ the protester exclaimed, pointing out the irreverence and lack of remorse that the officers seemed to be exemplifying.

The protestors recognized the state’s contempt and it re-signified their alienation from the formal public institutions that are supposedly there to protect them. The officer’s actions reconfirmed for the protesters the necessity for their extra-institutional direct actions. One of the sisters of Nuur, who herself wore the *hijab*, came forward to rally the crowd to engage in a campaigning form of anti-racism.

Thank you on behalf of my family. We are physically and mentally distraught firstly at our great loss and secondly at the blatant cover-up by the Metropolitan Police until this very day. We as a family believe that Nuur suffered a shameful death due to the extent of his injuries – injuries which were caused by the Metropolitan Police, which *insya allah* evidence shall prove. We and the community demand the suspension of those officers during the inquiry led by the police complaints commission. We also demand a public inquiry as past cases, i.e. the Stephen Lawrence case demonstrate that this is the most effective way that the truth gets out. Nuur was a very peaceful, wise and popular member of the family. Allah bless you soul, *insya allah*.

*Allahu akhbar! Allahu akhbar!*

The participation by Muslim women in protest politics constructs both individual and collective empowerment, as agents against the community injustices that they are experience. They are part of the struggle to alter power relationships between institutions such as the police and discriminated and dispossessed black communities. Through their participation in public protest, the pursuit of democratic public accountability acquires a new and insistent face.

The intertwined articulation of individual, familial and communitarian empowerment that Muslim women forge through their multi-sited politics can easily, however, become re-contained. Without a substantial understanding of Muslim women as waging a multi-frontal struggle of that sutures both individual and community resistance to racial, religious and gender

domination there is a potential danger that Muslim women in resistance become incorporated as subservient or self-sacrificing appendages to community struggles. Re-inscribing narratives of tradition-bound oppressed communities that are static or requiring Muslim women to sacrifice autonomy and spatial mobility in order to uphold honor and patriarchal authority are potential forms of re-containment.

This danger was actualized during a community demonstration that NMP itself took the lead to organize. The demonstration was in protest of the wrongful Forest Gate anti-terror raid that took place in Newham on June 18, 2006, and which will be discussed in the following chapter. The demonstration that weaved its way through the borough and gathered some 5,000 protesters created a division between the men's section up front and the women's and children's section at the back. The organizers of the march, which largely consisted of male-dominated organizations, had acquiesced to this division.

Even Muslim women activists within NMP rationalized the division as something that was a natural and cultural division in the community, or 'where the community was at.' But this examination of multi-faceted Muslim women's political subjectivities should serve as instruction that Muslim women within the communities are able take up the spaces of political protest and wage intersectional forms of resistance. The potential of Muslim women participation and leadership in mass politics is critical for both the symbolic interruption of the image of Muslim women as passive political objects in the contemporary framework and as being outside the democratic realm of the nation-state. As Peter Joyce has theorized, the function of participation in mass politics carries two key functions:

The use of extra-parliamentary politics is thus designed to alter the perceptions and priorities of policy-makers and in attempting to make them have regard to their views, participants are given a sense of empowerment... Empowerment embraces actions which range from securing a permanent alteration in the power relationship between citizens and the state to temporarily 'getting one over' on one's perceived opponents and feeling morally uplifted even if the state subsequently reasserts its power through coercive means. (Joyce 2002: 1-2)

Muslim women's capable and open participation in political protest points us towards yet another reason to reject the terms of the debate that frame the veil as an issue of a clash of civilization between a totalitarian culture and a liberal democratic West. A greater visibility and investigation of Muslim women's resistance activity in seeking to positively alter their gendered and racialized confinements within domestic, public and political spaces is important to challenge the myth of passive Muslim women needing rescue or of their proper places at the back of an anti-racist movement.

Muslim women have been and continue to become more visibly engaged in the long-standing democratic traditions of anti-racist struggle in Britain. Within anti-racist politics spaces, there is urgent imperative to insist on the expansion of the definition of what constitutes community-based anti-racist activism and to necessarily demand the full incorporation of the specificities of Muslim women's oppression in the current conjuncture. This requires a critical self-transformation that adopts Muslim women's oppressions and the incorporation of their leadership as a more explicit and inalienable front-line of anti-racist struggle.

## Chapter 6: Groundings in Resisting the Terror of the War on Terror



*One of the largest demonstrations in Newham's history took place on June 18, 2006. Placard reads 'The War on Terror has become a war on us'*

*Source: Mohan Ambikaipaker*

### **STATE TERROR IN EAST LONDON**

Early on Friday, June 2, 2006, 250 police officers from the armed C019 branch of the Metropolitan Police, anti-terrorist officers, riot police units and other state agencies raided two

houses on Landsdown Road, Forest Gate, London. It was the largest anti-terror operation carried out in Britain that year in Newham, where the ward of Forest Gate is situated. The raided houses were situated in the middle of a leafy tree-lined street of working-class terrace houses that had a mixed South Asian, African-Caribbean and white population. The main house in question belonged to the family of a Bangladeshi-British family and the police claimed they were acting on classified 'secret' intelligence, from a 'credible, sensitive source which in the past had provided corroborated information' (Hayman 2006: 1) The police intelligence claimed that there was a chemical weapon capable of mass destruction, located at the premises. Before daybreak, the police stormed into the house with a squad of thirty-five officers as the inhabitants, who comprised a multi-generational South Asian joint family of grandparents, parents and children and an eight month-old grandchild, were sound asleep.

During what came to be known as the Forest Gate raid, 23 year-old Abdul Kahar was shot by the police, dragged out of his home and dumped on the sidewalk where he bled. Later he was taken to the Royal London Hospital, and kept under armed guard. When the raid began, he and his family members fearing they were being attacked by armed robbers, screamed for the attackers to take everything, but to let them live. Here is Abdul Kahar's own account of the experience.

At about four o'clock in the morning, I was woken up by screams that I had never heard before. My younger brother was screaming, and from upstairs, from my room, I could hear him screaming, so I got out of bed. I just had my boxer shorts on and a T-shirt. It was dark and I assumed a robbery was happening. As I made the first step down the stairs, my brother was still screaming and I turned to look at the stairs. As soon as I turned around, I saw an orange spark and a big bang. I flew into the wall and I slipped down. I was on the floor. I looked to my right, on my chest, and saw blood coming down my chest and saw the hole in my chest. At that moment, I knew I was shot. The first thing I was thinking was that an armed robbery was taking place. As I went down, I saw an object flying in my face. At that moment I did not know what object it was but I now know it was the gun. He tried to hit me over the face with it. I saw the shotgun in my chest and I was begging, 'Please, please I cannot breathe.' He just kicked me in my face

and kept on saying ‘Shut the fuck up.’ I said, ‘Please, please I cannot breathe.’ One of the officers slapped me over the face. He was saying, ‘Just shut the fuck up, stay there, stay there’. (The Independent 2006)

The police initially claimed that the shot had been accidentally fired by a highly trained and specialist C019 officer whose sophisticated Gluck 17 semi-automatic pistol was apparently triggered during the heat of the moment because the gloves he wore were too thick. A local newspaper columnist in the Newham Recorder would later argue that the shot that could have killed Abdul Kahar within inches of his heart was permissible because, ‘In a warlike situation, accidents happen and we have to learn to live with that regrettable fact’ (2006). The British cabinet itself also chimed in with similar arguments about the ‘police acting in the best interests of the whole community’ and therefore requiring unaccountable and unbridled support, even when some innocent members of the community easily had their lives endangered through draconian measures.

This endangerment could have led to a fatal killing by the police as it did in the case of Brazilian immigrant Gill Charles de Menezes. De Menezes was mistakenly identified by the police as a Pakistani terror suspect in the aftermath of the July 7, 2005 subway bombings and was shot repeatedly and killed while riding a subway train on his daily commute to work as a mechanic. As Joseph Pugliese (2006) has argued, Menezes’ killing demonstrates the underlying ‘racialized regime of visibility’ at work in anti-terror policing and the War on Terror: ‘As de Menezes steps outside his flat and proceeds to walk down the street, a regime of visibility activates the stereotypical iconography of racial profiling as it re-signifies his ethnic identity from Brazilian to (South) Asian: in advance of any offence he is racially suspect.’ The operation of racialized regimes of visibility and the established codes of stereotyping are critical to the functioning of anti-terror racial profiling and policing. And it is these regimes of visual

interpretations, signifiers of racial hierarchy and order that depend on proscriptive notions of white normalcy which empowered the acts of violent domination during the course of the Forest Gate raid.

The Observer newspaper reported neighbors describing the surreal daybreak scene where Abu Korari, the younger brother who was not shot was ‘dragged down the road, put down on the pavement and then plastic sheets were put on him’ and restrained with ‘white overalls’ (2006). The report documented that ‘even the grandmother of the family was led from the home in handcuffs.’ I interviewed family members who described scenes in which they were begging the police to allow the grandmother to access her asthma rescue inhaler. The police themselves later confirmed that, besides the wounded Abdul Kahar, ‘two other people went to hospital. One was a woman suffering from shock, the other a man with a head injury.’ No other details were ever provided.

Immediately after the raid, Abu Korari was detained and held as a high-profile terrorist suspect at Paddington Green police station, the infamous site for almost four decades for counter-terror interrogations stemming from the era of intense Irish Republican Army (IRA) activity. Suspects are kept within eleven-foot square cells with no windows, and under the current rule of law inaugurated in the 2000 act, terror suspects can be held under such conditions and interrogated for up to 28 days without any charges before they have to be brought forward to a court of law . Even after these 28 days, detention can be renewed if adequate evidence is presented before a judge (Guardian 2007). There have been repeated and ongoing attempts to expand the 2000 act, including allowing for indefinite detentions, as was sought for unsuccessfully in the 2001 Prevention of Terrorism Act.

In this same raid, an unrelated South Asian family, who was renting the adjacent terrace house from the father of the two arrested men, was also stormed by the police. One of the members of this family had his head severely beaten with the end of a rifle as the police broke in. The members of this family, who were not arrested or even under any suspicion, were nonetheless taken and unlawfully held for twelve hours at the local Plaistow police station. An area comprising seven neighborhood roads was cordoned off to the public for over a week and all the residents who lived within this cordon had to be escorted to and from their homes by police officers.

The end result of the raid and investigation was that no chemical materials were found and eventually, after a week of campaigning by NMP, which had stepped into the situation to represent the affected families, the two brothers were released without charge on the evening of June 9th. After Abdul Kahar and Abu Korari gave an internationally publicized press conference at the St. Emmanuel's Church on June 13th, the Metropolitan Police issued statements that apologized for the 'hurt', 'disruption' and inconvenience' it had caused to the families concerned (Stratford Guardian 2006).

The families involved in the raid had by now been rendered homeless. Police sources in the media had boasted that, 'If necessary, we'll take the house down brick by brick' (Daily Mirror 2006). The house had originally been purchased in 1987 and renovated by Abdul Kahar and Abu Korari's father who had worked for years as a restaurant cook. The two brothers had themselves recently helped to renovate the house in order to create a basement gym – the activity that some neighbors felt was the trigger for the perception that a bomb factory was being built by 'Muslims with beards' (Godchild and Elliot 2006).



It was months before these houses, which had been virtually stripped bare in the fury of the search, could become habitable again. Even the case for receiving compensation from the state would take weeks, if not months, to build. The tabloid presses were demonizing the families as welfare queens who were draining the system through their audacity to seek compensation. One newspaper columnist declared, ‘Such a circus. And now these Muslim brothers will cry all the way to the bank’ (Flynn 2006). In addition, a few weeks following the dropping of the charges and as the brothers participated in building a justice campaign, the police sought to charge one of them again, but this time on the count of soliciting child pornography, which they claimed had been found on the hard-drive of a computer seized in the raid. The computer had been purchased second-hand and eventually the matter was not pursued for lack of evidence. However, this was not before local and national media went through several news cycles with the stories that also took the attention off the police’s almost deadly bungling of the raid.

The police force also never retracted its claim to have had credible intelligence, even though they had found no evidentiary basis to confirm a chemical bomb threat. They continued to issue statements that argued that ‘the intelligence received by the police continues to be developed and we will continue to exhaust all lines of inquiry’. Eventually the story faded from the headlines and the country turned its attention to other alleged terrorist plots.

Meanwhile, the reputation of the brothers in their local community was in tatters and they were widely slandered. By some accounts, they were characterized as ‘westernized rude boys’ who had taken to a deeper practice of Islam following 9/11 (Rayners and Sachdave 2006). A few weeks following the raid, when I was at a local post office, Abdul Kahar entered to mail a letter, and the entire office froze in silence out of apparent fear and trepidation. Up until the time of the

raid, Abdul Kahar had been a full-time collection driver with the local Royal Mail operations and also worked nights as a part-time supervisor at the local Tesco grocery store. But now nobody approached him, he kept his head down and proceeded to carry out his business. The clerk who received his letter and calculated the postage was almost shaking. The atmosphere returned to normal only when he left the post office and exited to the street alone.

During the conduct of the raid and even after it was evident that it had gone wrong, the then Prime Minister, Tony Blair, stated that he backed the police in the Forest Gate raid ‘101 percent...The bottom line in all of this,’ Blair said, ‘is a recognition that intelligence is not an art form where you can be 100 percent right all the time. But what you have to do is act on credible intelligence and then support those who take the decisions to act on credible intelligence’ (Hills 2006). Blair’s tautological comments seemed to echo a puzzling refrain that I had come to hear about logic of the state’s War on Terror. This was the belief that state’s moral, ethical and juridical errors in the rationale and the impact of the war on racial and religious minorities was in no way an obstacle to the further pursuit of the war or its rationale. This seemed to be as true for the question of the weapons of mass destruction that were never found in Iraq as for the chemical bomb that was never found in Forest Gate.

Between September 11, 2001 and the end of my fieldwork year in 2006, The Terrorism Act of 2000 had been utilized to authorize some 1166 arrests emerging out of anti-terror raids (Guardian 2007). Of these arrests, the British government could not bring about terrorism charges for over four-fifths of those arrested. This means that within five years, over 900 lives had been subjected to counter-terror operations without legal and credible basis. And there had been evidentiary basis for successfully convicting only some 40 cases up to that point (Guardian 2007). And yet the raids continued apace and a new act was passed in 2006 to further generate a

new range of terrorism offenses that civil rights groups were criticizing for being so broad as to comprise political policing.

This pattern of using anti-terror raids in a summary fashion, or as ‘fishing expeditions’ without respect to the presumption of innocence or the human rights of minority groups, had been also present during Britain’s history of Irish colonialism and the conflict against the Irish Republican Army. Between 1974 and 1993, 7193 persons were detained under the 1974 Prevention of Terrorism Act (Joyce 2002: 172). Of those detained in that entire period only three percent were ever charged with terror offenses. The prevalence and justification of these state practices had been on the decline since the end of the Irish conflict in the late 1990s, but have started to exponentially rise again with respect to the common-sense that has now seamlessly associated Muslim communities with terrorism.

In relation to the Forest Gate debacle, the then Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service, Sir Ian Blair, unremorsefully concluded that the police ‘had got it wrong’ and that ‘there will be other raids, but the lesson of Forest Gate is that we have to find new methods of engaging with the Muslim community in particular to reassure them of the necessity and appropriateness of police actions’ (Davenport 2006). Also, as Deborah Glass, the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) Commissioner flatly declared in her inquiry into the near-fatal shooting of Abdul Kahar, ‘I have no hesitation in concluding that the two families affected by the raid were the *victims of failed intelligence* [my emphasis], I don’t think that these are ground for disciplinary matters, but I do think they are grounds for an apology. I mean, they were—some of them were injured as a result of this, they all went through what must have been a terrifying experience’ (Independent Police Complaints Commission 2007).

The application of routinized state violence on Muslim subjects and the resulting ontological insecurity for such ethno-religious communities in Britain appear to be acceptable outcomes of a racialized form of liberalism. In this liberalism, two categories of racial subjects are constructed – those with inalienable rights and those whose rights are mutable. Empirical evidence that testifies against the effectiveness and disproportionately brutal impact of the current anti-terrorism discourse on the lives of Muslim minority families and communities appears to have no way of being able to seriously question the national-security logic that is presently hegemonic. In addition, the lived experiences of suffering and the question of justice and racial equality are all but irrelevant to the state that is firmly focused on the War on Terror.

#### **STATES OF EXCEPTION AND RACIAL LIBERALISM**

In *State of Exception*, the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (2005) carries out an argument with the ideas of the German fascist philosopher Carl Schmitt. Schmitt theorized that a state's sovereignty could be effectively produced out of its power to pull off the suspension of civil liberties and the usual processes of justice under heightened and permanent emergency rule. This form of state sovereignty tends towards ever-expansive totalitarianism over all aspects of social life and, in the case of the European experience of Nazism, worked to first construct 'the establishment, by means of the state of exception, of a legal civil war that allows for the physical elimination not only of political adversaries but of entire categories of citizens who for some reason cannot be integrated into the political system' (2005: 2).

At that historical moment, the ethno-religious group was the European Jewish community who the state was attempting to eliminate via state prerogative and through genocidal processes.

The construction of different classes of citizens who are racialized and legally set apart as ruled subjects has had a productive and genealogical linkage with the development of totalitarianism tendencies within the modern European racial state. The case of the Forest Gate raid also illustrates the constitutive relationship between the processes of racial differentiation and the development of totalitarian forms of sovereignty ongoing in Britain today. But rather than perceiving this development as an aberration to the normal functioning of Europe's racial liberalism (Mills 2008), it is important to consider this moment within a broader historical genealogy of racialized state formation in the west.

In the case of the 21st century west, Agamben argues that the targets of exceptional legal treatment now come to envelop an imagined globalized network of Islamic terror suspects. Agamben makes the point that the War on Terror discourse creates a dehumanizing dynamic when 'it radically erases any legal status of the individual, thus producing a legally unnamable and unclassifiable being. Not only do the Taliban captured in Afghanistan not enjoy the status of POWs as defined by the Geneva Convention, they do not even have the status of people charged with a crime according to American laws' (2005: 3). The normalization of war as a paradigm of governance allows for a suspension of liberal individual rights and adjusts the rule of law in order to routinely sanction the suffering and injustice experienced by classes of citizens who are racially differentiated from dominant white British subjects. The erasure or derogation of the legal status and rights of terror suspects has not only been applied to cover specific individuals or extremist political groups, but also essentialized Muslim communities. These essentialized communities are seen to be culturally exogenous to the morally advanced civilizational base within the west whose superior difference lies ironically in the diminutive political liberalism it exercises over Muslim subjects.

What Agamben does not adequately refer to, however, is the recursive operation of racial supremacy that underwrites the development of European and western regimes that institute rule by the state of exception. My earlier examination of the treatment of Tamil refugees and asylum-seekers, for example, is only one example of a racial protocol which allowed for derogations from Europe-wide human rights refugee covenants that have been part and parcel of post Holocaust moral and political consensus. British statecraft and the withdrawal of many contemporary European states and mainstream political parties from the conventions of refugee and asylum-seeker rights attest to how tenuous that consensus has been in terms of its universal application. It might therefore be proposed, as Agamben has done, that ‘from a strictly political point of view fascism and Nazism have not been overcome, and we still live under their sign’ (1990: 63).

The persistence of totalitarian tendencies within the European state calls into question Agamben’s concept of the state of exception. This concept, while critical and usefully descriptive, seems to imply that an *a priori* ideal state of normal liberal functionality had existed in European state history, a functionality which therefore can be reset. However, I argue that the ambiguous status of Muslim subjects resident within a degenerate liberal Britain and Europe is an exception that proves the rule of a totalitarian tendency that was historically exhibited by the modern European state both within and without its continental borders. As Aime Cesaire (1972) pointed out, these totalitarian tendencies are not exhibited within the hermetically sealed and geopolitical boundaries of Europe, but are also seen in Europe’s expansive imperialist projects and through forms of rule that were developed from experiences in the colonial domination of nonwhite peoples.

The ‘subjectification’<sup>1</sup> of Muslims under the state of exception today, however, may not always invoke explicitly racist codes that were common to the expansive moment of western imperialism, such as those expressed in the classic ‘civilizing mission’ and ‘white man’s burden’ rhetoric of Rudyard Kipling. But the framework of civilizational incommensurability finds a residual echo in the rhetoric reconfigured as the concept of the ‘clash-of-civilizations’ influentially developed by Samuel Huntington (Huntington 1996) to characterize the post-war threat to the west. To a large extent, the War on Terror appears to authorize the targeting of Muslims not definitively through racial codes, but ostensibly through a discursive fetishization of technocratic dilemmas. Technocratic concerns around the efficacy of scientific racialized profiling, intelligence gathering and mass communication arts, for example, become organizing motifs of the War on Terror that allow the extension the of the state of exception against Muslims to proceed in a depoliticized, deracinated and invisible manner. These technocratic fetishes act as a way to elide the discussion about the very basis upon which the legitimacy of the War on Terror is continuously reproduced and expanded. Concealed in the fetish and rendered politically peripheral to this logic are the emergence and development of Eurocentric anti-Muslim racism and the alienation of Muslims as equal subjects of the state.

The War on Terror is a war that is without end and has now exceeded the length of the two world wars of the twentieth century. Since the end of its empires in the middle twentieth century, the west has appeared to be under constant collective threat that requires a constant need for defense. The War on Terror seems to share an affinity with the preceding form of the Cold War, where a broadly conceived and amorphous globalized threat to the west became institutionalized for decades as a permanent crisis. It only came to a symbolical end with the

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<sup>1</sup> See (Ong 1996) for a discussion of this framework within the U.S. context.

collapse of the Soviet Union and the disappearance of the global communist movement as a credible anti-western threat.

Soon after the specter of Islamic terrorism emerged as the current dominant and organizing focus of western international relations today, it also initiated what I call a permanent racial crisis. This crisis unleashes racialized anxieties about the internal cohesiveness, national security and governability of western states that is potentially rendered unstable by non-western enemies both external and internal. The key process by which the state then works to re-inscribe its sovereignty is through the selective targeting of problematic ethnic Muslim populations as derogated subjects within the state of exception.

Such suspensions of moral and juridical treatment of racialized others, as has been noted is not novel to the history of the state in Europe, but develops from the two defining historical examples that are interlinked: the history of anti-Semitism and the history of the west's racial relationship to nonwhite colonized peoples. Barnor Hesse (2004) argues that there is a 'double-bind' in theorizations of western political excess or state violence that do not take into account the 'templates for the subordinated, interiorized racial categories' that have produced and continue to produce neo-colonial relationships for nonwhite people within Europe. As he further states, 'within the terms of westernese, subaltern Black concerns about the technologies of racism were not conceived, even within liberalism, as part of the hegemonic national priorities.' Within the traditions of racial liberalism, therefore, the concerns of British Muslims suffering from anti-terror operations and experiencing collateral damage from the War on Terror can be easily rendered as marginal considerations in relation to the need to reauthorize this war, its fears and its exceptional legal regime. The arrogance and apathy of British political figures concerning



the suffering endured by the mistaken victims of the Forest Gate raid is meaningful not simply as individual arrogance, but as a logical expression within enabling states of exception.

The more accepted and paradigmatic example of ethno-religious lived experience of racism within a state of exception in European history is, of course, the experience of the Jewish community in the 19th and 20th centuries. Karl Marx, who wrote the essay "On the Jewish Question" in 1843 some 28 years before Germany or Prussia formally granted emancipation to the Jews, grappled with a similar question of the relationship between the European state and an ethno-religious group that was not allowed to become incorporated within Europe's racial liberalism. In this essay, Marx tracks how European states try to renegotiate their racial liberalism in the face of the Jewish emancipation movement. Marx's critique of the emergent dominant tendency in Jewish politics to seek 'civic or political emancipation' within the framework of the nation-state reveals important parallels with the directions being pursued by Muslim communities today, and may be similarly constrained in the ways that Marx suggests.

By consigning the 19th century Jewish struggle to resolutions contained only within the sphere of civil society rather than within state formation, the state did not eradicate its construction of Jews as outsiders to the moral and political concerns of European identity and racial hierarchies. As Vijay Prashad notes, Marx theorizes that 'since the state deems difference within civil society as 'nonpolitical distinctions', it is able to arrogate for itself the role of being above those very distinctions' (Prashad 2001: 57).

Marx makes a salient point about liberal state formation which is that the reproduction of the liberal state's universality is sutured precisely through moments of attempting to resolve social disorder and racial crises. Crisis is necessary for the state to reassemble its universal and binding authority over a host of social and subordinate ethno-racial/religious identities. In the

case of 19th century Jewish struggle the dualism proposed by the liberal state between the notion of an abstract deracinated citizen and racinated private individual allows for organization of a temporary social order that eventually collapses with the rise of Nazism. The exceptional position of Jews, however, already prefigures the possibility of such a violent resolution to the European state's ambivalence about the community.

As Agamben also ironically notes, the day Hitler takes power, he also signs the Decree of Protection of the People and the State, which suspends the state recognition and toleration of privatized racial and cultural difference within the sphere of civil society. The German state then shifts towards a strategy of total elimination in order to sublimate the Jewish presence once and for all. The European state, as it develops its totalitarian tendencies, is a state whose universality is always in a necessary crisis in relation to racialized particularities. And yet the state uses these moments of crisis to reproduce its power with new forms of articulations between the universal and the particular. In a liberal moment, that suturing can take the form of a politics of privatized recognition of ethno-religious and racialized difference. But this recognition is not stable or lasting, and is constantly under threat through the assertion of European totalitarianism. Resident within heart of the liberal state's darkness is a totalitarian dynamic that continuously engenders war and peace, inclusions and exclusions – two co-existing tendencies.

The emergence of Muslims as a potential civilizational and national security threat within the terms engendered by the current War on Terror has constructed another crisis-filled moment for the identity of the west and the European state. The criminalizing of whole communities and the formulation of exceptional rules of law in order to construct Muslims as amenable targets of the War on Terror subsequently positions all Muslims as racially mutable citizen-subjects. These mutable citizen-subjects are then prepared subordinations that can be delivered through popular

antipathies and racist violence. Furthermore, the rules of recently institutionalized exception also work to prevent any effective recourse to racial or liberal individualist forms of remedial justice.

### **THE NEOLIBERAL-MULTICULTURAL-NATIONAL SECURITY APPARATUS**

In speaking back to the contemporary logic of the suspension of moral and ethical consideration and the power of the technocratic fetish, I would like to present a view of the War on Terror from the side of its victims and their struggle to pursue racial justice against the state of exception. I highlight three interlinked dynamics of present state formation in Britain which comprises of a neoliberal-multicultural-national security apparatus. The assemblage of these three logics of governance produces the invisibility and political apathy concerning Muslim suffering within the War on Terror. Firstly, the logic of neoliberalism presupposes a citizen-subject that does not make demands upon the state which is interested in divesting itself from any care-taking and social welfare responsibilities. Through neoliberalism, the state accomplishes a feat of alienating its own citizen-subjects from making claims upon it, and presents itself as reluctant to intervene in unequal material and power-based social relations. As was seen in the examination of racial harassment casework, the privatization of racial harassment remedies means that the state wants an arms-length approach with regard to the question of justice and prefers self-induced solutions for the antagonism between racist perpetrators and victims.

Secondly, the logic of multiculturalism requires the state to present itself as interested in collectivized identities and requires some form of recognition, often through ethnic development

projects and inclusive consultations that favor accommodationist symbolic representatives. Multiculturalism intends to de-essentialize the notion of a homogeneous citizenship body and positively recognize culturally different group rights (Benhabib 2002; Taylor, Gutmann, and Habermas 1994). But multiculturalism as a political theory of minority rights does not appear to be able to cope with the onslaught of the state of exception and the contradictions unleashed on Muslim communities in the War on Terror. In fact, it appears that the national security logic of the War on Terror has instead mobilized multiculturalism for its own ends, as will be shown later in this chapter.

Thirdly, the logic of national security and counter-terrorism is a repressive logic that aims to exert social control on its Muslim citizen-subjects through the use of force and the derogation of rights under the state of exception. This is done in order to secure the state's legitimacy as a protective and care-taking state against the primary threat of terrorism. The War on Terror therefore renegotiates the terms of the social consensus underlying British state formation from a social rights basis of citizenship towards a national security and counter-terror platform. These logics are interlocking but also contradictory. While the neoliberal logic divests the state from its care-taking obligations, it returns such obligations in the form of national security and anti-terrorism. While it alienates citizens in terms of social rights, it aims to bind them in terms of identitarian rights. And while it represses Muslim identity in terms of national security policing, it also aims to incorporate them within multiculturalism.

These interlocking logics oppression can be seen to operate during the British state's conduct of the Forest Gate anti-terror operation. On June 29, 2006 I carried out a watching brief for the Newham Monitoring Project at a meeting of the Metropolitan Police Authority, the civilian oversight body that supervises the work of London's Metropolitan Police and which is

meant to hold it democratically accountable to the people it serves. During this meeting, Operation Volga was a major item on the agenda and a presentation was made by the head of operations, Andy Hayman, an Assistant Commissioner of the Met who had also just received an honorific award of Commander of the British Empire (CBE), despite the raging controversy over the errors of the raid.

A timeline of Operation Volga was presented to the audience in this meeting, which detailed not only the schedule of the planning and execution of the operation, but also a virtual ‘hearts and minds’ campaign to secure the acquiescence and acceptance of the operation and its aftermath in relation to local Muslim communities in Newham<sup>2</sup>. As the legitimacy and the veracity of the basis for the Forest Gate raid was unraveling and losing credibility, the Metropolitan police engaged in an intense campaign to multiculturalize its damage control strategies. One key tactic to produce consensus in spite of the anti-terror raid was to selectively engage Islamic and local community institutions in order to reassert the legitimacy of the policy of carrying out anti-terror raids and derogative human rights measures on Muslim communities.

The groups and institutions selected for engagement were organizations such as all the major mosques in Newham and national ethnic media outlets, which included the Muslim Safety Forum, Islam TV Channel, Bangla TV, and the Muslim Centre. The police stressed that the Muslim community’s ‘partnership’ in the War on Terror was a key responsibility of Muslim subjects. It strenuously campaigned against other dissident political actions, such as non-cooperation with the police that was publicly proposed by some politicians from the Respect Party coalition, which also had several elected local councilors in Newham. At the same time, the police set in motion surveillance of dissident activity through its Cultural and Communities

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<sup>2</sup> The history of the ‘hearts and minds’ campaign within counter-terrorism has deep roots in Britain’s decolonization experience and its relationships with colonized races and their struggles for self-determination.

Resource Unit that was tasked with running a ‘reassurance hotline,’ conducting ‘internet monitoring’ and ‘monitoring tensions’(Metropolitan Police Service 2006). Several demonstrations that had been staged were also subject to ‘Newham Demo monitoring.’ Meetings were held with some 120 community leaders and local members of Parliament and reassurance leaflets were distributed within the community during the course of the raid and its aftermath.

It was no small feat to maintain the hegemony of counter-terrorism in the face of failure and popular discontent at the injustices perpetrated in the name of the state against local families and communities. This campaign required a great deal of counter-factual work and enormous amounts of dedicated resources by the police. Several top-level Assistant Commissioners, Deputy Assistant Commissioners, Chief Superintendents and Commanders were assigned as responsible ‘sponsors’ and operational leaders of these various ‘hearts and minds’ operations, engagements and consultations concentrated on this tiny municipal ward. The police appeared to be almost on a propagandistic war footing in relationship to their own constituents who were asking for direct accountability from their own state institutions. The missing component of these technocratic communication strategies was the simple question of the police’s accountability to the specific victimized individuals, families and communities who had been subjected to the wrongful anti-terror raid and state violence.

For several months following the raids, NMP undertook a submission to the Metropolitan Police Authority that detailed the strategic and misplaced emphasis in the MET’s alienating propaganda strategy. This strategy was critiqued for attempting to fulfill a predetermined counter-terrorism agenda, rather than engaging in an open democratic exchange with the directly affected ordinary constituents of the police force’s public service.

The Metropolitan Police say they have spoken to ‘community leaders’ but no efforts were made to communicate with residents whose roads were suddenly closed. Whilst briefing what might be described as ‘opinion-formers’ is important, the basis for choosing who receives information remains very much in the hands of the MPS. The Met has also consistently refused to provide a senior officer to respond publicly to local people who are not considered ‘important’ enough to be hand-picked as community leaders... At the Asian Friendship Centre’s meeting on 8 June, residents expressed concern that the police had given no explanation of what was happening, and had responded to some residents’ initial questions by simply telling them to ‘watch television.’ Other officers stated in response to residents’ questions that they had undertaken diversity training, and so are aware that they are a ‘service’ to the public – although residents felt that they were far from being answerable to the public. Although more junior police officers had probably not been fully briefed about the situation, it was felt that more senior officers should have been able to inform residents of what is happening. (NMP 2006: 4)

In contrast to the alienating strategies of the police, however, NMP sought to build up a defense and solidarity campaign for the two brothers accused in the raid in order to secure their safety and immediate release from detention. They also began to mobilize mass participation in a proposed direct action protest that would comprise a diverse coming together of Newham residents to protest the raids and the treatment of local Muslim families. NMP’s strategy was to keep an insistent focus on the question of state accountability to the care-taking of racial minority citizen-subjects in the light of the many contradictions the British state was trying to legitimize in relation to Muslims.

One key task that was assigned to me was to work on documenting the impact of the raid on the community that was situated in Landsdown Road and the surrounding streets. These had all been shut down and placed under total police cordon. My research was then incorporated into the official submission by NMP to Metropolitan Police Authority mentioned above. Fortuitously, one of NMP’s activists, Kevin, happened to live in one of the affected streets and thereby had the right to leave and re-enter the cordon. We worked as a team to interview residents in the area, to document their responses and to see who would possibly step forward as independent witnesses. What we found was that the raid had had a devastatingly negative effect on community members

in a number of ways. One afternoon I followed up on a conversation that Kevin had already had with one of his neighbors and documented the experience in my field notes.

I then went to the neighbor in No. 40. Kevin had already talked to her. But she was very agitated and vocal. A dark woman who wore glasses, she reminded me of my aunts in Malaysia. She looked Tamil to me. Her name though was Mrs. Shahid.

She was really beside herself and talking to Kevin was not enough. Her five or six year-old daughter was dressed in a white kurta and sat on the front wall listening to us.

“The boy’s blood is still here, in front here!” she shouted. She pointed to a spot outside her wall on the edge with No. 42 where the concrete was still moist and stained. “They dragged him and threw him here. And the parents,” – she was nearly in tears – “the mother – how she was screaming – even now I can hear in my head. How she screamed: ‘My son, my son!’ If I close my eyes I can see her. I was shaking, crying after that and I told my children, I’m gone, I’m gone. I’m a mother, I have children.”

“They told me, ‘Mummy don’t, you’re still our mummy.’”

“They dragged all of them out – the man, the woman – with nothing, no shoes, took her and put in handcuff – she had no dupeta.” She clutched her own dupeta to show me. “I’m sorry, sorry. But there’s something inside me.”

We started talking about what happened in the following days. “We feel like criminals,” she said. “People come knocking on our door want information: ‘Are they religious people?’ Yes, I said. What is wrong with that? Religious people can be Christian, Hindu. Then the dustbin man come – they see us with police. Police talking to us – they think we criminal.”

By this time an uncle on the other side of the road had come to join us. He had Met Kevin at the Green St. community forum meeting yesterday. They started to talk, but often both the uncle and aunt would turn to talk to me.

“This is to keep white people happy, keep America happy, go behind America,” he said.

For the people who lived immediately in the vicinity of the Forest Gate raid, its meaning combined local and global meanings in everyday ways. The War on Terror was reproducing the racialized experience of marginality within Britain and the west for Muslim residents of



Landsdown Road. The global signifier of this was the Anglo-American alliance that was responsible for initiating, conducting and leading the War on Terror, mainly in countries that were Islamic. The local signifier, however, was more modest but in everyday terms no less salient. This was expressed in ways such as Mrs. Shahid's anxiety over the dustbin man, who one would assume is usually a person of low social status. In the British context, many working-class whites are employed in local municipal services, which are salaried and unionized jobs and whose membership is heavily protected by predominantly white trade unions. Hence, the dustbin man here is also a local signifier for the normative white gaze, the everyday whiteness that Muslims experience as reminders of their racial-religious difference and their inability to claim the equality and normalcy of productive belonging as a Muslim in Britain.

There is also another important level of meaning here, and that is at the structure of feelings. As Jacques Ranganamy (1993) argues, a "culture of feelings" alludes to an "organizing intelligence" that creates and recreates a "complex equation" between ourselves and others. Mrs. Shahid's own sense of annihilation in her capacity to function as a mother, as a response to the terrifying agony experienced by her neighbor, lies in contrast to the state's use of technocratic fetishes to suture over the moral and juridical exceptions.

What is demonstrably human about Mrs. Shahid's bodily and emotional ethical responses are the instantiation of the human, or to be specific, the ability to relate in an intersubjective fashion, whereby the discourses of demonization, alienation and totalitarian logics are disrupted. The lived material reality of the War on Terror far exceeds the reductionism of the technocratic 'bottom line' proposed by British political elites and carried out by the police. The dynamic of collective criminalization and punishment that was unleashed by the anti-terror raids was inflicting a collateral damage to Forest Gate Muslims. They experienced themselves collectively

as subjects vulnerable to both social exclusion and possible physical death in a so-called liberal democratic state where such vulnerabilities are not recognized to exist. The community mobilization and casework strategies of NMP during the raid were directed toward organizing these ordinary collectivized experiences of Muslims in the local area and toward mobilizing a broader local constituency of empathy and inter-subjective identification against the totalitarian state violence experienced by targeted Muslims.

Among the many people in the community who were impacted by the Forest Gate raid were also the immediate family members who lived in the house. An interview I had with Abdul Kahar's and Abul Koyair's sister, Humeya, revealed that the experience had also had a gender-polarizing and guilt-inducing effect on the women of the family. The strong association of Muslim men with beards as potential terrorists led Humeya to question her own visible appearance and how she was spared in the police attack. Like Amina in the previous chapter, Humeya felt that her lack of visible Muslim difference privileged her in the eyes of the police, and she revolted at such a valorization. She did not wear the *hijab* and her family was liberal on such matters. But her own reassessment of her identity as a Muslim woman became challenged as the raid targeted the people she loved.

When I heard my brother saying that he had been shot, and I heard noises which I know was when the police were slapping him about, telling him to shut the fuck up. That could have been us, but it wasn't us. They could have easily hit us, but why didn't they hit us, the women in the family? The only explanation that I have in my head was physically we didn't look different. Coz the men did, they had their beards. Us, the women in the house, didn't have no scarves or nothing, we didn't have our scarves. We didn't look physically different. I don't know how to explain it. To separate us and them. My brothers and my dad did. And my dad is a really old man. You've seen him. And for them to kick him in the chest, to hold him down and kicking him. In my head I can't see how they can do that. And in fact these people are trained to kill... I haven't sat down in the family and said to them, 'How come they treated you guys different from us?' sort of thing, but I know in my head what it was.

In this moment in the War on Terror we are able to see the logic of the violent state domination at work. The alienation and exclusion of suspect male Muslims from the ambit of the liberal state's juridical rule, and the expectation that the broader body politic accept the exclusion of certain of its differentiated members is part of the new emergent counter-terrorism logic. This order and acquiescence is demanded with no regard to the basic dignities of care for human life, or whether a person is innocent or guilty. Humeya was unable to participate in that logic, and instead chose to become an activist for her family, as it worked with NMP to secure proper legal representation, to free the brothers, to find proper shelter, and to seek accountability and recompense from the state over its anti-terror policies.

The community-building organizing work, mass participatory political strategies and everyday focus of black anti-racist groups like NMP need to be considered in relation to what has emerged as a trenchant critique of British political blackness and specifically black anti-racist groups' relationship to the differential racisms experienced by Muslim communities. A major theme in the critique against political blackness has been derived from interests in post-modern hybrid-identity descriptions or in carrying out social analysis that de-essentializes identitarian categories and avoids the reifications of categories such as race, class and gender (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992). These interests and investments are not the same as those required by social movement dynamics which in many ways may require a certain degree of essentialism or at least coalitional linkages between differential and intersectional identities in order to constitute themselves as a mass movement.

Such movements are necessary because the context of their constitution is not simply to provide thick descriptions of difference, but instead is aimed at obtaining an 'alteration in the power relationship between citizens and the state' (Joyce 2002). In addition, these movements

seek to change institutional responses that do not regard or respect the views and priorities of particular subordinated citizen-subjects. Anandi Ramamurthy draws this distinction between self-valorizing ethnic identities and social movement identities.

I will argue for the historical value of the black political identity and suggest that the criticisms levied against this identity do not consider the difference between the formations of resistance identities by disenfranchised people and the formation of legitimizing identities. By 'resistance identities' I am referring to those identities generated by people in positions that are devalued and/or stigmatized by the logic of domination and therefore seek to build trenches of resistance in opposition to the permeating institutions of society. By 'legitimizing identities,' I refer to identities which are often state sponsored or hold interests in state approval for the purposes of funding. Acknowledging these differences should enable us to understand the contexts within which the black political identity played a fundamentally progressive and important role. (Ramamurthy 2005: 2)

In part what Ramamurthy is suggesting is that it is important to distinguish and valorize the different functions and contexts of the politics of race. Political blackness and other forms of emergent racial minority identities can be easily dismissed as essentialisms and coercive ideology when the context of mass community mobilization, direct action, solidarity casework, campaigning and anti-racist consciousness-building in the British context is not invoked. These resistance functions and ethics of racial identities have different logics than the legitimizing racial identities created in other social contexts, for example, within a local government politics of arguing for ethnically targeted state funding or in seeking recognition as symbolic representatives of minority communities.

Tariq Modood is arguably the most influential academic representing the argument that the black-white formulation of anti-racism has not been sufficient to capture either the differential basis of the racism encountered by different communities within the formation of 'black' in the British context. Political blackness, he critiques, was not able to recognize the cultural racism faced by Asians and failed to legitimize the differential cultural agency of British

Asians (Modood 1994, 2005). This failure of legitimation is contrasted mainly with respect to African-Caribbeans, for whom the term black he assumes is most naturally fused in ethnic-racial, cultural and political senses.

This assumption also collapses and primordializes the dense historical and contested politics that have been involved in the creation of a common British-based identity among African-Caribbeans who were differentiated along island-nation identities upon their arrival into Britain. African-Caribbeans, like Asians, are also subject to the splitting effects of ethnic-targeting multicultural funding policies, which lead again to separate island-based community group formations, especially at the local municipal levels. There are literally hundreds of such organizations competing with each other for local government municipal funding in Newham (registered via the Newham Voluntary Sector Consortium) and they comprise the veritable field of a small-scale multicultural industrial complex<sup>3</sup>.

In recent years, Modood has abandoned his concern with an ‘Asian’ difference that questions political blackness and has instead focused on ‘Muslim’ difference. The more multi-religious construct of ‘Asian,’ as many critics have pointed out, is also open to the charge of being a coercive and essentialist identitarian imposition. And yet Modood’s embrace of a singular Muslim identity is accomplished mainly by an unproblematized ‘Asian Muslim’

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<sup>3</sup> The argument against the Afro-centric bias of Caribbean diaspora politics also ignores the more than 150-year presence of Indo-Caribbeans in the Anglophone Caribbean and their contributions to resistance against British-ruled Caribbean politics. This includes playing important leadership roles in the 1960s and 70s black consciousness movements in places like Trinidad and Guyana, as well as within Britain. In fact, the history of black consciousness movements in the Anglophone Caribbean, and especially in the politics of figures like Walter Rodney, Claudia Jones, C.L.R. James and Cheddi Jagan was based on left-wing challenges to the racist and CIA-backed neo-colonial regimes in the regions. Many of these figures played a role within Caribbean communities in Britain as well, and pioneering Caribbean activists such as John La Rose, Jessica and Eric Huntley and many others emerged out of the Indo-African formulations of black consciousness that emerged in the British Caribbean. Similarly shaped were the politics of Indo-Caribbean activists in Britain like Rudy Narayan of the Black Legal Society who played an important role in black movements in Brixton; Roy Sawh of the militant London black power group, the Racial Adjustment Action Society; Arif Ali of the pioneering Black British press movement and others. These complex Afro-Asian histories, however, are beyond the scope of this dissertation, but they need to be recovered and returned to collective memory as usable histories.

equation with British Muslim identity as a whole. Such a formulation of Muslim difference often distorts the multi-national and multi-community formation that is characteristic of Muslim communities in Britain, and theoretically is no less of a politicized social construction than a black identity. Only half of the 1.6 million Muslims in Britain are of South Asian origin, and hence a 'Muslim' identity also glosses over real differences of race, ethnicity and nationality, not to mention other intersectional differences that articulate with gender and sexuality. Even the assumed unity of the global Muslim *ummah* (believers), which is often invoked ideally by Muslims, is often times a more complex day-to-day affair.

As the Newham Youth Parliament pointed out in Chapter Five, the question of marriage partners within the Muslim community is subject to racialized preferences and regulation. On the local level in Newham, for example, there are difficult negotiations and tensions in relation to the languages used to deliver the Friday sermons, and the sharing of mosque spaces enters into difficult negotiations as newer Muslim communities are more beholden to established and better endowed Muslim communities for access to religious and worship spaces. African descended groups such as Somalis also figure prominently in Muslim politics, albeit in less visible or institutionalized ways, and in relation to the longer established Pakistani or Bangladeshi communities. But they nonetheless are affected and are enveloped as targets of racist social action structured around the new racialization and visible marking off on a street-level that has come to be termed as 'Islamophobia' or 'anti-Muslim racism.' Nevertheless, major Muslim umbrella groups such as the Muslim Council of Britain have been largely dominated by South Asian groups and they structure their service emphases mainly toward South Asian Muslim linguistic communities.

The politicization of Muslim identities and the way they have become constructed as a threat to the national security of the British body politic has also become a salient issue particularly since 1989, with the occurrence of the Salman Rushdie Affair and with the dissipation of the Cold War threat to the west in the form of global communism. But it is certainly not the case that before the Rushdie affair there were no Muslims in Britain or that Muslims were excluded from black politics. In fact, the phenomenon of ‘Paki-bashing’ that Paul Willis (1977) noted in his footnotes in his study of white working-class subjectivities is amply evident in the 1960s. While Willis never focused on ethnographically studying working-class Muslim or Asian ‘lads,’ they were nonetheless present in constructing self-defense activity against the violent conditions of everyday racial harassment and attacks.

What was new and emergent in the Rushdie affair was the process of constructing the hypervisibility of Muslims as an ethno-religious group that was counterposed to the sovereignty of the British state. Muslim communities seeking equal protection under Britain’s blasphemy laws were typecast and categorized as illiberal antagonists and new proof of black people’s settlement in postcolonial Britain gone awry. As the British state grappled with the discontent against multiculturalism, there was a shift away from an absolute construction of non-white cultures as unwanted pre-modern pathologies unsuitable to the national civic culture of citizenship. Instead, ethnic minority cultures could now be perceived tolerable, but only within certain limits. The idea of citizenship as tending towards cultural homogenization, where immigrant communities have to pass a test of allegiance, such as the famous Norman Tesbitt ‘cricket test,’<sup>4</sup> had given way to a liberal democratic project of creating multicultural governance

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<sup>4</sup> Norman Tesbitt was a Conservative party politician who in 1990 declared: "A large proportion of Britain's Asian population fail to pass the [cricket](#) test. Which side do they cheer for? It's an interesting test. Are you still harking back to where you came from or where you are? See (Howe 2006).

that allows for some measure of expression of cultural difference within the dominant public sphere.

However, only certain forms of the ethnic can find a visibility through commodification and consumption. A neo-liberal universalism of the British state presupposes a careful ‘management of cultural difference’ (Mercer 2000), as an enabling relationship with racialized others. Careful multicultural management celebrates hip-hop music, the Notting Hill Carnival, Asian food, Bollywood movies and multinational foreign investment. At the same time, the racism in the socially excluded inner-cities which produced the Stephen Lawrence, Ricky Reel, Zahid Mubarek, Anthony Walker<sup>5</sup> racist murders and youth urban rebellions in Oldham, Leeds and Bradford in 2001 remain disjunctively invisible. The space between the political invisibility of racism and the hypervisibility of ethnic identities and cultures for consumption purposes locate the two poles of racial minority struggles in Britain. The political invisibility of racism faced by racial minority communities allows the state to continue with its systemic refusal in implementing real anti-racist transformation: the state is still unable to initiate proper investigations and public inquiries into racist murders, it fails to prioritize racial harassment as a top issue in assessing police performance towards minority communities and it has never yet prosecuted and convicted a police officer for the death in custody of a black person.

This dynamic is also nowhere more evident than in the recurring campaign by the state’s own Commission for Racial Equality and its head, Trevor Phillips, who has played a pivotal role in constructing British Muslims as recalcitrant multicultural subjects. In conjunction with the large Muslim protest about Danish cartoons that satirized the Prophet Mohammad, Philips issued a statement on the issue of free speech and on the issue of the use of *sharia* laws in Britain by

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<sup>5</sup> Ricky Reel was a 20-year old Asian student who was found mysteriously dead after having been racially abused a few hours before his death. See (Rogers 1999).



stating that ‘Muslims who wish to live under a system of *sharia* law should leave Britain... I don't think that's conceivable,’ he said. ‘We have one set of laws ... and that's the end of the story. If you want to have laws decided in another way, you have to live somewhere else’ (Bowcott 2006). In characterizing the urban rebellions by Asian Muslim youths against the police and fascist groups in the summer of 2001, Philips responded by suggesting that the so-called riots were the result of the self-segregation of those particular communities in Britain were ‘sleepwalking its way to segregation’. In a coded manner, described Muslim urban areas as ‘fully fledged ghettos — black holes into which no one goes without fear and trepidation, and from which no one ever escapes undamaged’ (Gillian 2005). Therefore, when discussed in relation to British Muslims, debates about the scope and validity of communal personal law, extra-parliamentary politics, and the exercise of cultural norms and the state of socially excluded inner cities become subject to a contradictory representation as both an internal pathology and an external threat to the body politic. Muslim culture, therefore, has been placed in an abject position *viz-a-viz* the multicultural discourse of Britain, and it is not seen as amenable to consumptive or integrationist incorporation.

There are complexities in the construction of ‘Muslim’ identity and the potential limits that these identities face within a consumerist ethos and neoliberal-multicultural-national security apparatus. A Muslim claims-making politics that is confined within official multiculturalism and within a capitalist social formation can actually work against the interests of the Muslim communities who are in fact the most impoverished of all ethnic minority communities in Britain. The definition of Muslim identity as a struggle for an important but limited set of issues, such as the funding of state-based schools, can occlude the formation of a broad-based and liberatory Muslim political agenda. This is especially true when Muslim communities are in need

of developing more participatory, inclusive and democratically confrontational dissent strategies against state violence or political authoritarian tendencies that have long historical trajectories that currently focus on Muslims, but are not possessively exclusive to the current Muslim situation.

During the Forest Gate raid, most of the local and national Muslim groups that had been selected to become the privileged symbolic representatives of Muslim communities in relation to the British state were extremely slow in coming to the defense of the people victimized in the raids or daring to take up a more questioning stance concerning the terror suspect's human rights, due process, custodial care or quality of legal defense. Muslim groups interested in partnering with the state did not enter into the unpopular work of developing a public interest consensus surrounding the rights of *unrespectable* members of their community. Creating a political agenda that practically advocates for the rights of African-Caribbean and South Asian male and female 'criminals' and then expands even further to open the horizon of 'decarceration' would be a social change strategy that links the question of criminal justice incarcerations and the 'state of exception mechanisms being applied on Muslims in the War on Terror. Arguing for the rights of detained terror suspects (or suspects under 'control orders') within an atmosphere of fear mobilized by the War on Terror is an interconnected issue with the incarceration logics of the British state. Questioning this logic carries the risk of losing respectability and state-sanctioned credibility as community brokers. But this would be a political move necessary to open the more comprehensive liberatory strategy. As Angela Davis, has argued,

An abolitionist approach... would require us to imagine a constellation of alternative strategies and institutions, with the ultimate aim of removing the prison from the social and ideological landscapes of our society. In other words we would not be looking for prisonlike substitutes for prison, such as house arrest safeguarded by electronic surveillance bracelets. Rather positing decarceration as our overarching strategy, we would try to imagine a continuum of alternatives to imprisonment – demilitarization of schools, revitalization of education at all levels, a health care system that provides free physical and mental care to all, and a justice system based on reparation and reconciliation rather than retribution and vengeance. (Davis 2003: 107)

Certainly critical opposition and resistance is not the state's wish of symbolic representatives in the heat of anti-terror raids. And as such leading Muslim groups instead worked to shore up the distinction between good/bad, moderate/extremist Muslims and to stress their own relevance as multicultural partners of the state. Hence, even as the two brothers were eventually released without charges, the only response from such groups was not to call for accountability for or investigation into the rights violations of British Muslim subjects. Instead, they chose to characterize the raids in apolitical terms, such as a 'tragic incident' and asked only that 'appropriate lessons' be learned. Muslim groups further opined that 'This is not a matter of apportioning blame but trying to ensure the foundations are in place to maintain trust and build a partnership between the Muslim community and the police' (Shaikh 2006).

The theme of Muslim community partnership in the War on Terror was sounded again and again as the dominant refrain and came to constitute the singular identity that Muslim groups could offer to the state in exchange for recognition and belonging. The inability of Muslim symbolic representatives to democratically and militantly mount a challenge to the state concerning rights violations and its totalitarian disinterest in being democratically accountable to ordinary Muslim subjects highlights not merely the shortcomings of particular leaders or particular groups. It reveals the real limitations of the politics of symbolic representation as it

operates within the accommodationist and respectable terms of reference set up by official multiculturalism.

In claiming a greater authenticity for Muslim-equality seeking politics, Modood also makes a self-defeating move of dismissing allies within political black formations as people with false consciousness, namely, the black identity that ‘was embraced by Asian political activists in the 1980s especially those whose activism was concerned with mainstream British society rather than the organization of their own communities.’ Apart from denying Muslims significant allies and erasing the work of black Muslim activists and Muslim communities within black formations, it is unclear, however, how this claim is empirically valid in the light of the work of solidly community-based black anti-racist groups such as the NMP.

Groups like these have been rooted within their local communities for decades and have always been comprised of large Muslim constituencies. NMP, which is mainly based in East London, has also had an alternating form of leadership that has often been comprised of Muslim activists. Ethnographic investigations reveal that black anti-racist work in Newham has always focused on intervening against the forms of racist social action that do not construct cultural, racial or religious difference in ‘cool,’ exotic and embraceable forms. Instead, Black anti-racism has been devoted to developing a fight against the racist violence, state violence and persistent forms of institutional racism that accompany racial differentiation. As such, the question of anti-Muslim racism fits squarely within its remit of black anti-racist concerns.

However, the development of NMP’s response towards anti-Muslim racism was also the result not merely of natural primordial instincts, but of reflective political processes. In the beginning of the War on Terror there developed two arguments within NMP about how to address the rising tide of anti-Muslim racism. Activists reflected that in the early days of the War

on Terror there was a division between those who wanted to address the rise of anti-Muslim racism by supposedly ‘taking the focus off Muslim communities.’ By this they meant that they wanted to alleviate the disproportionate scrutiny and targeting of Muslim communities as suspect communities in the War on Terror. They wanted to question the logic of the construction of Muslims as the common-sense new antagonists and Other of Britain and Europe by refusing to accept the terms of the logic of the counter-terror discourse that had been established by the state. In the long run, this position was not tenable as more and more Muslim individuals and communities became caught up in anti-terror operations and the broader antipathies against Muslims grew more virulent. A proliferation of Muslim identities therefore coalesced around experiences of these new violent forms of interpellation. A second strand of thinking within NMP, largely argued by Muslim NMP activists, sought to become more explicitly engaged with religious-based identities and community formations. They wanted to resist the drive towards removing liberal safeguards against anti-terror laws such as the presumption of innocence and the authorization of ethnoreligious and racial profiling within counter-terror practices.

Eventually, it was the needs of the Newham community and what it was facing that moved the debate towards the second school of thought. As more and more people in Newham became the target of anti-terror operations, control orders, and racial harassment based on their visible identities as Muslims, the organization moved decisively towards developing new forms of intervention. These included carrying out rights-awareness workshops in local mosques and educating the public about the impending consequences of the proposed anti-terror laws in order to build democratic mass participation to defeat its passage.



*Zareena Mustafa, NMP activist at the Forest Gate protest demonstration*

*Source: Mohan Ambikaipaker*

NMP activists, who continue to be committed to the project of ‘reconstructing multiracial blackness’ (Sudbury 2001), are in fact grappling with the emergence of the prominence of anti-Muslim racism and its effects on their own community-building efforts. Rather than shedding the complexity of black community-building or ignoring new manifestations of racism as suggested by Modood, these black activists are dynamically embracing the new challenges posed by anti-Muslim racism through political imaginaries that also engage in extra-institutional struggles for social change.

The lived experiences of racism, in spite of the differential character, provoke inclusivity rather than possessive exclusivity and nationalist disinterest within the logic of political blackness. Making room for the proliferation of these experiences becomes common sense

within a logic of black anti-racism that formulates its politics as a response against the experience of racism, rather than through absolute racial or ethno-religious or nationalist definitions and boundary-setting. African-descended NMP activist, Zainab Kelmsley, perceives meeting the challenges of anti-Muslim racism and black consciousness in the following way:

Kids of today, at the ages of 15, their perception of racism is different to mine at the age of 15. So what has that 10 years done? Why is there such apathy towards racism, especially in London? I mean, I get quite confused why black kids today don't understand the 'divide and conquer' rule—that if you don't work together, you know, that that is what the state does. And it's working very effectively. You look around the borough and you got Somalis and Pakistanis getting on; Pakistanis and Eastern European communities getting on; Blacks don't like Asians, Asians don't like blacks. It's absolutely ridiculous, and I don't really remember being as intense when I was 15. It really was very much black versus white. It doesn't mean that everybody mixed, that black and Asians mixed, but there was generally a sense of them and us. And that seems an awful lot diluted. There's this 'black on black' crime, as the police call it... I didn't think about black as a political umbrella until I started reading about politics and stuff, but in my own thinking, growing up, it was obvious that anybody non-white my age, born and brought up in the U.K. was going to have a similar experience. I wouldn't get caught up in what kids today do, a mixed group of kids picking on someone wearing a *hijab* or something. I wouldn't have been caught up in that. Because it was easy to see that it was the same experience that I was having. They were picking on her *hijab*, as opposed to my curly hair. It's the same thing. It was easy to translate. And I think that kids are not seeing that it's easy to translate and that's down to ignorance, as well as more complicated society. . . It's really disheartening to see that black communities being racist to other black communities. It's just heartbreaking, absolutely heartbreaking. So that would be an issue that I would like to have looked into. . . How on earth do we bring our communities back? (Kelmsley 2003)

The totalizing argument Modood makes that seeks to define Muslim identity and identifications as something exclusive and outside of political blackness is not evident in the consciousness and work of black activist individuals or the groups they are part of. The over-valorization of religious-based symbolic representation over and above all other political affiliations such as anti-racist activism, secular groups, socialist politics, gender-based or sexuality-based politics for Muslims conceptualizes them and their allies in far too narrow and reified a political framework.

Zainab's connecting of gendered racism targeted at Muslim women wearing the *hijab* and her own experiences of being treated differently due to phenotypical difference exemplifies grassroots analysis that does not categorize 'color racism,' 'cultural racism' and religious discrimination in mutually exclusive or academically reified terms. Instead, black activists act to mobilize correspondences and equivalences that can serve to stave off intra-minority conflict, mobilize inter-subjective community-building and build anti-racist social action.

NMP's own Muslim activists are also developing modes of political identification that incorporate what they term as 'multiple identity politics.' The term is used frequently by NMP's current chair, Asad Rehman, who is also involved in a number of Muslim groups, including the Muslim Human Rights Forum. In a conversation following the Forest Gate raid, Asad pointed out a historically complicated relationship that Muslim communities have concerning the elitist tendencies and accommodationist politics of institutional religious leaders. In narrating his own formation as an activist, he recalled the complex relationship that second-generation British Muslims like himself had with religious institutional leadership of their communities.

In terms of the elders, they were looking to their organizations and their own institutions, which were inevitably religious institutions. They were the first institutions that people wanted to build. They were always the meeting place and social place, organizing place for the community. But for the younger generations, the younger people, we also looked to ourselves, you know. 'Black People, here to stay, here to fight.' It bound us all together. We didn't see ourselves as being separate from the mosques. In fact the mosques were places where we got to see other people in our community, and finding other young people who were interested as well.'

And also having first experiences of the negative aspects of religious institutions – I remember of the local imam and members of the local mosque came with the local councilor who was Muslim to tell my dad to stop hanging out with communists, to stop him. We were launching a political attack on the local Muslim leadership, in terms of an attack on the one councilor because they were more interested in having tea with the police than dealing with the fact that we were being attacked. We had to fight our way to school, fight in school, and fight our way back from school and the police were doing nothing... That sort of politics began us.



Becoming an anti-racist activist for Asad meant an analysis of both the value of ethnic minority community institutions and their limitations had to simultaneously forge. The potential elitism of institutionalized religious leaders and their differential self-interest in contrast to ordinary Muslims is an important complexity. The different power relationships between clergy and base congregations are granted within political studies of Christian churches. For example, even in England, no one would claim that the clergy of the Church of England actually spoke for and represented the social views of the base congregations, but instead that these are power-laden relationships that are subject to everyday contestations. Religious institutions and organizations are not without their own hierarchies of gender, nationality, ethnicity and class and do not necessarily represent all sections of British Muslims in equal ways.

#### **BLACK TO THE FUTURE: ANTI-RACISM AND PRACTICAL SYNCRETISM**

The epistemological standpoint of activist research where attempts to ‘objectively explain racism’ are ‘necessarily continuous with political struggle’ helps me to understand the specific logic of the directly practical anti-racist politics that is engaged by NMP in contrast to other political formations (Mohanty 1997). The construction of Muslim particularity from a black anti-racist standpoint following the Forest Gate raid in Newham emerged through a contested and collaborative political and cultural process centered on the question of community mobilization. The raid drew the attention of a number of Islamist groups to organize a 50- to 100-person demonstration in front of the Forest Gate police station on June 16th, of which NMP was not a part. The focus of these groups was framed in a political narrative as a millenarian struggle

between the west and Islam, and participants held placards that said ‘Blair Crusader, Blair Terrorist, Police Go to Hell, War against Terror is War against Islam’ in order to make this point. They also mixed in secular symbolic messages concerning police brutality, second-class citizenship, apartheid and the shoot-to-kill policy.

The organizing logics of these groups did not aim to engage directly with the larger local community of concern in Newham, or the direct victims of the raids and their most immediate practical needs of working-class people. In the process of adapting to the new forms of racism emergent in Britain during the War on Terror, NMP relied on what I would identify as three key strategies that were developed within its work with victims of wrongful anti-terror operations.

### *1. The Practical is Political*

The axiomatic strategy that black police monitoring groups pursue in London is a combination of what they term as the combination of ‘practical’ and ‘political’ work. This strategy incorporates work done to ameliorate the direct effects of the state’s racism on individual victims and their families. NMP sought firstly to undertake practical work in response to everyday struggles that victims and affected families are forced into as a result of an anti-terror raid. In Forest Gate the results of the raid had left the families homeless and NMP activists undertook work to lobby a reluctant local Homeless Persons Unit to recognize the families of the terror suspects as statutorily homeless people to whom the state had a positive duty to temporary rehousing.

Doctor’s slips had to be procured in order to justify the absence of members of the families from work and to avoid the risk of retrenchment from their working-class jobs. The family’s cat,

which had gone missing from the home during the assault by the anti-terror police officers, had to be found after an exhaustive search on the streets by many radical NMP activists. It was finally located in the home of a neighbor who was looking after it, but who was worried about the cat's diet.

This strategy of combining practical-political work is an important methodology of struggle for black anti-racist groups and signals an ethics that first privileges the necessary re-humanizing process of the direct victims of racism themselves. But rather than remaining at a service level, this re-humanizing action is also fed into a political circuit where it has sought to challenge the technocratic fetishes and totalitarian unaccountability of the War on Terror state.

## *2. The Political is Practical*

At the same time, there was work on the political front. Two legal aid solicitors who had been appointed for the families concerned had to be removed. NMP knew that the quality of legal representation was critical if the brothers were to have any chance of resisting the state's prosecutorial powers. These types of considerations are not taken into account when Legal Aid solicitors and barristers are assigned to terror suspects, and while some firms and lawyers become invested in these cases as ways to raise the profile of their companies, there are also other lawyers who realize that the legal acumen and experience necessary for providing a highest standard of defense in highly complex anti-terror cases may be beyond them. In the initial days following the raid, NMP watched aghast as inexperienced legal aid lawyers made blunders that worsened the situation for the detained brothers and their prospects for release. NMP activists

worked with the families to substitute their legal representatives in order ensure that guilt was not assigned due to faulty legal representation.

After working to secure proper expert legal representation for the brothers, NMP then began to utilize the case in order to mount a protest campaign over the wider issues of the abuses and unaccountability of the raid towards the local community. Using the principle of working with victims of racism, rather than working for them, NMP mobilized a broad coalition of local forces to organize a protest rally in the Newham on June 18th that brought out between 3000 and 5000 supporters. The range of groups comprised, among others, the Muslim Public Affairs Committee, the Respect party, the local Labor party, the Stop the War coalition, United Friend and Family Campaign, Unison and a local chapter of Hizb-ut Tahrir.

### *3. Constructing a 'bottoms-up' politics of recognition*

Muslim identity in black political discourse is constructed through a reversal of the politics of unbelonging and alienation propelled by the War on Terror. In this political imagination Muslim communities are brought back from the counter-democratic sphere into the democratic sphere of struggle. The specificity of that struggle is located along a continuum of struggles by historically racialized others in Britain as well as earlier forms of racist violence that shaped the history of both Muslim and the broader non-white Commonwealth settlement in Newham. The community oriented march and rally on June 18th was structured along the lines of historic marches that had occurred along similar routes in Newham when African-Caribbean and South Asian communities coalesced around joint campaigns against racial attacks and murders. The uniting of the 'Justice for the Pryces' and the 'Justice for the Newham 7'

campaigns or the coalitional mobilizations that occurred during the ‘Justice for Gill Smith’ campaign, are part of the historical repertoire of black anti-racism in Newham.



*NMP patron Benjamin Zephaniah, poet and musician, at the Forest Gate march  
with coalitional members from the Muslim Public Affairs Committee*

*Source: Mohan Ambikaipaker*

Similarly in this instance the forms in which a mobilizational black identity was created and drew cross-cultural identifications from various racial and ethnic minority communities in Newham was utilized to mobilize joint community protest. Arising from this mobilizational standpoint, a 7-point list of political demands was articulated by the march organizers:

This protest is a united demonstration of feeling, from the residents of Newham and those beyond who support them We believe:

**1. A full and unqualified apology from the Metropolitan Police to be personally issued to those who were victims of these events.**

The treatment of the families and neighbors of --Landsdown Road by the Metropolitan police on the day of the arrest was barbaric and unacceptable. The leaking of lies and misinformation after the arrest was devious and similarly unacceptable.

**2. A call for an end to police privately ‘briefing’ newspapers.**

The sensationalized way the arrests were reported and the exaggerated media speculation, uncritical of the leaks and briefings, heightened a sense of fear and has further advanced a demonization of the Muslim community as a suspect community.

**3. Stop the politicization of the police force.**

The police should not allow itself to be pushed into such raids on questionable intelligence, and used as a political pawn in the governments wider policy agenda. Their job is the safety of the public and not propaganda. The reports of the directive for this raid coming from the Cabinet Office will trouble many.

**4. We are not prepared to live in fear or be silenced.**

Despite this sense of fear in general and this demonstration the Muslim community and others should continue to speak out against injustices, stereotyping and ill treatment, and should never be cowed into silence.

**5. End to association of Islam with Terrorism.**

There needs to be an end to associating religion with terror or any other breach of law. Terms such as ‘Islamic terrorism’ are inaccurate and divisive. The questioning of those arrested – by the police and some of the media – about their association or beliefs – be they political or religious – is deeply disturbing as it encourages a mentality of ‘guilt by association’ or ‘guilt because of conscience’.

**6. A full apology from the Prime Minister to the families and community.**

Statements by the Prime Minister such as saying the government is ‘101%’ behind the police action even when they have not bothered examining the facts of the arrest are unhelpful, and indeed only further add to the reckless manner of law enforcement.

**7. The War on Terror needs to be urgently reviewed.**

These aggressive raids, together with the large number of innocent Muslims arrested as terrorist suspects in the last few years are inevitable and damaging costs of the so-called War on Terror. The policy needs reviewing as it is dividing communities and heightening alienation. Despite this we will not allow our communities to be divided by such events and will work to further sincere understanding between Muslims and Non-Muslims.

NMP and the coalition of groups that produced these specific political demands and the public march and demonstration through Newham created a strategy for creating local solidarity against the Forest Gate raid. Another key strategy of interconnection was to unite the justice campaigns of the Forest Gate victims with the ongoing justice campaign for Jean Charles de Menezes, the mistakenly slain Brazilian man, who was killed under the anti-terror police's shoot-to-kill policy during the 7/7 bombings.

A very important symbolic moment in the protest march occurred when the younger Abul Koyair, the brother who was not shot, met en route with the de Menezes family who were participating in the march and exchanged his clothes for a Brazilian World Cup jersey. This symbolic move catapulted images of Abul Koyair into the national and international media and it comprised the front pages of both local and national papers. It was also an important political act. In putting on the Brazilian jersey, Abul Koyair was articulating the oppression suffered by his family and community with another community of suffering who were non-Muslim, non-Asian and non-British. It shattered common sense constructions of Muslims as separatist and problem communities who refuse to integrate, and who are culturally incommensurable with democratic values.



*Abul Koyair meets with the family of Jean Charles de Menezes en route on the march*

*Source: Mohan Ambikaipaker*

It also sent a signal to the Muslim community that there was a wider political context for their suffering, and that they were not isolated and devoid of allies. What was notable about the coverage of the event was that expectations of angry and irrational Muslim mobs running amuck, which had been gathering momentum as rumors and press sensationalism led up to the protest, became redirected towards the solidaristic nature of the rally that encompassed primarily Muslims but also Sikhs, Hindus, Africans and African-Caribbean communities.





*Communities and families in the Forest Gate march*

*Source: Mohan Ambikaipaker*

Locating Muslim particularity in this fashion stands in contrast with the political ideology of Islamist right groups like Ahlay Sunnat, Alqurba and Al-Mahajuroon who had organized the earlier protest at the Forest Gate police station. Their attempted appropriation of the victims' struggle was routed through absolutist narratives of the Christian-Muslim crusades and Muslims as timeless and ahistorical victims of the West. In contrast, a significantly larger and more diverse number of people took to the streets for the June 18th demonstration to protest the Forest Gate Raid in solidarity with the Muslim families affected by the British state's violence.

In conclusion, I want to take up Ruth Gilmore's argument that a 'practical syncretism' is a critical method of struggle and a site for producing resistance identities for communities subjected to violent racialized domination. Gilmore argues that a 'bottom-up politics of

recognition in the face of threatened annihilation' can enhance a 'syncretic rescaling of identity' (Gilmore 2008). Such a process is one of the central contributions that black anti-racist groups like NMP are making against the dominion of the War on Terror in Britain. Rather than remaining passive in light of the targeting of Muslims by the War on Terror state, NMP has adapted its anti-state violence strategies to elaborate black anti-racist strategies that include contemporary Muslim identities and address anti-Muslim racism. Therefore, the political meaning of black in Britain today is not necessarily fractured by the emergence of Muslim particularity. Rather, it comes to occupy a place of belonging alongside other identities that have been routed through the dynamics of on-the-ground anti-racist resistance.

This re-humanizing strategy of anti-racism requires a journey into the concrete ethnographic, where the specificities of the ordinarily human must be returned to those who are violently dominated: by taking back the streets of one's neighborhood from racists and the police, by expressing solidarity with the humanity of people racially and sexually abused, by asserting the right to feel safe at home, by dispensing love to child, sibling and parent, by administering medicine to the elderly, by maintaining the dignity of cultural and religious identity, by demonstrating for the recognition of the equal valuation of life and rights at the very moment when the guns and boots of the state are coming for you.

## **New Beginnings for Britons of Color and Anti-racism:**

### **Blackness without guarantees**

I read once passingly, about a man named Shakespeare, I only read about him passingly, but I remember one thing he wrote, that kind of moved me. He put it in the mouth of Hamlet I think it was. He said ‘to be or not to be’ – he was in doubt about something – ‘whether it was nobler in the minds of man to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune (in moderation), or to take arms, against a sea of troubles, and by opposing end them. And I vote for that, if you take up arms, you’ll end it, if you sit around waiting for the one in power to make up his mind that he should end it, you’ll be waiting a long time. And in my opinion, the young generation of whites, blacks, browns and whatever else there is, you’re living at a time of extremism, a time of revolution, a time where there has got to be a change. People in power have misused it and now there has to be a change and a better world has to be built and the only way it is going to be built is with extreme methods and I for one will join in with anyone, I don’t care what color you are, as long as you want to change this miserable condition that exists on this earth (BBC TV 1964).

- Malcolm X, Concluding remarks at the Oxford Union, 3 December 1964

The approach of this fieldwork-based study has been to position myself as a creative participant in the construction of everyday anti-racist resistance for Britons of color and allied anti-racists in Newham, East London. My ethnographic presentation details the encounters and exchanges that take place within the construction of spaces of struggle that are conceptualized theoretically and practically as black in Britain. This space for me, and for many others, has produced profound experiences in practicing a politics of concrete solidarity that goes beyond the modes of violent alienation and the impositions of inegalitarian social relationships that are the staple experience within ostensibly color-blind Western liberal democracies.

Prior studies have already critiqued the dominant state framework of viewing racist violence as random, de-racialized and nonpolitical events – as individual incidents, neighborhood disputes, inter-personal conflict and robberies gone wrong. These studies have alternately identified the social dehumanizing functions of racist violence, the local white

territorialism that it serves and its relationship with macro-level socio-economic crises and historically emergent racial exclusion ideologies of the nation. What I add to these studies is the argument that the racial subordination inherent in the everyday social processes of racist violence and, by intersectional extension, state violence, are not only derivative of broader ideological forces but are constitutive of recursive racial domination at a macro-systemic level. I argue that the processes of racist violence and state violence are productive of the domination and hierarchy that is secured for whites, through unevenly empowered and routinized contestations within the re-configurations of white racial state formation and an emergent national security welfare state. And it is within this framework of analysis that the politics of black mobilization against multiple forms of racial subordination experienced by Britons of color is made legible not as an anachronism, but as socially meaningful and politically urgent.

The continuum of the everyday to the formal institutional production of heterogeneous and racist social relations of domination are renewed through articulations achieved between the acts of individual perpetrators, discriminatory state institutions, state violence and the enabling conditions of superordinate white interest convergences and color-blind liberal political discourse in the dominant public sphere. These conditions are a key feature of the present dispensations of race that require struggle and change. Hence, this dissertation does not represent racist social actions as the result of individual perpetrators or moral panics such as ‘yobbish’ or anti-social behaviors. Daily anti-racism has to engage and frame interventions within these available official frameworks and utilize given processes for remedial actions in order to secure immediate benefits for victims of racism. But they do not in any way represent an adequate theorizing of the function of racism in contemporary Britain for anti-racists. In the absence of grounded practical struggle, conceptualizations like the ‘social cohesion’ framework (Cantle

2008) or the ‘dialectics of cultural conviviality’ (Gilroy 2005) framework unfortunately obfuscate the life and death dilemmas of racialized and gendered British social relations.

Instead of focusing on these frameworks in this dissertation, I have instead presented racist social action in its proper everyday salience as political action that articulates with state logics for the purposes of reproducing a hegemonic white-centered state formation. This struggle for state formation privileges multi-class white social relations and is located in the institutional conflicts between white elites and the lower social classes. It is further mobilized and expressed along modalities of chauvinistic national-cultural and racial solidarities. While this formative struggle of political racism is defined as a tacit whites-only game, it nonetheless has as its structural base the material bodies and the material social lives of racially excluded people, who are everyday inserted into relations of domination by racist whites and are subordinated by a white-centered social order.

My position as activist researcher was to seek both to re-member the history of the multiple cycles of struggles against racial domination in Britain and to engage in contemporary efforts at cooperative practical struggle against the concrete lived experiences of racism. Anti-racism in this study is conceived as an ontologizing social struggle, a struggle about reconstituting social relationships into egalitarian and cooperative forms. As C.R. Hensman (1992: 163), the late Sri-Lankan Tamil transnational activist and one-time member of the Institute of Race Relations in Britain, put it, ‘Humans must be related to be known. If there is human-related care...or if there is human-like thought and creativity, it has to be learnt only in a relationship, through mutually self-revelatory action’.

Oftentimes, however, in studies of political resistance the emphasis on contradictions and the failure of social movements to successfully overcome oppression can work to discourage the

effort to make social change. Gramscian theories of the cultural incorporation of political subjects into broader hegemonic order is usually posited as a way to explain the intractable and overwhelming character of social order and its dense operations of division and oppression. And acquiescing to this perspective is itself a political maneuver that fails to see the role played by intellectuals and researchers themselves in foreclosing the openings that are created through the agentive and contradictory practices of resistance. As Stephen Yeo pointed out:

Social relations are what they say: social *relations*, not one-way traffics form basics to secondaries, and *social* relations, productive, specific and thus determined, but not puppets unable to pull their own strings. We have to look to particular humans and classes of humans, to their/our choices, past and present, to their/our ways of producing usable things (including ideas), to their/our acquired positions and powers in relation to other humans across very wide and increasingly inclusive areas of social activity...[The] degree of 'success' or 'failure' imputed depends on how one looks at it contextually as opposed to moralistically. It all depends on politics. It depends on whether you wish to take a creative part in the construction of associated enterprise for labor, or to be a party to its emasculation. There is a continual and in the end political choice to be made, from within such enterprises today, whether to emphasize what is being achieved (however small) and could be achieved (however visionary) or to stress what has not been, is not being or cannot be achieved. (Yeo 1981: 116, 129)

Black anti-racism, as this dissertation has described it, is one of the associational forms of remaking social relations that is historical and ongoing in Britain today. It is a form of social struggle that needs to resist closure, even as it adapts and re-invents itself by seeking to go beyond new determining conditions. An activist fieldworker position disagrees entirely with stand aside or stand above objectivist and positivistic traditions of social science, and a corollary argument advanced, for example, by John Solomos and Les Back (2001: 386) that research into race and racism be conducted via an academic politics of avoiding the 'trap of a speaking position which ultimately can be reduced to a form of advocacy'. Instead, I argue for a remembering of the transnational traditions of resistance and struggle that brought a person like Malcolm X to Britain where he was met by African-Caribbean, South Asian and allied whites

who sought to construct struggles with methods, instruments and imaginaries available in the 1960s cycle of social struggles.

Malcolm X's transnational anti-racist circulations worked to disrupt the discourse of the moral superiority of Western political order and revealed the circuits of Western liberalism's possessive investments in racism. But he also demonstrated the capacity to conceive of the horizon for social change by projecting solidarity in the face of the outrageous suffering caused by racism. As John Holloway (2002: 1-9) has argued,

The starting point of theoretical reflection is opposition, negativity, struggle. It is from rage that thought is born...we should not abandon our negativity but, on the contrary, try to theorize the world from the perspective of the scream...In order to protect our jobs, our visas, our profits, our chances of receiving good grades, our sanity, we pretend not to see, we sanitize our own perception, filtering out the pain, pretending that it is not here but out there, far away, in Africa, in Russia, a hundred years ago, in an otherness that, by being alien, cleanses our own experience of all negativity. It is on such a sanitized perception that the idea of an objective, value-free social science is built.

To ground social research through engaging activist partisanship is to interrupt the cognitive apparatus that maintains the invisibility of racial oppression. In the case of contemporary Britain it is the invisibility of white racial state formation, buffered by what Charles Mills (1997) has argued is the meta-level power agreement among whites. Social research into race and racism needs to construct strategies to break through these normalizing procedures.

Anti-racism in this context therefore requires both a non-objectivist and a non-subjectivist conception of struggle. The unfolding process of becoming both the object of the process of racialization and racism and the subject of racism's negation are not separable. The dynamic, however, can be analyzed by making an analysis of how one is positioned by racial structural violence and to search for modes of social action that link those who are other to our own differentially racialized, gendered and religiously inflected experiences of racism. These

linkages and active searches for political articulation are an important process for the overcoming of social movement contradictions.

By participating within NMP's anti-racist formation and working with people very different from myself, I developed a many-sided consciousness of the black experience in Britain. Britons of color are individually unique, and their collective racial experiences are structured differently, but these differentiations also emerge from the common logics of racial domination. The necessity of participating in making social change in immediate and practical terms with people similar to and different from me produced a daily awareness of racism as a totalizing social relationship that was greater than the sum of its parts.

Such a holistic anti-racist standpoint, however, cannot seek to escape into slogans or grand theories and stage an escape from the concrete problematics of effective day-to-day struggle. For anti-racists in Britain there are serious practical questions to be answered. How do we stop the ongoing scourge of racial murders? How do we stop the re-configuring patterns of racial harassment and attacks? How do we stop the sexual assaults of the police against black women? How do we interrupt the intersectional oppressions of racial domination and gender domination as they emerge interlocked within racial minority communities? How do we stop the harassment of women wearing the *hijab* on the streets? How do we disrupt the state's exceptional juridical regimes of surveillance, torture and violence that are proliferating within the 'War-on-Terror'? How do we stop the dismemberment of diasporic refugee and asylum-seeking families? We are compelled to create practical answers to these many-sided questions of anti-racism rather than to leave them as melancholic inter-generational grief or to side-line these issues for abstractly universal political objectives.



The ethnographic account presented in this study is comprised of a limited set of stories about the pain and screams that emanate from the racism that occurs when the anti-terror police, trigger-happy and ready to dole out death-dealing violence, smash their way into an innocent Muslim family's home as they sleep; when one black woman's son is rendered mute by hearing his mother insulted as a 'Paki-whore', 'wog's meat', 'black cunt'; when another black woman looks out of her kitchen window and wonders if yet another police officer is going to be coming to assault and sexually molest her; and when a Muslim woman sets out in the morning dressed in a *hijab* and worries about being greeted by harassment, insults, assaults and confinements. These screams are interlinked, and furthermore they are mutually enabling conditions that maintain the naturalized regularity of a common racist order.

The stories presented in this study are by no means exhaustive or, in some objectivist social science manner, do they posit a representative sampling size necessary for overcoming our doubts that something is very wrong and rotten in the state of Britain. They are also not meant to claim exemplary status. Rather, they gesture to the ordinary chain of suffering and pain that is masked and rendered invisible by powerful and dominant frameworks of social life that habitually violate the rights and humanity of Britons of color. The interlocking ensemble of stories that speak of differential racisms emerges through my strategic vantage point as a black anti-racist activist in Britain who tried to construct care and joined in the resistance waged by Britons of color against everyday experiences of racial domination. Arguably, the only way to experience and to intimately grasp the totality of social oppression, to the extent that is possible within the limits of a single person, is to partake in multi-sided alliances and struggles.

Stories, as opposed to ossified political positions and reified certainties, make only the requirement that we listen and thus begin the rediscovery of our inter-subjective contingency.

The ‘imagination to listen,’ as Mariana Mora (2003) has argued for another context of struggle, is an important component of progressive political practice and it can alter our received notions of what it means to struggle, where we think the struggle is located, and where we assume there are no points of struggle. Listening, as an activist practice, further opens up a path to realizing a phenomenological form of interconnected humanity. Accordingly, the impact of listening strengthens our capacity for multi-sided negations of domination and oppression. That is, rather than seeking a hallowed ground above the subjective horrors of suffering, we must be moved so as to ground our theorizing from the perspective of the multiple screams we become attuned to in our listening. This is what, perhaps, an ethnographic presentation on the lived experiences of racism can provide as a starting point.

As an activist anthropologist in East London, I learned that developing the capacity for listening to people’s screams and becoming accountable to their sufferings and hopes begins to shape my own subjective parameters. Anti-racism, in this sense, cannot remain a professionalized endeavor. For example, when I was confronted with a Pakistani immigrant family that had been racially harassed out of their homes and who arrived with all of their belongings and a child packed into a battered Nissan Micra and told me, ‘*Bhai* (brother), you are our last hope,’ I had to decide what to do and what theory, practice and identity exclusions or inclusions to mobilize. When an African-Caribbean man whose legs were broken by the police hobbled to me to ask how to make police officers accountable, especially the ones who arrived on his doorstep and crippled him on account of playing Reggae music too loudly, I needed to develop an answer for him. When an eleven-year old African-Caribbean girl who was assaulted by a group of policemen raiding her home complained bitterly that she did not want to give me witness testimony but preferred to go out and play with her cousin, I had to figure out what to

say. When another African-Caribbean girl, who was abducted by a gang and whose story the police refused to investigate, told me that the world would not believe her because ‘I am black and poor’, I needed to offer her a response. And when a Bangladeshi Muslim father who intervened in an instance of racist school bullying was then targeted for violent reprisals, and had been repeatedly turned down by the local council for re-housing, I needed to address his fear. I accompanied this same man to the Homeless Person’s Unit, where officers refused to believe his story, he suffered a heart attack and collapsed in my arms, and nobody in the office was bothered to help. When the ambulance finally arrived and a white EMS officer shoved half an aspirin into this father’s mouth and declared that he was probably staging the heart attack to help his re-housing case, I had to stifle my own outraged scream for fear that the officer would allow this man to die as punishment for my insolence.

These are only some of the yet untold stories of my time as a participant in black anti-racist spaces. The question of what to do was never an abstraction or an anachronism that could be reflected upon in tranquility or through received foreclosures of identity. Instead, the task of making connections between the different screams and thereby developing an adequate and expansive consciousness became the ground of constructing my own autonomy in a daily world full of others.

What theorization, therefore, will enable Britons of color and anti-racists to build their own capacity and power for both their short and long-term struggles against violent and interlocking forms of racial domination? To privilege, in the end, the political question of anti-racism, rather than theory-building, is to become grounded again in the ontologizing practices of solidarity. Solidarity entails supporting the self-activity, self-organization and self-development of those who experience racism to self-manage their own paths to liberation. NMP once argued

for this perspective in a submission to revise the Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) curriculum in British schools as part of its work to further anti-racist education. PSHE is a course taught as part of the National Curriculum in Britain. The idea is to provide pupils with grounding in ‘real life issues which affect children and young people, their families and their communities, and engages with the social and economic realities of their lives, experiences and attitudes’ (PSHE 2011). NMP’s (2000: 32) submission proposed that ‘Involvement in local anti-racist community campaigns, black community organizations, or the experience of initiating their own campaigns is not only positive in showing that action can be taken against racism, but can provide an excellent way of learning skills, building confidence and learning how the local democratic system operates’. The proliferation of spaces of struggles which facilitate autonomy and solidarity for Britons of color in the struggle against racism is key lesson from the history of black-antiracism.

Black anti-racist politics in Britain will continue to grapple with the task of creating political ‘protagonists’ ( Harnecker 2007; Lebowitz 2003) out of people and communities who suffer from racism. Racial conditions such as they exist in Britain will require it. There are no absolute phenotypical requirements, passports and work identities possessively necessary for this type of work and the politics of a grounded anti-racism. There is similarly no need for an absolutist denouncement of identity politics and dismissals of anti-racism as false consciousness and subordinate social processes.

This is not to say that contradictions even within the ambit of black anti-racism are not present or do not inflect resistance practices. Examining tendencies within black anti-racism such as the over-reliance on ‘superpersons’ - high-profile, usually male, charismatic community leaders; the unconscious retreat into day-to-day clientelism with victims of racism rather than

thinking and working on energizing their own political protagonism; the continued subordination of women's intersectional experiences of racism as political priorities; the problems of white ally inclusion in black anti-racist spaces and the politics of the re-dissemination of dominant and subordinate forms of inter-minority racisms are important areas for further work. There are, of course, many other contradictory tendencies that can emerge in the process of resistance-building and they need to be named and confronted.

The humble and promising achievements of black anti-racism in Britain, however, are also real. To illustrate a story of how self-activity and self-change occurs in the context of solidarity-building among Britons of color, I will refer once again to the story of the Justice for Pryce Campaign carried out by NMP and the consciousness raising educational values and interracial political tenets that this campaign produced for its time. After Kenny Pryce's brother Eustace was murdered by white racists, two NMP activists, Hardev Singh Dhesi and Herbie Boudier, a South Asian Sikh man and an African-Caribbean man from Jamaica, came to see Kenny, who would later become an anti-racist activist himself and go on to become chair of NMP. Kenny provided a testimonial to the character of his relationship with the late Mr. Dhesi, one of the pioneering NMP black activists in East London:

Mr. Dhesi helped us to use our voice, helped us to use it to demand justice and make changes, from a time when we had been overwhelmed with grief and helplessness. He had a gentle, calm and dignified way of encouraging the confidence and strength to do it. He was a role model showing young people how to use their own experience, not to be frightened and find the courage to speak out boldly. As I got to know him he showed me that racism was far broader than I had thought, the massive effect institutional racism has across so many areas of life, from policing to education. He was an excellent ambassador from his community, before that I had little contact with Asian people. He was like a teacher and a fatherly friend encouraging so many people to develop their own skills and fight for justice. He worked tirelessly to do that, he wasn't interested in creating a high profile for himself. That is his legacy. (NMP 2000: 25)

This process of engendering cross-cultural and interracial solidarity in concrete social action against racism encapsulates the purpose of once again becoming black in Britain today. In this moment, and in the many moments that are possible in the coming struggle for Britons of color and their anti-racist allies, a new future begins.

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