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Racial violence and the politics of hate

In January 2012, a 61-year-old taxi driver in Bedford, Mehar Dhariwal, was viciously beaten to the ground by a customer who kicked and punched him as he screamed racist abuse. Covered in blood, Mr Dhariwal was taken to a hospital but no scan was carried out and his broken ribs went undetected. A few days later he was dead. In July 2012, after moving to Barnsley, south Yorkshire, just six weeks before, a family of asylum seekers had to be rehoused. Youths had been throwing stones at the property, showering the family with glass. The mother, four months pregnant, had to be taken to hospital and later reported that her 3-year-old daughter was so traumatised that she barely ate. In November 2012, a father of a Muslim family who had just moved into their new home in Nottingham answered a knock at the door, to find a burning crucifix wrapped in ham on the doorstep. The fear and insecurity has forced the family to move.

Racism is changing in the UK. If the crude forms of racism of industrial capitalism were directed at the workers from the West Indies and Indian subcontinent brought in to fill postwar labour shortages, the racism of postindustrial capitalism is being directed at new migrants who find themselves providing the manpower for ever more flexible labour markets, and at 'settled' migrants who have been forced into the twilight worlds of the service economy. It is a racism embedded in neoliberalism, set against a backdrop of globalisation, where towns and cities reflect a national picture of poverty entrenched amid prosperity. It is a racism where the poor and poorer still are left to fight it out over deregulated employment, as social protections are steadily eroded.

Racism as everyday violence is a common occurrence.¹ In 2011/12, police forces recorded over 37,000 racially or religiously aggravated crimes, over 100 per day, in England and Wales.² The Crime Survey for England and Wales suggests that this is just a fraction of the actual number.³ Even taking into account the limitations of 'official' statistics, the figures give some indication of the extent of the humiliating verbal abuse, taunts, harassment and assaults that form the backdrop to so many people's lives. Yet this is not reflected in the general perception of the issue, nor is such violence usually deemed newsworthy. It has been dealt with, goes the orthodoxy, in the Macpherson Inquiry and Report (1999) into the murder of Stephen Lawrence and subsequent police activity. Hence, in 2012, the

conviction of two of Lawrence's killers, nineteen years after his murder, was universally celebrated (including by the police who had been so complicit in the injustice originally meted out to his family). While the pervasive, even institutional, racism of the criminal justice system may, it was felt, have initially underpinned the failure to track down the killers, that was now all in the past. Anodyne messages that there was 'more to be done' were trotted out by politicians, newspaper editors and opinion formers, insinuating that, though the country might be blemished by the odd bit of racism and discrimination, Britain was ultimately heading in the right direction.

What follows suggests something different. It has its origins in a report published by the Institute of Race Relations in 2010 called *Racial Violence: the buried issue*, which analysed over 600 racist attacks over a one-year period.⁴ More immediately, it draws from an investigation into the patterns of racial violence in three relatively small UK cities which followed this report: Plymouth, Stoke-on-Trent and Peterborough.⁵ In the first instance, the patterns we have identified provide evidence of a changing *geography* of racial violence which is spreading from the urban to the suburban: from the metropolitan cities historically associated with racist attacks, to smaller areas which do not necessarily have these same histories. Second, they further indicate how the *scope* of racist attacks is widening, incorporating new targets and intensifying violence. Each of these cities is experiencing relatively recent population changes, be it from the dispersal of asylum seekers, the natural growth of BME communities, the drawing in of migrant workers to restructured economies, the pull-in of international students or, simply, the outward flight of better-off white families. In Plymouth, for example, in south-west England, the proportion of the city's residents from a BME community increased from 1.6 per cent in 2001, to about 9.1 per cent in 2009. This population shift was related to (among other factors) the dispersal of asylum seekers, a drive to increase the number of international students and the natural growth of existing BME communities.

But in addition to these economic and social changes, a new 'common sense' racism is also permeating national policy-making and practice. It asserts that the UK is under persistent threat – from Muslims whose faith is deemed antithetical to its values and identity; from asylum seekers and migrant communities whose very presence threatens to impoverish it; and from black communities whose cultural

mores are infecting it (turning the whites black, according to the prominent historian, David Starkey).⁶ It is a racism which is passed off as pragmatism and legitimised as economically and culturally necessary. This is the climate that fosters and sustains racial violence.

If the anti-racist struggles of a generation ago recognised that combating racist attacks necessarily involved challenging the state's denial that racism existed, then the anti-racist struggles of today necessarily involve challenging the state's denial of its own complicity in creating such racism. And it is in the places where racism is spreading, apparently unchecked and well below the radar of mainstream political concern, that the impact of this denial is being played out.

From racism to pragmatism

Increasingly among policy-makers, academics and intellectuals, there is a propensity to talk of the UK as entering an age of hyper-, supra-, or super-diversity.⁷ The exact terminology varies, but reflects the demographic changes which have taken place over the last few decades and are continuing apace. These changes, a swirling consequence of the UK's former and ongoing imperial adventures, the end of the cold war, the expansion of the European Union, the crippling debt burdens and poverty forced upon the global South and the seismic upheavals engendered by globalisation, are here to stay. The responses to them, including an equally swirling mix of rancorous press campaigns and state policies and practices managing and controlling 'race' are reshaping the parameters of racism in the twenty-first century.

The creation of multicultural Britain has been a predominantly 'urban' experience, particularly in the context of a postwar demand for labour in the manufacturing and service industries. These patterns of migration have continued to shape the geography of demographics; London and those towns and cities which imported labour in this period remain by far the most ethnically mixed parts of the UK. (In 2009, about 45 per cent of England and Wales' BME population lived in London.⁸) Yet what those who claim the dawn of a new epoch refer to is not just the *fact* of ethnic and religious diversity, but its *kind* and its local distribution. According to one academic, this incorporates not just the diversity of old, but patterns of migration that have accelerated since the 1990s. (Such patterns, for example,

have come to include those formally seeking protection and those with fewer restrictions on their movement as a result of European Union expansion.⁹⁾

Unlike the migrations of 'old', this 'new' migration is increasingly geographically dispersed. Although it predominantly affects the UK's major urban centres, it is also being experienced on a greater scale in smaller towns and cities; in addition it is impacted upon by the internal migrations of existing BME communities.¹⁰ Whereas fewer than 6 per cent of the population of England and Wales were from a BME background in 1991, this had risen to 13 per cent in 2001 and about 20 per cent in 2011. 'Groups outside the white British majority are increasing in size and share, not just in the areas of initial migration, but throughout the country,' some demographers have claimed, before adding 'and our projections suggest that this trend is set to continue'.¹¹

It is against this backdrop, and, more specifically, the policies established to 'manage' and stem population change, as well as the fears stoked up by demonising it, that a new geography of racial violence has begun to emerge across the UK. Many of those who talk of an age of diversity merely point out that the UK's demography is shifting. But throughout the twenty-first century, the idea that 'diversity' (never mind 'super-diversity') threatens solidarity and identity – a concept once the domain of the political Right – has been normalised. Multiculturalism is now regarded as one of the key determinants of an array of ills ranging from rioting to terrorist attack.¹² 'Race relations' policy has been reworked to both assimilate and exclude (internally, through a vernacular of community cohesion and integration and externally, through reform of immigration and asylum legislation) on the basis of perceived cultural adaptability of the new migrants and economic benefit to the nation.¹³ In all of this, considerable effort has been taken to maintain that the management of diversity is nothing more than an exercise in pragmatism: a necessary step for a benevolent nation on the cusp of being overwhelmed.

Hence, a range of commentators, thinktanks and opinion formers on population change have been accorded the status of experts, with their 'analyses' regurgitated by the media and insinuated into policy debates. Migration Watch UK, for example, a well-known privately funded thinktank, has, for a decade, lobbied about immigration, with its findings cited extensively and uncritically as

impartial knowledge. Bolstered by an advisory council drawn from former and existing members of academe, business sectors and the judiciary (among others), the organisation's achievements to date include providing research for a cross-party parliamentary group on 'balanced migration' and a petition, publicised by the press and signed, at one point, by 1,000 people per hour, calling on the government to 'get immigration down to a level which will stabilise the population'.¹⁴

Migration Watch UK is, of course, only one source of ideas on managing population change, but it shows how the repeated projection of apocalyptic future scenarios can trickle down – and up. In the mid-2000s, taking inspiration from a government report arguing that the pace of population change was 'simply too great in some areas at present', it congratulated policy-makers on restricting one avenue of immigration whilst simultaneously arguing that 'there is clear evidence of a link between the proportion of ethnic minorities in a particular area and the rate at which the white population has declined'.¹⁵ These and similar findings have fuelled a media storm about 'minority white cities' – held up as a signifier of the UK's dystopian future unless radical remedial action is taken. No matter that, as the academics Nissa Finney and Ludi Simpson have expertly shown, much of the information on which these views are based comes from a hodgepodge of (wilful) statistical misinterpretation and untruth. They nonetheless result in the perpetuation of myths – about integration, segregation and migration – that have permeated mainstream politics.¹⁶ The prime minister, for example, in his first major speech on immigration after taking power (heralded as a forthright assessment of how migration threatens 'our' way of life) explained how 'For too long, immigration has been too high', maintaining that it was 'untruthful and unfair' not to talk about it. Population change, he said, was leading to 'discomfort and disjointedness', and the 'largest influx of people Britain has ever had' was placing 'real pressure on communities'.¹⁷

Of course, there are debates to be had about the real pressure being put on communities throughout the UK. What else could follow the biggest transfer of public money into private hands Britain has ever seen, as a result of the banking and financial crisis and the government's savage austerity measures, hollowing out the basis of communities and forcing people into unemployment. Decades of neoliberalism have already torn out the heart of many former industrial towns and

cities,¹⁸ concentrating economic power in the capital and the south-east of England, so that now the richest 10 per cent in the country own more than half of its overall wealth, compared to less than 1 per cent owned by the poorest 10 per cent. In the process, neoliberalism has eroded many ties of community solidarity in favour of fostering a winner-takes-all morality, elevating entrepreneurialism and competition as the way to order human interaction.¹⁹ Such factors shape the context in which population change, increasingly being experienced beyond the urban areas with which it is historically associated, is, indeed, an issue that many local authorities are suddenly having to respond to.

Holding such debates requires an understanding of the processes of globalisation which have impoverished and uprooted millions, some of whom have ended up on Britain's shores. It is globalisation, as both the expresser and facilitator of fundamental shifts in the nature and operation of capitalism that, within the UK, has transformed the economy and led to a perpetual state of poverty within prosperity. But these are issues which those formulating or implementing policies to deal with 'super-diversity' do not reckon with. Instead, the problem is reduced to the management of race, necessitating a series of techniques devoid of context. A few nods to the 'richness' of 'diversity' are offset against calls to manage and limit the 'negative effects' of migration. Britain, the narrative goes, has been paralysed for too long by political correctness and unable to speak out against the negative impacts of population change (be it externally, from migration, or internally, from the 'natural' growth and movement of BME communities). Hence, it is necessary to seize the moment. This is not 'racism' (as the columnists, spokespeople, opinion formers, thinktanks and intellectuals are always at pains to point out), but bravery;²⁰ for if these issues are not tackled head-on, then the real beneficiary will be the far Right. But the potential for an honest conversation is never realised, as the most powerful voices arguing that diversity erodes the national 'ties that bind' crowd out all others.

New geographies of racism

Economic decline

To understand the current trend, the city of Stoke-on-Trent is a good starting point. Stoke, in north Staffordshire, embodies what economic commentator Aditya

Chakraborty calls the UK's 'de-industrial revolution':²¹ a revolution that has led to a fall in the number of people employed in manufacturing from about 6.5 million in 1979 to about 2.5 million some thirty years later (or almost 30 per cent of Britain's national income to about 12 per cent in the same period). Once a global manufacturing heartland, Stoke's pottery industry was practically annihilated by the ruthless transfer of production to lower-wage economies overseas, going from employing about 50,000 people in the 1970s to about 7,000 in 2011. Legacies of its industry, though, remain. They are there in the attempts by the local authority to kick-start a tourist drive, enticing visitors to see the once-working factories – a reminder of England's industrial past; in the older generation's chronically high levels of workplace illnesses such as respiratory tuberculosis and lung cancer; and in the fact that the transition to a service economy has done little to alter the reality that over half of Stoke's population are, according to government statistics, in the most deprived quintile in England and the city has some of the highest levels of child poverty in the country.²²

Stoke briefly hit the headlines in 2001, when Asian and white youths took to the streets to protect their homes from the potential threat of fascist marches. Against a backdrop of uprisings by Asians in several (mainly northern) towns and cities, fighting against fascists and the police, it was one of several incidents that led to the emergence of the 'community cohesion' agenda: a policy framework underpinned, essentially, by an argument that the disorders had happened because some communities were leading 'parallel lives' to mainstream society, and were, thus, proof of the 'failure' of multiculturalism.²³ While this policy position came to dominate political orthodoxy, Stoke itself quickly resumed its former position as somewhere generally ignored by the political classes unless something major happens. And so, when something major did happen, seven years later, it shook the political establishment. By 2008, the city had nine extreme-right British National Party (BNP) councillors; the organisation had established itself as the main opposition to the Labour party, and there was a credible possibility that Stoke could become the first city controlled by the far Right in the UK. That it didn't was down to a combination of dedicated anti-fascist campaigning and, to a lesser extent, the BNP's own internal infighting. Yet, amid all the hand-wringing by the major parties that followed (the national Labour party went so far as to parachute in its own election candidate in an attempt to claw back voters), what was ignored was that the BNP had been able to draw on a

combination of local concerns about poverty and the lurch to the racist Right in mainstream politics. It was this that was leading to a changing geography of racial violence way beyond the confines of this one city.

The demonisation of asylum seekers

Nowhere was this clearer at the beginning of the twenty-first century than with regard to asylum seekers. Vilified by politicians and press as thieves and liars, they were frequently dispersed to the run-down areas of smaller towns and cities throughout the UK where they could easily be marked out. Not surprisingly, this resulted (and continues to result) in localised climates of hostility. Dispersal, as Arun Kundnani has argued, produced 'its own anti-dispersal: a not-in-my-backyard mobilisation, in which each locality fought to have asylum seekers moved on somewhere else'.²⁴ In many cases this was reinforced by local politicians and local media which reiterated the messages of their national counterparts; condemning the presence of a group of people uniformly depicted as a mass of scroungers was easily passed off as simply a defence of the rights of more longstanding residents. In Peterborough, for example, the mayor described his own city as a 'crime-ridden, rubbish-strewn hellhole', arguing that it had gone into 'asylum meltdown' and railing against those who had learned to 'milk the system'. Three local councillors wrote an open letter to the leaders of the three main political parties, lamenting how population change had led to an increase in crime, a climate of fear and the overwhelming of services. Just two years after the national policy of dispersal had begun, police revealed that they had recorded two thousand racist attacks against asylum seekers throughout England and Wales,²⁵ a pattern of violence which has continued. At their most extreme, such attacks have proved fatal.²⁶ But murders are only the most brutal end points of the emergence of a specific form of violent racism which has led to children being hounded from schools, adults being hounded from their homes, and families being hounded from the towns and cities where they have sought safety.

Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism

Such attacks indicate what can happen when a particular group is used as a political scapegoat, but refugees are not the only group under threat.

Islamophobia, embedded within the war on terror, has fuelled anti-Muslim violence across the UK;²⁷ proving deadly in some cases.²⁸ As this violence has continued over the last decade, it has morphed from unprovoked attacks on individuals – including the ripping off of niqabs, spitting and assaults – to encompass anything seen as Islamic. Bolstered by a set of conspiracy theories about ‘Islamification’, violence is frequently directed against mosques, Islamic centres and institutions. These are attempts literally to stop Islam from having any foothold in British cities – even buildings set to be converted into mosques have been vandalised to the point of obliteration. ‘Burn the lot of them out’, wrote a former soldier on Facebook just before he ran a gas-pipe into a mosque in Stoke in 2010.²⁹ Attacks of such kind throughout the UK are becoming routine.³⁰

Climates of fear

There are others, too, living in a climate of fear: the migrant workers who are employed in economies that have been radically transformed over the last decades. In Peterborough, a city which has increasingly turned to its outlying agricultural hinterlands in the face of economic difficulties, migrant labour has become more and more embedded within its economy. Such is the extent of this economic restructuring, that, in 2009, one in every five jobs in the city was going to migrant workers, many of whom were from the eastern European countries that entered the EU in 2004 and 2007. And what has since happened reveals some of the real costs of the UK’s ruthless demand for cheap labour. With many workers exploited to the point of near slavery and then fired to make way for new ones, over time, a series of makeshift tent-villages began to appear on roundabouts and in parks, providing accommodation for the desperate and destitute. The hostility generated was predictable: one councillor called them ‘vagrants’ and a ‘drain’ on other residents, telling the press, ‘If they are not going to contribute to this country, then, as citizens of their home country, they should return there.’ Some residents evidently had their own ideas about how to help this process along, taking matters into their own hands and torching the tents.

Racial violence is now structured into postindustrial Britain, particularly its night-time economy where ‘new’ migrants and asylum seekers alongside ‘older’ discarded BME workers feel the brunt of unemployment as industries are dismantled.³¹ Yet, as discrimination locked them out of work in mainstream

employment, and lack of capital prevented them establishing large-scale enterprises, alternative employment sectors such as taxis, restaurants and take-aways – where racism is now routine – became the only options.³² Workers, frequently un-unionised and working alone, bear the brunt of alcohol-fuelled violence. In Stoke, for example, the violence directed against those BME communities working in its night-time economy over the last few years has involved lumps of masonry being thrown at people, demands for takeaway staff to hand over protection money and taxi-drivers having to barricade themselves in their vehicles. Meanwhile, in Plymouth, a city reeling from the gradual hollowing out of its shipbuilding and defence industries that has turned to the service sector in a drive to restructure its economy around tourism, racist attacks within the night-time economy reached such proportions that, in 2000, specialist police initiatives were developed in response, such as installing audio and video recording equipment in businesses. Some taxis in the city display stickers bluntly telling potential customers that the driver is ‘English’, giving them the opportunity to choose a white driver.

The politics of hate

Racial violence is spreading against a backdrop of generalised hostility to what is increasingly dubbed ‘super-diversity’; hostility that has been normalised as pragmatic ‘common sense’. A lethal combination of capitalist restructuring and policies to ‘manage’ diversity by targeting the ‘diverse’ have created the climate for racial violence to flourish. But policy-makers now, post Macpherson and influenced by a neoliberal world view in which social ills are caused by individuals’ shortcomings, rather than social and economic inequities, are revising how such violence should be viewed and combated. Now racial violence is part of a ‘hate crime’ agenda.

The term ‘hate crime’ originated in the US,³³ but the hate crime ‘agenda’ in the UK can be traced back to the New Labour government’s flagship legislation, the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 (enacted just prior to the Macpherson Report).³⁴ This introduced higher maximum penalties for crimes designated as being racially aggravated; i.e. motivated in part by an individual perpetrator’s racial hatred. The concept of hate crime has consequently come to prominence in the workings of the criminal justice system. At its core is a rhetorical commitment

to criminalise *hatred*, bringing to bear the full force of criminal justice agencies and, if applicable, the penal system in a drive which is both punitive and symbolic. The former, by way of an assumption that the way to combat racism is through longer prison sentences and harsher punishment; the latter by way of an assumption that it is criminalisation that sends out a message that the state is taking racism seriously. 'While people continue to be attacked and even killed because of who they are, we owe it to them, their families and their communities to carry on the fight against hatred', says the latest Equalities Minister.³⁵ Yet, what the amalgamation of hate crime definitions into the workings of the state has done is to invert the gaze from the world to the individual. 'Hate crime' displaces racism (once again³⁶) from the social (and political) to the psychological – and thereby absolves the state of institutionalising racism.

In itself, this is somewhat ironic. One of the triggers for a concerted focus on the devastating impacts of racial violence was, as alluded to above, the Macpherson Report. It stated publicly and officially – verifying what generations of community activists had been saying for years – that a reality of brutal racist attacks could not be divorced from an equally brutal reality of police indifference, criminal justice inertia and ultimately institutional racism.³⁷ Yet what has emerged in the years following the report is what sociologist Henry Giroux has described (in relation to the US) as a racialisation of politics combined with a personalising of racism.³⁸ In this, the state creates the conditions for racist violence at exactly the same time as it promises to amass greater powers to combat it. Institutional racism is being erased from public debate (aside from a nod to, e.g., glass ceilings in elite professions),³⁹ even as the tracking down and imprisonment of racist offenders is triumphantly celebrated. Successful prosecutions are circulated through a local press always eager for positive criminal justice stories, and an image of continual reform is maintained. That all kinds of interracial crimes, including those involving young black men using the word white about police during an altercation, are now being prosecuted as 'hate crimes' serves to further inflate the notional significance of 'hate'.

In part, this stems from the division of hate crime into a series of 'strands', whereby racism is located alongside other (in policy-speak) 'personal characteristics'. Racism, in this context, is seen alongside homophobia, homophobia alongside disability crimes, disability crimes alongside crimes against

transgender people, and so on. All, of course, are groups that suffer horrific abuse and that face multiple forms of prejudice. But what this leads to is a categorisation of hate crime in which all vie for an equal status of victimhood. It creates a form of identity politics; not to be included is seen as a kind of insult, as proof that such and such a victimhood is not taken seriously. So, after the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 came into force, it was followed by calls to encourage the government to create tougher sentencing criteria for other potential crimes of 'hate' such as medical condition, political opinion and sexual orientation.⁴⁰ In 2003, the Criminal Justice Act placed a duty on the courts to increase the sentence of any offence deemed to be aggravated by the victim's disability or sexual orientation.⁴¹ The current definition of hate crime focuses on disability, gender-identity, race, religion or faith and sexual orientation.⁴²

Partners in (hate) crime

From the 1950s to the 1990s BME people fought to get racial violence accepted as a crime. They marched, picketed police stations, formed community patrols, asserted in court that 'self defence was no offence'. They created grassroots anti-racist monitoring groups and, in the 1980s, even some progressive local authorities monitored racial violence and the police. This was a learning process for the community and an education for the local state. But those days of politics are over.

The hate crime agenda enables the criminal justice system, in conjunction with a host of 'partners' from the statutory and non-statutory world, to define what racism is and how it should be dealt with. With organisations representing various victims' groups forced into a bizarre competition to have their cause acknowledged by the government, their struggles have often consequently been focused on finding space to be accommodated within local frameworks of crime control, rather than asking critical questions of these agencies. And in this context, a whole sub-tier of professional bodies and organisations has either been established or had their work adapted over the last decade. Hate crime has been structured into the local state, embedded and professionalised within local authorities through an array of hate crime officers, diversity representatives, criminal justice agencies and those established 'third-sector' organisations which have been recognised as having a legitimate stake in the hate crime world.

At its core, such an approach dovetails with an increasing enthusiasm for multi-agency working, accelerated by the New Labour government but continued by the Coalition, which has subtly restructured the basis of state power.⁴³ Through a plethora of networks and multi-agency meetings, such working groups rely on securing consent for the policing of 'hate'. This approach echoes practices that were put in place in the 1980s after the urban uprisings in Brixton, Mosside, Toxteth, Chapeltown and other inner-city areas. The encouragement of a network of trusted partners and liaison bodies, linked together through a series of strategy meetings and working groups, harks back to Scarman's consultative committees which, according to critics, were exercises in co-opting the community into policing.⁴⁴ Similarly, today the fight against racism is being removed from those communities feeling its effects to be relocated within local institutional structures.

This has particular resonance in areas which are suddenly experiencing racism in its most raw form and do not have traditions of anti-racist campaigning at community level. This is not to denigrate the often tireless work of some individuals in racial equality councils and other organisations who seek, often with little support, to counter racial injustice. But it is to say that, in the absence of community-based networks, local authorities and criminal justice agencies have appropriated anti-racism, deflecting its politics and muting its anger, and locating it as a professional service working within the structures of the state. On the one hand, this has manifested itself in the plethora of community cohesion projects aimed at encouraging 'mixing', good neighbourliness and shared values. If 'hate' stems from the individual, the thinking goes, then it is the government's responsibility to reduce tensions by creating the space for shared activities and cross-community contact.⁴⁵ On the other, the government, as well as the criminal justice system, have created a network of 'partners' and stakeholders at both national and, through multi-agency working, local, levels. And it is through these structures that officially sanctioned partnerships can define among themselves what the priorities are in fighting 'hate'. Thus, organisations working within the structures of the hate crime agenda decide which communities are in need of 'protection', where police officers may most effectively be deployed, and so on. The problem, though, is that, in practice, such partnerships are unequal, with the police and local authorities having most power.⁴⁶ The consequence is that alliances made between different partners fighting 'hate' can break down when community-based concerns come up against the aims of more powerful partners.

In Peterborough, for example, when the English Defence League (EDL) held a protest at the end of 2010, the police persuaded young Muslims to avoid the area, discouraging them from holding a counter-protest, on the pretext of maintaining order. This was presented as a deal under which the police said that, if the counter-demonstration was not held, they would contain the EDL. Yet, in the event, the EDL came to the city and its members were allowed by police to gather and give particularly insulting speeches, calling the prophet a paedophile. Such scenes – of police forces and local authorities dissipating local protest against the EDL – have been replicated elsewhere. In Leicester, for instance, the police and the city council ‘undertook a wide-ranging programme to dissuade local people from engaging with or taking part in lawful marches and assemblies on 4thFebruary [2012]’, according to the Network for Police Monitoring (NETPOL).⁴⁷

Ultimately, the appropriation of ‘anti-racism’ allows state agencies to present themselves as a set of neutral institutions working to ensure public order for all by intervening in the tensions between communities. This, in turn, enables the policing of ‘race’ to go relatively unchallenged. So, in response to new social issues associated with demographic change, a series of intensifying criminal justice and immigration strategies have been put in place that have met little resistance. Thus, for example, in Peterborough, migrant workers forced to live in tents in abject poverty, exploited and destitute, were subjected to new forms of immigration raids. Police, UK Border Agency (UKBA) staff and local authority officers prowled the city, rounding up this new class of homeless, backed up by a compliant, embedded media – including the BBC.⁴⁸ The official line that these immigration sweeps were actually for the benefit of those being subjected to them, that facilitating their removal from the country would help them, raised barely a murmur. Questions were never asked about the viability or morality of bodies such as UKBA, the police and local authorities criminalising communities and enhancing racism, even as they worked ‘in partnership’ on hate crime strategies.

The reality is that the rhetorical commitment to stamp out racism has emerged at exactly the same time as a reinvigorated commitment to deal with, criminalise and discipline ‘race’. Not only has this criminalisation been driven by ideological shifts in racism, such as the targeting of Muslims under the rubric of anti-terrorism,⁴⁹ it is set against a backdrop of the targeting and surveillance of communities by the criminal justice system that has become entrenched as the damaging impacts of

neoliberalism have taken hold. As Sivanandan has described it: 'Thirty years of neoliberalism and financialisation' have broken up the working class into a 'precariat' and an (officially termed) 'residual' social group 'of the never-employed, estate denizens, inner-city youth, refugees, asylum seekers – the flotsam and jetsam of market society'.⁵⁰ It is this sub-section of the populace – those who make up the 'collateral damage of unchecked market economics'⁵¹ – multicultural in make-up, but in which BME communities are overrepresented, that is seen as needing to be managed and contained by the criminal justice system. And, where there are no community networks to resist such inroads, what limited accountability there is often resides in infrastructures such as law centres or citizens' advice bureaux which have adapted their remits; in those occasional radical staff members of racial equality councils; or in those support centres that have sprung up to provide advice and guidance to 'new' migrants. But these are exactly the sorts of organisations that are currently being starved of funding under the doctrine of austerity. They are some of those feeling the brunt of 40 per cent cuts to the legal aid budget and £95 billion cuts to public services.⁵²

The far Right and anti-white racism

This replacement of an anti-racist movement and redefinition of hate crime as any criminal offence 'motivated by hostility or prejudice based on a personal characteristic',⁵³ has opened up space for all kinds of groups to stake a claim that the 'real' racism is that faced by white (or, more specifically, white-British) people. The failure to acknowledge the role that state policies and practices play in setting the conditions for racial violence leaves only a definition of hate as springing from internalised rage or, at most, ongoing animosities between communities. In this conspectus, everyone has equal claim to being a victim of hate; everyone can potentially be an offender.

Of course, the notion of anti-white racism is not new. The far Right has for decades aimed to promote and play on fears that a white majority is being overrun and overridden by hordes of immigrants.⁵⁴ Nor are such ideas confined to the far Right. The perception that majority 'culture' is being diluted, for example, has long been a staple of the right-wing press (as well as certain thinktanks).⁵⁵ But at a time when the claim that the UK's 'super-diversity' poses a threat is legitimised by mainstream politics, ideas of anti-white racism have particular appeal. And it is in

those areas undergoing forms of population change that they can rapidly gain purchase.

The far Right's appropriation of hate crime and success in turning it into a concept of anti-white racism can be partly gauged by its electoral support. The BNP managed to gain unprecedented popularity in the mid-2000s in various towns and cities in the UK for a combination of reasons. But it was buttressed by the way mainstream parties ceded ground to the far Right, ostensibly to prevent people from voting for it. Meanwhile, the BNP was able to manipulate the genuine concerns of white communities, over immigration, asylum and Islam, in those places which had been left to rot by mainstream political parties.

Using the language of hate crime, far-right groups have made considerable efforts to assert that they are the 'real' victims. It is this, in part, that has provided the basis for continued far-right campaigning, despite electoral setbacks. Ironically, while the state's commitment to combating hate crime appears to have increased as it has abandoned any real understanding of institutional racism, the EDL, the BNP and other far-right groups have seized the concept and used it for their own ends. Thus, whilst marches and rallies are still mobilised against the building of mosques and Islamic centres, they are increasingly also held to protest that the criminal justice system is institutionally biased against white people.⁵⁶ And they are held in defence of Christian values that, it is claimed, are being 'eroded' by a political elite too paralysed by political correctness to defend the interests of the nation.⁵⁷ And they are held in 'remembrance' of white people who have been killed or injured in what they allege are racist attacks. In Stoke, for example, after a BNP supporter was killed in 2008 by his Muslim neighbour, whom he had subjected to years of racist abuse and harassment, the BNP presented him as a 'white martyr'.⁵⁸

Such cynical attempts to make political capital from horrific incidents have been resisted by bereaved family members who have condemned the far Right for attempting to gain support.⁵⁹ But, worse, the fall-out of such far-right organising can be detected in an enhanced climate of violence: the Kurdish family forced to barricade themselves in their own takeaway from a baying mob of EDL members in Plymouth, for example, or the taxi-drivers forced to stop working on the eve of an EDL march in Stoke after receiving death threats.

The parameters of racial violence have changed dramatically over the last two decades: geographically (the phenomenon has spread), conceptually (it has been redefined as hate crime), politically (it has been claimed by the far Right) and strategically (it is being managed by state and private agencies not combated by the community). And all at a time when the age of austerity cuts financial support to community infrastructures and creates the conditions of competition among the poor and poorer where racial violence can thrive. Local activists, anxious to deal with popular racism and racial attacks, for want of radical left strategies, still look hopefully over their shoulders to local authorities to help set up community initiatives, without seeing the extent to which local authorities are now compromised. Such an understanding, of course, is made all the harder as popular discourse divorces violent racism from its political, economic and ideological contexts. Obviously one cannot just replicate old struggles in new conditions, but we can learn from the lessons of the past and remould them into contemporary struggles. All the conditions are there and all the possible allies.

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