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THE (DIS)ARTICULATION OF RACE AND CLASS IN BRITAIN, 1970S-1980S

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the conceptual and political articulation of race and class in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s. It traces the contributions of authors such as Stuart Hall and A. Sivanandan, alongside collective experiences of militancy and intellectual production—including black radical publications (*Race Today*, *The Black Liberator*), political organisations (Black Unity and Freedom Party, Black Liberation Front), and black feminist groups (Organisation for Women of African and Asian Descent)—to wider debates in the social sciences and Marxist theory on the relationship between racism and capitalism, and the conceptualisation of race and class. These reflections are situated within the historical processes of decolonisation and postcolonial migration, the vocality of social movements, and the economic crisis of the 1970s, which unsettled the British post-war consensus. The emergence of Thatcherism is analysed as both a response to and a decisive rupture with this conjuncture, advancing a neoliberal reorganisation of society that also relied on dismantling the theoretical-political articulation of race and class. Drawing on a wide range of published and unpublished sources, the thesis reconstructs how these authors advanced original theorisations starting from the peculiarities of black people in post-colonial Britain. The first chapter explores different conceptualisations of racism, contextualising them within the British race relations paradigm. The second examines how these understandings informed different interpretations of race and class, highlighting the tension between sociological and political accounts. The third addresses the issue of organisation through the concept of articulation and the practice of political blackness, which sought to unite heterogeneous subjects shaped by a shared—although differentiated—postcolonial experience. The final chapter analyses the disarticulation between black and class politics in the 1980s, showing how understandings of racism, of race and class, and of political organisation were reshaped within the wider hegemonic project of Thatcherism.

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ACRONYMS AND INITIALISMS

BLF	Black Liberation Front
BUFP	Black Unity and Freedom Party
BWG	Brixton Black Women Group
CCCS	Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies
IRR	Institute of Race Relations
OWAAD	Organisation of Women of African and Asian Descendance
RTC	Race Today Collective
TBL	The Black Liberator

Their destiny, I suggest, was not to create the idea of that struggle so much as to articulate it.

Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism*

Introduction

At the beginning of 1975, while the Conservative Party was about to reorganise its leadership with the unexpected election of Margaret Thatcher over the incumbent leader and former Prime Minister, Edward Heath, the Community Relations Commission—a public body established to counter racial discrimination—organised a two-day conference in London titled "Black People in Britain: The Way Forward." The conference aimed to provide a platform for discussing the most urgent issues affecting black communities in Britain, featuring sessions with prominent black intellectuals and politicians, such as the Jamaican-born economist Albert G. Hines and the Grenadian-born medical practitioner and Labour Party politician David T. Pitt, who was soon to be nominated as a Baron.[1] In a dismissive commentary in its quarterly *Race & Class*, the newly reformed Institute of Race Relations observed that "the all-black participants were hand picked" for the conference by white organisers who, "having set it up," allowed them to request more funding for black projects and discuss black self-organisation. These demands, however, would soon be redirected through proposals to reorganise community relations services in order to reach, and possibly co-opt, those black organisations into state operations.[2]

Among the participants at the conference was Stuart Hall, the director of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. Rather than focusing on the request for state aid, his speech emphasised the "important political step forward" that the conference had been compelled to acknowledge and undertake, as it had certainly played no part in determining it. Speaking at the closing plenary session, Hall remarked that the conference was significant because it facilitated dialogue between Afro-Caribbeans and Asians on the social problems of the black community, which present themselves "as inter-connected" even when analysed separately (housing, employment, education, police brutality). This, he argued, is because what influences these problems is "the inter-connected structure of institutional racism." While those who examine these issues with

[1] 'Black People in Britain: The Way Forward. A Conference by and for Black People in This Society, 17-19 Jan 1975', London, January 1975, LRA/01/0114/03, GPI. On Margaret Thatcher's emergence within the Conservative Party, see Eva Garau, *Margaret Thatcher: la formazione e l'ascesa* (Carocci editore, 2020).
[2] 'UK Commentary', *Race & Class* 17, no. 1 (1975): 78–79.

a policy-oriented approach often do so in "compartmentalised and slightly unpoliticised ways," this was certainly not the experience of those who live with the effects of that social structure directly, as it manifests as a power that "shape[s] and contain[s] and confine[s] the situation of people at the bottom."[3] And it is precisely regarding the power to oppose this structure that Hall highlighted another issue that emerged during the conference, which likely went unnoticed because even those who mentioned it were unwilling to accept it:

> I think in some ways [the] most important thing which has been signalled at the Conference, is a decisive shift of power and problems in the black community to the base. We have heard a lot about the grassroots, and you know that not everybody who says "Lord, Lord" shall be answered, not everybody who calls the name of the grassroots knows where the grass grows. … when power shifts that way, it also shifts away from something. And the Conference is also about the shift of power away from the majority of people sitting in this room, including me. (Applause) It is about the disintegration of that mediating structure conjured into existence in the last 10 years of race relations. That is no longer, in my view, a tenable structure; it has lost its political credibility.[4]

The "power shift" Hall identified pointed to the emergence of a black British radical politics which, in open contestation with the state's management of the racial question, asserted itself publicly against both the policies and the rhetoric of racial governance from the mid-1960s onwards. Confronted with the reorganisation of post-imperial power in a United Kingdom unsettled by the decolonisation movements and postcolonial migration, and riding the momentum of the global black liberation movement, a constellation of groups and organisations responded to their experiences of racism in the metropole by giving rise to a British Black Power.[5] As noted by Rob Waters, this history of organised

[3] Stuart Hall in 'Conference Black People in Britain: The Way Forward, Held 17-19 January 1975, Plenary Session VI, Chairman Dr. Pitt', London, 19 January 1975, 5–6, LRA/01/0114/03, GPI.
[4] Ibid., 5, 7.
[5] Kalbir Shukra, *The Changing Pattern of Black Politics in Britain* (Pluto Press, 1998); Rosalind Eleanor Wild, 'Black Was the Colour of Our Fight. Black Power in Britain, 1955-1976' (PhD Thesis, University of Sheffield, 2008); Anne-Marie Angelo, 'The Black Panthers in London, 1967-1972: A Diasporic Struggle Navigates the Black Atlantic', *Radical History Review* 2009, no. 103 (2009): 17–35; Robin Bunce and Paul Field, 'Obi B. Egbuna, C. L. R. James and the Birth of Black Power in Britain: Black Radicalism in Britain 1967–72', *Twentieth Century British History* 22, no. 3 (2011): 391–414; R. Kelley and S. Tuck, eds, *The Other Special Relationship: Race, Rights, and Riots in Britain and the United States* (Palgrave, 2015); Anne-Marie Angelo, '"Black Oppressed People All over the World Are One": The British Black Panthers' Grassroots Internationalism, 1969-73', *Journal of Civil and Human Rights* 4, no. 1 (2018): 64–97; John Narayan, 'British Black Power: The Anti-Imperialism of Political Blackness and the Problem of Nativist Socialism', *The Sociological Review* 67, no. 5 (2019): 945–67; Saffron East, Grace Redhead and Theo Williams, eds, *Anti-Racism in Britain. Traditions, histories and trajectories, c. 1880–present* (Manchester University Press, 2024).

black politics is tightly bound with what he describes as "a wider political culture thinking black," comprising black publications, bookshops, music and record shops, as well as community programmes of self-education, welfare provision, housing, and legal advice. Such a political culture was simultaneously shaped by, and continuously redefining, the lived experiences of blackness—understood, on the one hand, as a condition endured, that is, as a position within a hierarchical and oppressive social structure; and on the other, as "a particular kind of critical perspective … and the politics that this entailed."[6]

This research seeks to examine that critical perspective and its political articulation not merely as a moment in the history of contemporary social movements, but as a theoretically significant contribution to debates within the social sciences and political theory on the relationship between capitalism and racism,[7] and on the conceptualisation of race and class.[8] If, following Waters, blackness refers to the specific postcolonial experience of formerly colonised peoples confronting unequal power relations mediated, to recall Hall's formulation, by the political and interpretative structure of race relations—a structure that both sought to smooth and simultaneously reproduce the hierarchies upon which it was founded—then the explicit naming of that experience as racist, through the

[6] Rob Waters, *Thinking Black: Britain, 1964-1985* (University of California Press, 2019), n. 16, pp. 225; 4.
[7] This debate has been recently reinitiated by the publication of a new edition of Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Zed Books, 1983; 2nd edn, University of North Carolina Press, 2000). See, among others, Nancy Fraser, 'Expropriation and Exploitation in Racialized Capitalism: A Reply to Michael Dawson', *Critical Historical Studies* 3, no. 1 (2016): 163–78; Gargi Bhattacharyya, *Rethinking Racial Capitalism: Questions of Reproduction and Survival* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2018); Satnam Virdee, 'Racialized Capitalism: An Account of Its Contested Origins and Consolidation', *The Sociological Review* 67, no. 1 (2019): 3–27; Michael Ralph and Maya Singhal, 'Racial Capitalism', *Theory and Society* 48, no. 6 (2019): 851–81; for an historical outlook, see Justin Leroy and Destin Jenkins, eds, *Histories of Racial Capitalism* (Columbia University Press, 2021); Aurélia Michel, *Il bianco e il negro. Indagine storica sull'ordine razzista*, trans. Valeria Zini (Einaudi, 2021; originally published as *Un monde en nègre et blanc. Enquête historique sur l'ordre racial* [Points, 2020]); Sylvie Laurent, *Capital et race: Histoire d'une hydre moderne* (Seuil, 2024).
[8] See the monographic issue titled 'Race and Capital' in *Historical Materialism* 31, no. 2&3 (2023), edited by Robert Knox and Ashok Kumar, especially the sub-section 'Labour,' pp. 219–303. With more pronounced historiographic concerns, yet still offering significant theoretical reflections, see David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (Verso, 1991); David R. Roediger, *Class, Race, and Marxism* (Verso Books, 2017); Satnam Virdee, *Racism, Class and the Racialized Outsider* (Palgrave, 2014). Whether to consider race and class as more or less autonomous structural positions or as identities, and what the relation is between the two in either conception, will be further discussed during the thesis. This topic is nonetheless effectively accounted for, especially in debates on intersectionality, see Asad Haider, *Mistaken Identity: Mass Movements and Racial Ideology* (Verso Books, 2018); Ashley J. Bohrer, *Marxism and Intersectionality: Race, Gender, Class and Sexuality under Contemporary Capitalism* (transcript Verlag, 2019); Jennifer Christine Nash, *Black Feminism Reimagined: After Intersectionality*, Next Wave: New Directions in Women's Studies (Duke University Press, 2019); Sandro Mezzadra, 'Intersectionality, Identity, and the Riddle of Class', *Papeles Del CEIC* 2 (2021): 1–10; Arun Kundnani, *What Is Antiracism? And Why It Means Anticapitalism* (Verso, 2023).

politicisation advanced by black radical organisations, constitutes a theoretically crucial moment. This is because the very act of naming a specific experience with a new term transforms it into an object of critical inquiry, converting everyday experiences into analytical categories and principles of intelligibility for discerning the nexus between racism, power, and capital.

By reconstructing and discussing the elaborations of authors such as Stuart Hall and A. Sivanandan, alongside collective experiences of militancy and intellectual production—including black radical publications (*Race Today*, *The Black Liberator*), political organisations (Black Unity and Freedom Party, Black Liberation Front), and black feminist groups (Organisation for Women of African and Asian Descent), this research undertakes an historical-conceptual analysis of the articulation of race and class in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s. The research is based on the theories developed by the movements and organisations themselves that, in their collective and sometimes competitive efforts to advance a black politics, sought formulations capable of describing contemporary historical forms of long-standing structural problems. These reflections are situated within the historical processes of decolonisation and postcolonial migration, the vocal presence of social movements in the wake of the global 1968,[9] and the social and economic crisis of the 1970s, which unsettled the British post-war political consensus. The emergence of Thatcherism is examined as both a response to and a decisive rupture with this conjuncture, advancing a neoliberal reorganisation of society that also depended on dismantling the theoretical and political articulation of race and class.

State of the art

The analysis of the forms and theories of black politics in Britain must thus be located in a specific historical context and its transformation. In one of the first systematic studies of the subject, Kalbir Shukra examined how the focus of social and political research on race and racism shifted in relation to black political strategies. This evolution is evident in the passage from an integrationist approach to the radical politicisation of race in the 1970s, mirrored in the social and political sciences, from initial studies defining the so-called race relations paradigm to its Marxist critiques. Likewise, urban studies of

[9] Sandro Mezzadra and Maurizio Ricciardi, 'Introduzione. Nel segno del "Sessantotto"', *Scienza & Politica. Per una storia delle dottrine* 30, no. 59 (2018).

racialisation processes resulted from unrest in inner cities during the early 1980s.[10] Shukra offers a valuable overview of the historical trajectory of black politics in Britain, demonstrating how it often set the pace for knowledge produced in institutional centres—although the author ultimately interprets the movement's history and politics through those same institutional frameworks rather than through the original sources produced by the movement itself. This is particularly evident when Shukra discusses the theoretical and organisational relationship between race and class within the Black movement. He argues that the movement renounced class in order to establish an autonomous black identity. However, this reflection is not referenced in the movements to which he refers, as his sole polemical objective Paul Gilroy's interpretation of this theoretical analysis.[11] In so doing, Shukra inevitably sacrifices the complexity and originality of political and social theorisation, reading it in light of the outcome of that history—namely, the defeat of radical politics and the institutional reorganisation of black politics.

Shukra's assessment thus hinges on an alleged failure to couple radical analysis with a politics, which resulted in forms of separatism even when radical intellectuals claimed "a 'black' identity … through the development of black politics."[12] A particularist ideology and differentiated group needs, thus, justified forms of separatism and division that came to characterise the 1980s and 1990s, but which, according to the author, were already possible to envisage in black radicals' theorisations and forms of organisation:

> Although each group was organised partly to expose hidden forms of oppression, the overall effect was to raise awareness of each oppression among its victims and turn rival groups into oppressors too. Celebrations of victimhood prevented real connections being made between the different groups.[13]

As this thesis will demonstrate, the question of identity was vigorously contested throughout the 1970s. The affirmation of race as a cultural, national, or political identity belonged only to some currents within an already plural field of black politics (which Shukra acknowledges but does not explore in its plurality), and it was utterly criticised by others. Identity, inter-ethnic competition, and the intensification of particularity appear

[10] Shukra, *Black Politics in Britain*, 4–7.
[11] Ibid., 103–5; For Gilroy's understanding of processes of race and class formation, see Paul Gilroy, *'There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack': The Cultural Politics of 'Race' and Nation* (Hutchinson, 1987), 14–42.
[12] Shukra, *Black Politics in Britain*, 32.
[13] Ibid., 49.

more as outcomes of that history than as its precondition, especially after the disarticulation of race and class, which occurred throughout the 1980s. Although Shukra recognises the internal tensions within the movements that made this political project of disarticulation possible (not a conspiracy but part of a genuine political struggle fought both ideologically and materially), by delimiting black consciousness as an identitarian stance, he sidesteps the very struggle over terms and concepts which, both in their autonomy and in their interrelations, envisaged different futures and political possibilities.

The analysis of the sources serves, then, to trace that debate and those alternative conceptualisations, as well as the struggle over them, from within the conjuncture. This means also evaluating changes in concepts and theories in light of shifting relations of forces, material and political transformations, in the midst of a restructuring of global capitalism, in which the political control of migration and freedom of movement (of people, while the logistical possibilities for increased globalisation of goods and capital were being actively constructed) assumed an increasingly central relevance. Recovering those conceptualisations is not simply a matter of bringing them back to light in all their complexity and contradictions; it is a way of showing the different forms taken by those theoretical-political problems that persist, unresolved, in the present.[14]

As W.J.T. Mitchell has effectively shown, race continues to be "a critical component of social reality" even at the very moment when its political irrelevance and scientific inconsistency are proclaimed, and its ideological, mystificatory—indeed false—nature is repeatedly asserted.[15] According to Mitchell, the conservation of race, to recall the title of W.E.B. Du Bois's work to which he alludes,[16] follows from the persistence of racism and its violence. In other words, insofar as specific social, material, and institutional practices continue to produce racist effects while not explicitly invoking racial

[14] From this point of view, the aim of this research is to carry out a theoretical operation similar to that proposed in Michael Hardt, *The Subversive Seventies* (Oxford University Press, 2023), albeit with a more limited context and set of references, as its focus is Black Britain. Not only does Hardt trace "the beginning of our time" back to the 1970s, he also evaluates the theories produced by specific social and revolutionary movements on a global scale "in terms of their concepts" (ibid., 10, 7). This evaluation is conducted through the lens of four interpretative concepts: autonomy, multiplicity, democracy and liberation. Furthermore, Hardt devotes several pages to the concept of articulation between Hall's elaboration and feminist reworking (149–164), as well as to British political blackness (177–181). This discussion will be taken up again in the third chapter, which is devoted to these themes.

[15] William J. T. Mitchell, *Seeing through Race* (Harvard University Press, 2012), 26.

[16] W.E.B. Du Bois, 'The Conservation of Races', in *W.E.B. Du Bois Speaks: Speeches and Adrresses 1890-1963*, vol. 1 (1897; Pathfinder, 1970).

justifications, race as a conceptual tool still allows us both to explain and to contest politically the reality of racism. Mitchell is primarily concerned to formulate race as a medium—a way of *seeing through*—and does not fully develop this explicitly political inflection of race, beyond recalling "the continuing power of both the concept of race and the passion of racism to mobilize political power."[17] Nonetheless, different politicisations of race remain a live issue not only in everyday reality[18] but also in critical theory—for example, in debates over the (im)possibility of politicising blackness.

In theorising a world incapable of recognising the humanity of black people, the British philosopher David Marriott described the peculiarity of race not as a subordinate or cultural entity, but as inherently defined by effacement. Through his interpretation of Fanon, he has proposed a definition of blackness as something that "*is not*," and which cannot be defined in terms of the goals one might seek to achieve by referring to race. Any attempt to place blackness at the basis of a politics, he argues, would fail to grasp the complexity of the absence that being black entails, thereby turning blackness into an essence—whether conceived as an originary condition to be restored, a tradition to be transmitted, or a shared destiny to be constructed. Affirming the impossibility of fully knowing blackness would thus mean accepting that "there is no last word and testimony on what blackness is." In this sense, Marriott advances an anti-essentialist critique not for its conjunctural, or even contextual or contingent, definitions, but for one founded on what he calls the "innocence" of blackness, precisely because of its unknowability, its impossible definition. In this way, his critique is articulated in a form as inescapable and a-historical as that of an essence when he maintains that "blackness is, then, the very figure of an erasure … that is never persistent or present in its erasure."[19] Proceeding from the premise that any redefinition of blackness is lacking, incomplete, and ineffective before the immanence of the removal it describes, Marriott does not recognise those

[17] Mitchell, *Seeing through Race*, 49.
[18] See Siddhant Issar, 'Listening to Black Lives Matter: Racial Capitalism and the Critique of Neoliberalism', *Contemporary Political Theory* 20, no. 1 (2021): 48–71; Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (Haymarket Books, 2021).
[19] David Marriott, *Of Effacement: Blackness and Non-Being* (Stanford University Press, 2024), 144–45, 204. For a critique of Marriott's reading of Fanon and his critical dialogue with Achille Mbembe, see Iain Chambers, 'What Is the "Black" in the "Black Mediterranean"?', Postcolonial Politics, 28 August 2024, https://postcolonialpolitics.org/what-is-the-black-in-the-black-mediterranean/.

moments in which race has been affirmed as a subversion of hierarchies and as a political overwriting of effacement through new meanings.

By contrast, Kehinde Andrews powerfully restates the case for black radicalism capable of autonomously defining blackness by grounding it in a political tradition linking Africa and the diaspora, with modern slavery as the key event marking black subjects across the Black Atlantic. He advances a historical conception that prioritises the recognition and reclamation of "our link to each other and to Africa," proposing blackness as "a political rather than a cultural essentialism." It involves rejecting what Cedric Robinson has termed 'the Creation of the Negro,' and instead advocating a politics of blackness as "the call for unity in order to overturn the system that oppresses Africa and the Diaspora." Although he explicitly states his distance from Afro-pessimism, Andrews nonetheless ultimately develops a definition of anti-black racism—or at least a hierarchical view of various forms of racism—that enables differentiation and ranking of their effects while aiming to understand them as part of a broader structure. While promising a radical black politics for the twenty-first century, he remains entangled in a definition of blackness as anti-Negro—constructed with reference to the past—that fails to articulate a genuinely transformative political project for the present and future. Black radicalism, in this account, summons the spectre of revolution to make possible the fulfilment of liberal demands; it ultimately calls for repairing the underrepresentation of some rather than constructing the political articulation of a truly subversive subject.[20]

This is particularly instructive, given that Andrews's formulations are explicitly critical of the conjunctural theorisation of political blackness, which is the object of this study.[21] Political blackness was a historically specific form of collective identification and political articulation that emerged in Britain from the late 1960s, through which people of African, Caribbean, and Asian descent recognised themselves as part of a shared political subject shaped by the intertwined legacies of colonialism and contemporary state racism. Rather than signifying a biological or cultural identity, political blackness denoted a position within the social relations of post-imperial Britain and a strategy for uniting

[20] Kehinde Andrews, *Back to Black: Retelling Black Radicalism for the 21st Century* (ZED, 2018), 156, 170, 244–45.

[21] For an overall review of these critiques, see Madeline-Sophie Abbas, 'The Promise of Political Blackness? Contesting Blackness, Challenging Whiteness and the Silencing of Racism: A Review Article', *Ethnicities* 20, no. 1 (2020): 202–22.

communities whose diverse experiences of exploitation, migration, and racism revealed a common structure of domination. In this way, it functioned both as an analytical category and a political practice: it described the material realities of black life in the metropolis while actively fostering common struggles among groups otherwise divided by national origins. By connecting local struggles against racism and exploitation in Britain to broader networks of anti-imperialist and Third World liberation movements, political blackness articulated a form of internationalist politics rooted in the understanding that race was not supplementary to class but constitutive of it.

The aim of this work is certainly not to decontextualise political blackness and present it as a ready-made solution to the open theoretical problem raised in this introduction—namely, the persistence of racism and the continuing relevance of a politicisation of race to oppose it. Rather, this thesis examines political blackness as a historically situated theoretical-political practice which is best described through Stuart Hall's concept of articulation. From this perspective, articulation serves both as a critical framework for analysing the historically specific relationship between race and class within determinate social formations, and as a theoretical principle for understanding the constitution of the political subject and the question of its organisation.

In critical dialogue with Althusser, Hall developed the concept of articulation as a means of thinking unity and difference, universality and particularity, without collapsing one into the other. The concept operates on two interconnected levels. On the one hand, it designates the overdetermined relation among the different levels of a social formation—economic, political, and ideological—whose unity must always be historically produced. On the other hand, it refers to the political and ideological practices through which such unity is actively constructed or contested. In this second sense, articulation denotes the deliberate intervention of hegemonic forces seeking to reorganise social relations: by forging new meanings, bridging previously separated elements, or, conversely, by undermining existing forms of unity to the point of disintegration. Reflecting on this dual dimension of articulation enables us to approach the theoretical question of organisation[22] not in terms of the historical evaluation of specific

[22] The relevance of this problem in contemporary political theory has been recently raised by Rodrigo Nunes. Drawing on political ecology and network theory, he proposes to consider organisation ecologically

organisational experiences—whether deemed successful or failed—but rather in terms of their coherence as practices capable of producing new political subjectivities from differentiated yet shared social experiences, and of challenging processes of disarticulation.

The thesis, therefore, takes Thatcherism as the decisive social force which, in the course of the neoliberal restructuring of British society, confronted black politics and ultimately reworked the theoretical and political articulation of race and class. It did so by redefining—that is, by (dis)articulating—the structural meaning of racism and the forms of radical black political organisation that had emerged throughout the 1970s, producing a new, regressive articulation to confront radical movements' social and political demands. Within this context, black radical intellectuals not only analysed the social conditions and struggles of black people in Britain, but also offered some of the earliest critical interpretations of Thatcher's project of economic, political, and social restructuring through the prism of race and the societal effects of racism. Acting explicitly against the radical articulation of race and class, Thatcherism's project of disarticulation exerted a direct pressure on these theoretical elaborations, compelling their revision and, in doing so, reaffirming the profoundly historical and mutable character of political and social concepts themselves.

With these problems in mind, John Narayan presented British Black Power not as the history of a single party but as the overall experience of different movements and groups, diverse in many respects but sharing an idea of political blackness. While Narayan focuses on the heyday of British Black Power,[23] this thesis shifts to the 1970s and 1980s, a period when organisational forms proliferated to such an extent that some of its protagonists questioned why unity remained elusive among black groups. Some even suggested that their "ideological differences [could] be safely accommodated in a single

as a network in which its various components (i.e., different organisational and organised forms) influence one another through their interconnectedness. In this sense, organisation as ecology calls for some form of articulation, although it seems to be more a result of the relationships established within the network itself than a theoretical principle and a political practice aimed at actively building those articulations (Rodrigo Nunes, *Neither Vertical nor Horizontal: A Theory of Political Organisation* [Verso, 2021]).

[23] Narayan, 'British Black Power'.

well-produced, well-written paper."[24] Whether this was true remains one of the open questions this research attempts to explore through the reconstruction of these debates.

Notes on methodology and sources

This thesis provides a historical-conceptual analysis based on extensive archival and printed sources relating to the British Black Power movement. It draws on materials from the George Padmore Institute and the Black Cultural Archives, London, which, together with the Institute of Race Relations (whose collections were unavailable in the first half of 2024, when most of the research in London took place, due to relocation), hold the bulk of the corpus of black radical publications, internal documents, pamphlets, and papers. Additional documents were also consulted at the London School of Economics and the University College London archives in late spring 2024.

In the early 1970s, the first Black Power organisations in Britain—the Universal Coloured People's Association and the Black Panther Movement, respectively founded in 1967 and 1968—fractured along ideological and organisational lines. Out of these splits emerged a multiplicity of formations: in 1970, the Black Unity and Freedom Party (BUFP) was established, insisting on a Marxist-Leninist organisation able to anchor black workers' experiences within the wider class struggle; in 1971, the Black Liberation Front (BLF) rejected what it saw as the Black Panther Movement leadership's overly rigid Marxism and bureaucratic centralism, arguing instead for an organisation built from the needs of black communities in Britain. Both developed distinctive structures, though often engaged in similar activities, such as community self-help programs and, crucially, independent publications—*Black Voice* (BUFP) and *Grassroots* (BLF)—through which they reached black constituencies, propagated their positions, and elaborated their readings of black experiences and struggles against racism and exploitation.[25] Alongside these formations, further political collectives emerged with more explicitly theoretical ambitions: from UCPA in 1971, came the journal *The Black Liberator* (TBL), involving

[24] BLF, 'Unity', *Grassroots* 3, no. 2 (1973): 5, GPI (NEW/9/9).
[25] Wild, 'Black Power in Britain', 89–109; Harry Goulbourne, 'Africa and the Caribbean in Caribbean Consciousness and Action in Britain in the 1970s', in *Caribbean Transnational Experience* (Pluto Press, 2002); W. Chris Johnson, '"The Spirit of Bandung" in 1970s Britain: The Black Liberation Front's Revolutionary Transnationalism', in *Black British History: New Perspectives*, ed. Hakim Adi (Bloomsbury Academic, 2019).

figures such as Alrick Cambridge, Cecil Gutzmore, Colin Prescod, Stella Dadzie, and Gerlin Bean; while from the dissolution of the Black Panther Movement in 1973 came the Race Today Collective (RTC), with Darcus Howe as editor of the homonymous journal, and a group of young activists and intellectuals coming from different previous political experiences participating in its writing and discussions (Barbara Beese, Farrukh Dhondy, Mala Sen, Linton Kwesi Johnson, and Leila Hassan among others).[26]

Since the emergence of Black British politics, women had been at the forefront of organisations, although their theoretical and political contributions long remained underacknowledged. By the early 1970s, their modes of organisation also began to shift, marked by the establishment of the Brixton Black Women's Group (BWG) in 1973, soon followed by the creation of similar black women's groups across Britain. By the end of the decade, these groups had come together under a national umbrella organisation, the Organisation of Women of African and Asian Descent (OWAAD). Like other political formations of the period, both BWG and OWAAD produced their own publications—in the form of newsletters—*Speak Out!* and *FOWAAD*, respectively.[27]

Especially concerning *Black Voice* and *Grassroots*, both of which were independently produced, there is no guarantee of regular publication schedules, as they were not always released consistently, and the number of volumes published in a given year may not necessarily correspond to those of the preceding or following year. Moreover, publication dates are not always printed on the newspapers themselves, though they can usually be inferred from references within the articles or from the progressive numbering of issues across the years. This same numbering system also allows to identify

[26] Robin Bunce and Peter Tatchell, '"Race Today Cannot Fail": Black Radicalism in the Long 1980s', in *Labour and the Left in the 1980s*, ed. Jonathan Davis and Rohan McWilliam (Manchester University Press, 2018); Waters, *Thinking Black*, 181–88. Most of the *Race Today* issues have been digitised and are available online at https://archive.org/details/racetoday. Some articles have been republished in the collection Paul Field et al., *Here to Stay, Here to Fight: A Race Today Anthology* (Pluto Press, 2019).

[27] Beverley Bryan et al., *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain* (1985; Verso Books, 2018); Julia Sudbury, *'Other Kinds of Dreams': Black Women's Organisations and the Politics of Transformation* (Routledge, 1998); Natalie Thomlinson, '"Sisterhood Is Plain Sailing?" Multiracial Feminist Collectives in 1980s Britain', in *The Women's Liberation Movement. Impacts and Outcomes*, ed. Kristina Schulz (Berghahn, 2017); Jade Bentil, '"We Were Fire-Fighting against Thatcher and the System She Was Putting Forward": The Black Women's Movement and the Boundaries of Nationhood in Thatcher's Britain', in *Resist, Organize, Build: Feminist and Queer Activism in Britain and the United States during the Long 1980s*, ed. Sarah Crook and Charlie Jeffries (State University of New York Press, 2022). *Speak Out!* issues have been recently republished, together with some other BWG's text, in the anthology BWG, *Speak Out! A Brixton Black Women's Group Reader*, ed. Milo Miller (Verso Books, 2023).

gaps in the surviving collections. Efforts were made to compensate for these omissions through consultation of multiple archives; nevertheless, particularly in the case of *Grassroots*, some lacunae remain—especially for the 1980s.

Unlike *Race Today* and *The Black Liberator*, which were characterised by a more explicitly theoretical orientation and by Marxist-inspired practice of inquiry, *Grassroots* and *Black Voice* functioned primarily as propagandistic and informational tools. Yet, in keeping with a pedagogical spirit conceived as a form of political responsibility towards the black community that defined the organisations behind them, these publications did not shy away from offering interpretations of current events or political developments. Such interventions condensed and disseminated the ideological line of their respective organisations, often in close response to unfolding struggles. These sources have been read in conjunction with manifestoes and, most importantly, organisational documents such as position papers and internal discussion notes, whose intended audience was not the wider public but members already engaged in political work. Precisely for this reason, these materials often contain more advanced and conceptually sophisticated forms of theorisation, providing valuable insight into the intellectual and political dynamics of these black radical organisations. However, as these sources were not intended for publication and are sometimes unsigned or undated for security reason, it is often difficult to determine their exact drafting date.

In this study, these materials are approached as spaces in which activists, intellectuals, and collectives articulated conceptual frameworks that sought to make sense of, and intervene in, the conjuncture they inhabited. In this sense, the archival documents examined here are understood as both products of specific historical circumstances and instruments through which those circumstances were politically and theoretically redefined. They are read not simply as historical records documenting political activity, but as sites of theoretical production in their own right, alongside institutional forms of knowledge production and sharing—structured and quasi-scientific publications, books, university thesis, and scientific publications. Among these institutions, there is the London-based Institute of Race Relations (IRR). Established in 1958 as an independent research body funded by the corporate sector and large foundations to carry out research on race relations worldwide, the IRR played a role both in directing British capital's post-imperial investments worldwide and in producing policy-oriented research on

immigration, racial tensions, and minority conditions at home. By the late 1960s, members of staff began to question the Institute's research agenda and public role. At a general meeting in April 1972, the incumbent board was outvoted and resigned *en masse*. A principal organiser of this internal struggle, the then-librarian of the IRR, A. Sivanandan, was appointed director and later editor of its journal *Race*, soon to be renamed *Race & Class*. This internal *coup* reoriented the IRR towards a radical, anti-racist agenda and positioned it, especially through the mordant writings of its director, as both critic and chronicler of the new course of black radical politics.[28]

Alongside these positions, this thesis deliberately includes the Jamaican-born sociologist Stuart Hall, notwithstanding those who have excluded him from this debate on the grounds that his work (and indeed the Cultural Studies project) was "jargon-heavy, post-structuralist abstruseness that had little to say about the daily motivations of black people."[29] Here Hall is situated within this history in a dual role, acknowledged by Hall himself in the opening passage of this introduction, of a committed black scholar and a "familiar stranger" to black politics.[30] It is not just a case of recognising Hall's political activity, which ranged from diasporic and postcolonial engagements (such as the West Indian Society in Oxford) to British and simultaneously global cultural politics and new social movements (such as the New Left Review and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) from his arrival in Britain. It is also to recognise that Hall's intellectual trajectory as a researcher and social scientist was profoundly shaped—and at times directly informed—by the theoretical production of social movements that challenged mainstream interpretations, simultaneously exposing their supposed apolitical stance.[31]

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[28] A. Sivanandan, 'Race and Resistance: The IRR Story', *Race & Class* 50, no. 2 (2008): 1–30; Waters, *Thinking Black*, 188–91. Some of Sivanandan's writings have been collected into three volumes (A. Sivanandan, *A Different Hunger: Writings on Black Resistance* [Pluto Press, 1982]; *Catching History on the Wing: Race, Culture and Globalisation* [Pluto Press, 2008]; *Communities of Resistance: Writings on Black Struggles for Socialism* [1990; Verso Books, 2019]). However, to date, there has been no systematic study of Sivanandan's thought. *Race & Class* 41, nos. 1–2 (1999) dedicated a special issue on the occasion of his 75th birthday. Today, the IRR remains not only the heir to his thinking and political commitment, but is also involved in promoting his ideas, see John Narayan, 'New Times or New Circuits: Recovering Sivanandan's Political Economy', *Race & Class* 65, no. 1 (2023): 14–33.

[29] Wild, 'Black Power in Britain', 14.

[30] Stuart Hall, *Familiar Stranger. A Life between Two Islands*, ed. Bill Schwarz (Duke University Press, 2017).

[31] Similarly, Rob Waters has argued that the theoretical innovations not only by Hall but also by Paul Gilroy should be read as an integral part of the epistemological, cultural, and political rupture represented by "Britain's moment of 'thinking black'" (*Thinking Black*, 3). Hall himself famously described the irruption

At the same time, his analyses entered into critical dialogue with these movements' own elaborations, sustained by an explicit commitment to understanding theoretical and critical work as integral to a wider politics of transformation.[32] Because of this, Hall's analytical tools are deeply grounded in historical experience and therefore prove significant both within the internal critical dialogue among the authors examined in this research and as broader interpretative instruments guiding it, most notably through the concept of articulation. In this sense, Hall was far from detached from the "daily motivations of black people": he translated those lived experiences through original theoretical formulations that situated them firmly within the academic debates of political theory, sociology, and cultural theory—fields that might otherwise have continued to overlook them.[33]

Although the thesis privileges a conceptual reconstruction of the theoretical and political debate, the exposition follows a broadly chronological structure, with only a few exceptions—occasional incursions into the past or near future—introduced where certain events prove particularly relevant to clarifying specific conceptual turning points. The timeframe under consideration extends from 1973 to 1985. The year 1973 marks not only the implementation of the 1971 Immigration Act but also the formal end of the British Black Power period. This closure followed a series of divisions and fragmentations that had begun earlier in the decade, resulting in the proliferation of organisations and distinct political positions that are examined throughout the thesis. The endpoint, 1985, is determined by the defeat of the miners' strike and the resurgence of urban uprisings with a pronounced racial dimension. From that moment onwards—although the organisations themselves did not disappear immediately—the frequency of their publications declined, as did political participation, already in crisis for some time, until many of these groups

of race and feminism into cultural studies as two theoretical breaks necessary for theoretical production to innovate: "I want to hold to the notion … that movements provoke theoretical moments. And historical conjunctures insist on theories … the crucial importance … of what I would call the necessary delay or detour through theory" (Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies', in *Essential Essays 1: Foundations of Cultural Studies*, by Stuart Hall, ed. David Morley, 2 vols [1992; Duke University Press, 2019], 80–81).

[32] Cf. Paul Warmington, *Black British Intellectuals and Education: Multiculturalism's Hidden History* (Routledge, 2014).

[33] Archival materials relating to Stuart Hall and the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies were accessed during an earlier research period at the Cadbury Research Library (University of Birmingham) between October and December 2021.

eventually dissolved between the late 1980s and the early 1990s. Finally, the thesis identifies 1981 as a key turning point. That year saw a wave of urban uprisings in several British inner cities, prompting an explicit governmental response under Margaret Thatcher, most notably through the publication of the Scarman Report and a series of legislative and policy interventions. These measures had profound implications for both the political activity and the theoretical elaborations of the groups and authors examined in this study, shaping the subsequent trajectory of Black radical thought and its confrontation with the emerging neoliberal order.

Outline of the thesis

The first chapter explores competing conceptualisations of racism in the British post-war context, situating black radical thought within and against the transformation of the race relations framework that dominated public discourse, sociological studies and policy from the late 1940s onwards. In the face of decolonisation processes, the delegitimisation of scientific racism following the Holocaust and the first post-colonial migrations, social sciences reoriented their approach to racism and racial issues through the race relations paradigm. This was aimed at understanding and managing the relationships between former mother countries and newly independent nations, as well as the interactions between white and non-white populations in British cities. The authors examined in this study challenged this paradigm on both analytical and political grounds. They contended that the race relations framework naturalised racism as an inevitable by-product of contact between groups presumed to be racially distinct, thereby depoliticising its structural roots. Against this view, black radicals articulated different conceptions of racism as a power structure, sharing the assumption that it was strictly embedded in capitalist processes of production and reproduction.

All the analyses considered agree on the central role of racism in determining the life and work opportunities of former colonial subjects who emigrated to the United Kingdom, with a strong focus on the issue of education. The BUFP located racism within the capitalist state's need to regulate class conflict, presenting it as a mechanism of social discipline and ideological intervention on the class struggle, impeding the recomposition of the working class into a unitary political subject. In addition to emphasising the disciplinary nature of racism, Sivanandan's analysis of the political economy of migration

provides insight into the evolution of racism and its institutionalisation in state policies, and its dependency on capital's operation, revealing racism's material basis. Through its analysis of racism, TBL develops a theory of the state and its ideological apparatuses in dialogue with Louis Althusser and Nicos Poulantzas, while Stuart Hall's contributions to a Marxist theory of ideology advanced a conjunctural and materialist comprehension of racism as a necessary component of capitalist reproduction.

Taken together, these analyses establish a theoretical shift from the conceptualisation of racism as a spontaneous social reaction to understanding it as a relation of power that is integral to capital's processes of accumulation and reproduction. Building upon this conceptual foundation, the second chapter explores how structural understandings of racism influence different interpretations of the relationship between race and class. It analyses the tension between sociological and political accounts of these concepts, which simultaneously depict a specific social reality and identify the political subject best suited to contest it. This chapter is structured as an analytical study of the concluding section of *Policing the Crisis*, where Hall and his co-authors engage with various radical interpretations of the composition, position, and politics of the black proletariat. These interpretations are reconstructed, examined, and discussed throughout the chapter, beginning with the debate between the RTC and TBL regarding the social position of black workers within the British post-colonial capitalist formation. In this confrontation, both groups reworked key Marxist concepts such as exploitation, productive and unproductive labour, and the industrial reserve army, to theorise and envision the most effective form of class struggle for the social subject they depicted—respectively, the black wageless or the super-exploited sub-proletariat.

These figures were definitely not the only ones to be theorised by black radical intellectuals. The chapter then examines three additional social and political subjects emerging in the attempt to think together race and class: the black proletariat, in BUFP's reinterpretation of Maoist distinctions between primary and secondary contradictions, which is both part of the working class and distinguished from its white counterparts; the working-class black woman, discussed in some black feminist interventions that explore the interactions of racism and sexism within capitalist production and reproduction, seen as mutually constitutive; and the black community, which served as both a specific political subject and the material and cultural infrastructure through which black social

power was organised beyond the workplace, in community struggles that echoed within industrial disputes. The chapter then concludes by exploring two antithetical political conceptualisations of race: Sivanandan's, whose understanding necessarily involves race's articulation to class; and the BLF's separation of race and class, with the latter associated with the white working class, while black people are best conceived as lumpenproletariat existing in conditions of dispossession and oppression. Returning to *Policing the Crisis*, which critically synthesised these debates, the chapter assesses an interpretation of race as a crucial element of class reproduction and a vital component in the cultures and politics of black labour in 1970s Britain.

The third chapter addresses the problem of political organisation at the intersection of race and class. Rather than focusing primarily on empirical accounts of black organisations—self-help groups, community activism, anti-imperialist and black global networks—it analyses the theoretical and strategic attempts by black radicals to conceptualise organisation itself. The chapter's fundamental premise is that the concept of articulation, developed by Stuart Hall in his critical dialogue with Marxism and in reference to the development of capitalism in racially-structured societies, is not only heuristic but also useful in posing the problem of organising a heterogeneous social subject into a collective political force. The chapter argues that, as both a theory and a politics, articulation designates an organisational principle that can grasp unity and difference without reducing them to identity. While Hall tests his theory mainly in his conjunctural analysis of Thatcherism, the chapter examines the peculiar example of political blackness as a politics of articulation.

In the face of the shared yet differentiated experiences of exploitation and racial oppression faced by Africans, Asians, and West Indians in Britain, black radicals adopted a political definition of 'black' that enabled them to describe not only their shared circumstances, but also a specific horizon of struggles—global in outlook, as they aimed to connect with anti-imperialist movements, albeit in the context of the British postcolonial metropolis. In light of this definition, the chapter examines various translations of political blackness into organisational forms that are more or less consistent with the above-defined principle of articulation. These include the BLF's revolutionary black nationalism, which emphasised community survival, cultural rediscovery, and Pan-Africanism, resulting in a quasi-biological, cultural nationalist

conception of blackness; the BUFP's particularisation of Marxism to meet the experience of the black proletariat while allowing for broader connections with the white working class; and the development of black socialist feminism by the BWG and OWAAD as an example of political blackness as both a principle of Afro-Asian unity and a theoretical framework for interpreting the conditions of black women in Britain and worldwide. The organisational problem outlined above concerns less the organisational form itself and more the way in which a collective partiality can effectively express and consolidate its social power. The chapter thus concludes with an analysis of two paradigmatic forms of struggle from the 1970s and early 1980s: strikes and urban riots. In both cases, the autonomous self-activity of one or more partial subjects in struggle determined the form of struggle that, in turn, opened up or precluded specific organisational articulations.

The final chapter analyses the disarticulation of black radical politics in the 1980s, showing how understandings of racism, of race and class, and of political organisation were reshaped within the wider hegemonic project of Thatcherism. In response to the urban uprisings of 1980–81, Thatcherism intervened to redefine race not as a field of radical politics but as an object of policy. Political management of race was redirected towards programmes of institutional inclusion that reaffirmed a liberal understanding of racism as a problem of inter-group relations, this time reframed not in racial but in ethnic terms. Central to this redefinition was the analysis developed in the Scarman Report, which explicitly rejected any structural or institutional interpretation of racism, asserting instead that it was primarily a matter of individual prejudice. In doing so, the Report simultaneously acknowledged and neutralised the structural critique advanced by black radicals. If Scarman provided the ideological groundwork for this shift, the government's policy interventions in inner-city areas—especially those targeting black youth employment and training—materially enacted the process of disarticulation.

In this process, class was reasserted as a subordinated condition rather than as a political subject, through the consolidation of a new wage regime, reinforced by welfare retrenchment and reductions in unemployment benefits, while race was recast as a market category under the rubric of ethnicity. Access to public funding such as the Urban Aid scheme was increasingly mediated through ethnic identification, and the creation of a black business class fostered the fragmentation of the black community along class lines. Where once political blackness had articulated diverse struggles within a shared anti-

racist and anti-capitalist project, neoliberalism promoted ethnic pluralism and market competition as the new basis of social organisation. The emergence of a black middle class and the institutionalisation of race, via ethnicity, as a matter of policy, posed both analytical and practical challenges for the political groups examined in this study, ultimately leading to the defeat of the collective political black subject. Yet, as Hall reminds us, disarticulation also opens the ground for new articulations to be contested: within the ruins of collective politics, the potential for contestations and new articulations endures.

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This work stems from an overwhelming passion for a collective politics that attempts to forge connections in an increasingly disordered and fragmented world. For this reason, the comrades with whom I am fortunate enough to engage in collective thought and action are present on every page of this work.

Mum and Dad continued to trust and support me as best they could in this not always easy-to-understand choice to hope one day to make a living from university and research. With Chiara and Matteo, a few words have always been enough. Because of this, I have sometimes failed to express how grateful and proud I am of them.

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This work is dedicated to the loving memory of mastro Tonino, who, by the end of his life, had almost learned the refusal of work.

1 Conceptualising racism

This chapter examines the different political conceptualisations of racism that emerged in post-war Britain. It begins by tracing the institutional and sociological debates surrounding the *race relations* paradigm, which had the effect of either displacing or depoliticising the question of racism. Against this backdrop, black radical organisations and intellectuals reframed racism as a power relation constitutive of capitalist social reproduction, one that shaped the lives of black people both in their everyday experiences and in structural terms. The chapter then turns to an analysis of this structural dimension, exploring various understandings of the relationship between racism and the state—particularly its institutionalisation through immigration policies—and, subsequently, of the connections between racism and ideology.

1.1 From the 'race relation' problematic to the problem of 'racism'

1.1.1 Casting off racism

The concept of racism has a relatively recent history. Although scholars debate its modern roots—some tracing its original epiphenomena back to antiquity—the earliest known usage of the term is in late 19th-century French ('*racisme*' and '*raciste*').[1] A few decades

[1] Pierre-André Taguieff, *The Force of Prejudice: On Racism and Its Doubles* (University of Minnesota Press, 2001; originally published as *La Force Du Préjugé: Essai Sur Le Racisme et Ses Doubles* [Éditions la Découverte, 1987]), 85–87. Taguieff himself is unequivocal in stating that "racism surely preexisted the appearance of the word *racism*," although he framed it as a "problem word, a word with a great number of questions hung onto and tied to it." This is primarily because racism denotes both "the absolute negation of difference" and the "absolute affirmation of difference." More significantly, however, the term racism has, over time, come to encompass a variety of attitudes, behaviours, and ideologies, thereby losing its original reference to race theory and coming to imply a wide range of conflictual situations. It has ultimately become a highly overused term, describing "the name given to exclusion inasmuch as it treats as a natural grouping—that it 'biologizes'—a set of individuals who are supposed to belong to the same social category" (ibid., 82, 32, 20–21, 40–41). Acknowledging the necessity of disentangling the history of racism from that of race, Wulf D. Hund argues that one can identify "preceding racisms" prior to its nineteenth-century formulation, which "used different models of racist discrimination" even in antiquity (Wulf D. Hund, 'Dehumanization and Social Death. Fundamentals of Racism', in *Marx and Haiti: Towards a Historical Materialist Theory of Racism* [LIT Verlag, 2022], 29). Similarly, Cedric Robinson, in distinguishing between racism and racialism—a distinction elaborated by several other scholars, see Kwame Anthony Appiah, 'Racisms', in *Anatomy of Racism*, ed. David Goldberg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 3–17; also, Pierre-André Taguieff, *La couleur et le sang: Doctrines racistes à la française*, 2nd ed. (1998; repr., Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2002)—used the latter term to refer to a cultural disposition internal to European civilisation since its pre-modern era, aimed at legitimising and reaffirming

later, the word 'racism' is also registered in the English-speaking context, though 'racialism' was initially more prevalent.[2] Particularly, it was associated with South Africa, referring both to the interactions and intra-white competition for power between the British and the Boers, mostly used polemically by the former against the latter, and to the discrimination against "coloured races." In these early occurrences, racism exhibited a degree of polysemy. Despite almost a century of 'scientific' theorising about race, reference to these theories was far from obvious or direct. In these early occasions, for example, recognising oneself as a racist was a reinforcing character for a sincere nationalist, as was expressed in France in both anti-German and anti-Semitic sentiments.[3]

The rise of fascism and Nazism in Europe during the 1920s and 1930s led to the crystallisation of its meaning as a peculiar ideology linked to specific policies of domination and extermination. Against this backdrop, the self-proclaimed racists also became stigmatised as such by those who confronted Nazi-fascism politically and ideologically.[4] From the 1930s onward, and even more vigorously after World War II and the Holocaust, there emerged a scientific and political imperative to equate racism with the falsification of science and thus to a purely ideological construct. This process—instantiated by UNESCO conferences and statements to discredit racial discrimination and refute any biological basis for racial hierarchisation through evidence drawn from

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the "social organization as natural by reference to the 'racial' components of its elements" (*Black Marxism*, 2). These meanings point to a continuity, rather than distinct ruptures, in what can be reconstructed as a long history of racism as a practice of social discrimination serving political ends of domination. A similar conception is also found in Michel Foucault, for whom racism or racist discourse "was really no more than an episode, a phase, the reversal, or at least the reworking, at the end of the nineteenth century, of the discourse of race war … for purposes of social conservatism and, at least in a certain number of cases, colonial domination." (*'Society Must Be Defended': Lectures at the College de France, 1975-1976* [Penguin Books, 2004], 66). While attempting to reconstruct its historical origins, Hannah Arendt concentrated on the underlying body of opinion that enabled twentieth-century racism to assert itself as "the powerful ideology of imperialistic policies," distinguishing racism from the preceding race-thinking (Hannah Arendt, 'Race-Thinking before Racism', *The Review of Politics* 6, no. 1 [1944]: 36).

[2] *Oxford English Dictionary* (2008), under 'Racism'.

[3] For an overview of the uses of 'racism' in different European contexts previous to the 1920s, and for the "chauvinistic intra-white argument" concerning South Africa, see Wulf D. Hund, '"Racism". The Birth of a Concept', in *Marx and Haiti: Towards a Historical Materialist Theory of Racism* (LIT Verlag, 2022), 61–69. For a discussion of the link between racism and nationalism, Étienne Balibar, 'Racism and Nationalism', in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, by Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (Verso Books, 1991; originally published as *Race, nation, classe. Les Identités ambiguës* [Editions La Decouverte, 1988]).

[4] See, as an example, the way Giulio Cogni used the collective term "the racists" in *Il razzismo* (Fratelli Bocca, 1937). For an analysis of fascist racism, see Francesco Cassata, *'La difesa della razza': politica, ideologia e immagine del razzismo fascista* (Einaudi, 2008). For the scientific and political stigmatisation of Nazi racism, see the classics Magnus Hirschfeld, *Racism* (Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1938); Julian Huxley and Alfred Cort Haddon, *We Europeans: A Survey of 'racial' Problems* (1935; Penguin, 1939).

various scientific disciplines[5]—initiated the marginalisation of racism and its confinement to the furthest right fringes of the political spectrum, best described two decades later by Michael Banton's definition of racism as "the doctrine that a man's behaviour is determined by stably inherited characters deriving from separate racial stocks having distinctive attributes and usually considered to stand to one another in relations of superiority and inferiority."[6] As this conceptualisation rested on 19th-century notions of the scientific pretension of racism, which had been proved as false, Banton concluded that the concept of racism had exhausted its validity and should no longer be used in sociological analysis. New forms of racial hostility were to be framed within other premises and frameworks than the pseudoscientific ones. Yet this also meant that social groups had not stopped thinking of themselves as racially distinct. For this reason, Banton did not abandon the concept of 'race,' albeit a sociologically constructed one.

Following this intellectual trajectory, one observes a concerted effort by scholars and politicians to eradicate the basis of the specific form of racism assumed during the interwar period in Europe. In other terms, the political defeat of Nazism, coupled with the scientific discrediting of the racial theories underpinning its power, suggested the possibility of racism's demise. Yet, to declare racism historically concluded would have meant disregarding the fact that while it no longer possessed public legitimacy, at least in overt forms, it persisted in other ways, for it was not merely a scientific aberration but an expression of political domination with a broader spatial and temporal reach than that of the Nazi regime. Born out of Atlantic slavery and colonial conquest, this form of political domination had never been stable nor taken for granted. Indeed, historians and critical scholars argued that racism started to be clarified as a concept precisely when the processes of subjugation and exploitation that constituted its worldly determinations began to be challenged.[7]

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[5] Elazar Barkan, *The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States between the World Wars* (Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[6] Michael Banton, 'The Concept of Racism', in *Race and Racialism*, ed. Sami Zubaida (Tavistock Publications, 1970), 18.

[7] George M. Fredrickson, *Racism. A Short History* (2002; Princeton University Press, 2015), 156; also see Barbara Jeanne Fields, 'Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America', *New Left Review*, no. I/181 (June 1990): 95–118; Michel, *Il bianco e il negro*. Alberto Burgio also links the emergence of racism to the need to justify the limitation of the idea of universality proclaimed by modernity (*Critica della ragione razzista* [DeriveApprodi, 2020]). While being deeply rooted in the eighteenth-century obsession

This form of political domination was, at that very moment, being called into question in the colonies by the national liberation struggles. As Colette Guillaumin has observed, the simultaneous realisation of the Holocaust and the process of decolonisation had distinct impacts on European consciousness. Because of its geographical proximity and its traumatic effects, anti-Semitism elicited guilt and recognition of Jewish victimhood, whereas colonial racism remained a more distant issue. Colonised peoples, rather than being framed as victims in need of reparation, entered Western consciousness as political actors engaged in struggle, posing a problem that required political management.[8] If colonialism's injunction to the colonised subject was to stand in their place, colonial administrators were now faced with the problem of having to come to terms with a colonial world that no longer wanted to remain subordinate to its colonisers, nor was it about to be trapped within state borders. A process that inevitably made it impossible to limit racism to the continental European experience, demonstrating its ordinary validity in the colonial world while at the same time challenging it.[9]

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with classification, race-thinking took the form of a "(social) discourse of race" throughout the nineteenth century in order to enable the re-legitimation of a hierarchical order that had been destabilised by the events of 1789 (Giovanni Ruocco, *Razze in teoria. La scienza politica di Gaetano Mosca nel dibattito pubblico dell'Ottocento* [Quodlibet, 2017]). Eric Williams famously argued that the North Atlantic plantation system was central to the emergence of modern racism, claiming that "slavery was not born of racism: rather, racism was the consequence of slavery." It was on the plantations that slave owners came to the "practical conclusion" that Africans were inferior in order to justify their need for cheap labour. Although Williams explicitly states that the decisive forces in overcoming slavery were economic, namely the development of industrial capitalism thanks to the profits generated by the Atlantic triangular trade system, it is significant that racism reappears in his conclusions when the economic rationale is challenged not just by material (industrial) and moral (abolitionist) forces, but also and decisively by the sabotage, escapes and insurrections of black slaves. These protagonists of their own emancipation were "the most dynamic and powerful social force" against whom the racist arguments in favour of slavery based on a racial hierarchy became more explicit (Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* [1944; University of North Carolina Press, 2021], 4, 14, 161). Both the slaves' centrality and the continuous fear and threat of blacks' insurrections reveal not just the profound influence of C.L.R. James (*The Black Jacobins: Toussaint l'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* [1938; Vintage Books, 1975]), but also resonate with W.E.B. Du Bois's analysis of the reconfiguration of racism in the post-Civil War scenario in the US (W.E.B. Du Bois, 'Die Negerfrage in Den Vereinigten Staaten (The Negro Question in the United States) (1906)', trans. Joseph G. Fracchia, *CR: The New Centennial Review* 6, no. 3 [2006]: 241–90).

[8] Colette Guillaumin, *L'idéologie raciste. Genèse et langage actuel* (Moutin, 1972), 101–2.

[9] "The first thing the colonial subject learns is to remain in his place and not overstep its limits" (Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* [François Maspero, 1961; repr., Grove Press, 2004], 15). According to Fanon, racism necessarily arises and develops within the Manichean world of the colony as a specific form of general subjugation, which is exercised through exploitation and material violence as well as through the imposition of an external colonial regime, cultural erasure, the assertion of moral, institutional, legal and political superiority. In other words, both in its biological and cultural forms, it is "only one element of a vaster whole: that of the systematized oppression of a people." Precisely as an instrument of oppression, racism does not lose its virulence because of the "evolution of people's mind", but rather because "on all

In 1950, economist Henry Hodson, then editor of *The Sunday Times* and former Reforms Commissioner to the Government of India, identified "the problem of race relations"—along with its possible ideological alignment with Soviet Communism—as one of the most pressing issues of the twentieth century, which had hitherto remained "largely outside the scope of political thinking" and therefore deserved to be properly studied and politically tackled. By race relations, Hodson referred to a set of five challenges emerging in the context of decolonisation, four of which he considered explicitly political, as they pertained to international and economic affairs, state power, and governance. These included the relations between nations and racial groups within and beyond political borders; the governance of European protectorates over colonised peoples and the redefinition of political and economic relations with newly independent states in the Commonwealth; the issue arising with the replacement of white supremacy as the logic which had allowed to rule the colonies for centuries; and finally the struggle for power in plural societies, such as East Africa, where Europeans, Africans, and Asians coexisted as a result of settler colonialism and the forced movement of indentured laborers from Asian colonies.[10]

The fifth aspect, which Hodson described as "residual, and largely social and economic," concerned the "race-relations problems which arise … wherever there is a racial or colour minority, from the West Indies to the West India Docks." In his view, issues related to race relations would inevitably emerge wherever groups of individuals perceived themselves as racially distinct. While recognising the association between races and skin colour, Hodson did not define race as a biological characteristic but rather as the perception of a recognisable hereditary difference between social groups, which, in turn, gave rise to prejudice. Faced with the inevitability of prejudice—not racism as a formal doctrine of supremacy nor as an institutional politics, but rather the spontaneous outcome of post-imperial coexistence in the metropoles and international interaction on the global scene—Hodson regarded the British Commonwealth as a real laboratory for a "life-size

sides men become free, putting an end to the lethargy to which oppression and racism had condemned them" Frantz Fanon, 'Racism and Culture', in *Toward the African Revolution. Political Essays* (François Maspero, 1964; repr., Grove Press, 1994), 33, 35–36.

[10] Henry V. Hodson, 'Race Relations in the Commonwealth', *International Affairs* 26, no. 3 (1950): 305, 309, 314.

political experiment" in race relations, the conditions and outcomes of which would be under the control of the imperial authorities.[11]

As most of the British policymakers dealing with the decline of the Empire,[12] Hodson was concerned with preserving—albeit in a reshaped form—the imperial ties that had previously been based on social hierarchies legitimised by racism. The struggles for decolonisation have been eroding the validity of direct imperialist domination and its racist legitimation; the attempt was now to reframe these ties as a series of political and economic challenges within a hierarchical framework of race relations. The latter emerged as the new name for those social problems that arise wherever interactions occur between individuals and social groups perceived as racially distinct. Previously confined to the colonies, these issues were spreading to metropolitan centres due to postcolonial migration. By constructing the interaction between natives and migrants (and, more broadly, between former colonisers and the formerly colonised) as a social problem, Hodson not only sought to establish the heuristic tools necessary for its study and definition but also advocated for the political and legal mechanisms needed to contain and resolve race relation issues before they escalated into an autonomous political crisis—such as a 'race war'—or, even more critically, merged with class struggle. Against this backdrop, he called for the creation of an Institute of Race Relations, modelled on the one founded in Johannesburg in the 1930s, to systematically and scientifically study race relations, both domestically and within the broader international framework of decolonisation.[13]

Influenced by the Chicago School of sociology and the works of Robert E. Park, as well as by the political mobilisations against racial segregation in the US and South Africa, the race relations paradigm emerged in post-war Britain as both an intellectual and political response to the changing situation within the British Commonwealth and the growing presence of non-white populations in the metropole. Throughout the 1950s and

[11] Ibid., 309, 313.
[12] Kathleen Paul, '"British Subjects" and "British Stock": Labour's Postwar Imperialism', *Journal of British Studies* 34, no. 2 (1995): 233–76. A similar trajectory to Hodson's is that of Philip Mason, a former agent of the Indian Civil Service who served as first director of the Institute of Race Relations (see Brett Bebber, 'The Architects of Integration: Research, Public Policy, and the Institute of Race Relations in Post-Imperial Britain', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 48, no. 2 [2020]: 319–50).
[13] Hodson, 'Race Relations in the Commonwealth', 315; see also Marc Matera, 'The African Grounds of Race Relations in Britain', *Modern British History* 34, no. 3 (2023): 415–39; Paul B. Rich, *Race and Empire in British Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), 169 ff.

early 1960s, different social scientists examined the patterns and consequences of immigration within local communities, producing a first, not homogeneous, and loosely theoretically informed body of research on race with a focus on the British context. The following contributions of Michael Banton and John Rex eventually established the dominant approach for analysing race dynamics in Britain, supporting empirical research with a theoretical framework that framed the object of inquiry in terms of 'race relations.'[14] Banton's approach centred on the social interpretation of phenotypical markers, such as skin colour, in everyday interactions. He conceptualised race as an abstraction shaped by subjective meanings, arguing that racial differences varied across historical and social contexts and acquired shifting significance in contemporary Britain. By contrast, Rex emphasised how these subjective definitions were structured by economic inequalities and political exclusion. In his approach, race relations problems arise where two groups, distinguishable by their physical features or cultural identities, living together in a single society have different chances of accessing the same social opportunities, and this is justified and rationalised in terms of race. Therefore, Rex's perspective underscored how racial stratification was embedded within broader socio-economic structures, reinforcing patterns of exclusion and inequality.[15]

By the early 1980s, the race relations paradigm had come under extensive criticism, particularly from Marxist scholars.[16] Among them, Robert Miles argued that focusing on

[14] John Solomos, *Race and Racism in Britain*, 4th edn (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 29–34; see also John Solomos, *Race, Ethnicity and Social Theory* (Routledge, 2022), 27–33.

[15] Michael Banton, *Race Relations* (Basic Books, 1967), 19; John Rex, *Race Relations in Sociological Theory* (Schocken Books, 1970); John Rex and Sally Tomlinson, *Colonial Immigrants in a British City: A Class Analysis* (1979; Routledge, 2022); Michael Banton, 'The Race Relations Problematic', *The British Journal of Sociology* 42, no. 1 (1991): 115–30. On the so-called 'race relations paradigm,' and the evolution of British sociological approaches to race and racism, see John Solomos and Les Back, 'Conceptualising Racisms: Social Theory, Politics and Research', *Sociology* 28, no. 1 (1994): 143–61. For a discussion of the so-called 'Banton-Rex debate,' see the monographic section in *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38, no. 8 (2015), particularly Stephen Steinberg, 'Two Children of Empire: Michael Banton and John Rex', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38, no. 8 (2015): 1382–88, world; Peter Ratcliffe, 'The Debate between Michael Banton and John Rex: A Re-Evaluation', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38, no. 8 (2015): 1395–400.

[16] John Gabriel and Gideon Ben-Tovim, 'The Conceptualisation of Race Relations in Sociologial Theory', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2, no. 2 (1979): 190–212; Jenny Bourne, 'Cheerleaders and Ombudsmen: The Sociology of Race Relations in Britain', *Race & Class* 21, no. 4 (1980): 331–52; Paul Gilroy, 'Managing the 'underclass' : A Further Note on the Sociology of Race Relations in Britain', *Race & Class* 22, no. 1 (1980): 47–62; Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, ed., *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain* (1982; Routledge, 2005), 7–44. For a review of these critiques, see John Solomos, 'Varieties of Marxist Conceptions of "Race", Class and the State: A Critical Analysis', in *Theories of Race and Ethnic Relations*, ed. David Mason and John Rex (Cambridge University Press, 1986).

race relations risks reducing the complex interplay of social, economic, ideological, and political forces shaping a given social formation to mere relations between 'races.' This, he maintained, results in circular reasoning and flawed conclusions that assume racial discrimination is the sole determinant of all social outcomes. While individuals may still recognise themselves as belonging to different 'races,' this recognition should not be assumed as an objective or scientific tool. Instead, it must be critically examined to determine whether they refer to 'real' phenomena and to understand why and how these perceptions are reproduced. Since race itself is not a biological reality, the focus must shift to its historical production and reproduction as a socially accepted idea. This also implies avoiding what Miles calls the reification of 'race'—that is, treating it as an agent in its own right, for this perpetuates the very concept that has been discredited as false and unscientific.[17]

In Miles's view, to claim that opportunities in a racially stratified society "appear to be determined by the race into which one is born" is in fact a mistake and a mystification; for it is racism, not race, that operates as an effective societal force. As an example, he argues that discrimination in hiring is driven by racist attitudes rather than any intrinsic racial attribute.[18] In this way, he advocated a shift away from the race relations paradigm and centring sociological inquiry on racism by identifying the economic, political, and ideological conditions that render racial attribution, both socially and academically, commonly accepted as real.

1.1.2 Politicising racism

Robert Miles's elaborations on racism proceed from his research on migration and labour, which inevitably led him to confront not just the sociological approach to race relations but also their juridical-political equivalents.[19] Scholars broadly agree that the substantial

[17] Robert Miles, *Racism and Migrant Labour* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 22–43.
[18] Ibid., 33.
[19] Rob Waters contends that there was no straightforward translation from race relations research to concrete policy measures. Nonetheless, as the author himself acknowledges, the relevance of this social research endeavour remains crucial to the political function that sociology had assumed, particularly in the post-war and social planning period ('Race, Citizenship and "Race Relations" Research in Late-Twentieth-Century Britain', *Modern British History* 34, no. 3 [2023]: 491–514). This was the kind of publicly engaged sociology that underpinned the work of Thomas Marshall, playing a crucial role in the development of new forms of citizenship grounded in social rights (Thomas H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class: And Other Essays* [Cambridge University Press, 1950]; see also the introduction to the Italian translation, Sandro

demand for labour, especially in low-profitable and labour-intensive sectors required for post-war economic reconstruction, created a context for a seemingly 'liberal' approach to immigration by British governments. Faced with an estimated shortage of 1.5 million workers in the immediate post-war years,[20] and with many Britons emigrating to the white countries of the so-called Old Commonwealth,[21] the British government neither systematically promoted nor actively regulated immigration from its colonies until the early 1960s. In fact, after having considered the possibility of filling the gaps in the labour market with colonial workers, the Royal Commission of Population eventually discouraged formal employment agreements addressing colonials, fearing housing and assimilation problems, and doubting the quality of their work performance. Therefore, formal recruitment schemes such as the European Voluntary Workers (EVW) programme targeted Eastern and Southern European workers and displaced peoples, whereas migration flows from colonial territories (such as the West Indies and some African colonies) and former colonial states (India and Pakistan, independent since 1947) spontaneously increased over time.[22]

Mezzadra, 'Diritti di cittadinanza e *welfare state. Citizenship and Social Class* di Tom Marshall cinquant'anni dopo', in *Cittadinanza e classe sociale*, by Thomas H. Marshall [Laterza, 2002]). Rather than seeking a direct correspondence between social research and policies, this study aims to highlight how the conceptualisation of race relations both stemmed from the consequences of immigration policies and served as the ideological and political instrument through which Britain was governed in an increasingly racialised way. For the relation between social sciences and political theory, see Maurizio Ricciardi, 'Modernità e dottrina. Sulla genesi delle scienze sociali come forma contemporanea della teoria politica', in *Tra melancolia e disciplina. Per una storia costituzionale delle dottrine politiche. Festschrift für Pierangelo Schiera*, ed. Monica Cioli and Maurizio Ricciardi, Quaderni di Scienza & Politica (Dipartimento delle Arti, Università di Bologna, 2021).

[20] Ian R. G. Spencer, ed., *British Immigration Policy since 1939: The Making of Multi-Racial Britain* (Routledge, 1997), 38.

[21] Paul Corner, *Sviluppo del capitale ed emigrazione in Europa: La Gran Bretagna* (Mazzotta, 1978), 25–26; Paul, 'British Subjects'. The distinction between Old and New Commonwealth countries emerged in British political discourse alongside the acceleration of decolonisation in the aftermath of World War II. It was meant to differentiate between the predominantly white former dominions that had been independent since the 1930s (e.g., Australia, Canada, or even South Africa, where whites were numerically smaller but politically dominant) and the newly independent, largely non-white former colonies in Africa, the Caribbean, and South Asia. While both groups were part of the Commonwealth and retained formal citizenship rights, this distinction increasingly functioned as a racialised framework within immigration debates.

[22] Zig Layton-Henry, *The Politics of Immigration: Immigration, 'race' and 'Race' Relations in Post-War Britain* (Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 27–28; Johannes-Dieter Steinert, 'British Post-War Migration Policy and Displaced Persons in Europe', in *The Disentanglement of Populations: Migration, Expulsion and Displacement in Post-War Europe, 1944–9*, ed. Jessica Reinisch and Elizabeth White (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2011); Simone Duranti, *Dis-union Jack: Immigrazione, minoranze etniche e razzismo in Inghilterra (1945-90)* (Donzelli, 2024), 34.

Voluntary migration from the colonies proved harder to regulate than formal labour recruitment schemes, imposing limitations on quotas. Colonial citizens were legally recognised as "British subjects" under the British Nationality Act 1948, which granted them the right to enter Britain as any other British-born resident. By the early 1950s, black immigration, although numerically modest, had become a subject of mounting concern in political parties and Cabinet discussions, though it had not yet assumed public relevance.[23] These backbench discussions expressed fears about black migrants as a potential threat to Britain's social order, portraying their presence as a challenge to racial homogeneity, for "Black immigration, it was alleged, would create problems which were insoluble precisely because their provenance was 'racial' and not political."[24] The conceptual framework of race relations thus became the primary lens through which the interactions between black and white populations were interpreted, leading not just to the racialisation of immigration but rather to the reconstruction of a white British identity.[25]

Robert Miles identified the 1958 riots as a critical turning point in this racialisation process. Between August 23 and September 2, hundreds of white people harassed, attacked, and rioted against West Indian residents in Notting Hill; similar events occurred in Nottingham, though with fewer people involved. While West Indians were the targets of these attacks, political and media narratives framed the violence not as examples of white racism but as a consequence of the increasing presence of New Commonwealth settlers.[26] In other terms, public and political discourse downplayed the actions of native residents in perpetrating racial violence, despite them being arrested in great numbers by

[23] Shirley Joshi and Bob Carter, 'The Role of Labour in the Creation of a Racist Britain', *Race & Class* 25, no. 3 (1984): 53–70; D. W. Dean, 'Conservative Governments and the Restriction of Commonwealth Immigration in the 1950s: The Problems of Constraint', *The Historical Journal* 35, no. 1 (1992): 171–94.
[24] Bob Carter et al., 'The 1951-55 Conservative Government and the Racialisation of Black Immigration', in *Inside Babylon: The Caribbean Diaspora in Britain*, ed. Winston James and Clive Harris (Verso, 1993), 69. See also Paul, 'British Subjects'; Eva Garau, 'Britain between Identity Politics and Immigration. The Conservative Approach from the Empire Windrush to the "Rivers of Blood" Speech, 1948–1968', in *Europe between Migrations, Decolonization and Integration (1945–1992)*, ed. Giuliana Laschi et al. (Routledge, 2020).
[25] Bill Schwarz, '"The Only White Man in There": The Re-Racialisation of England, 1956-1968', *Race & Class* 38, no. 1 (1996): 65–78; Barnor Hesse, 'Introduction: Un/Settled Multiculturalisms', in *Un/Settled Multiculturalisms: Diasporas, Entanglements, 'Transruptions'*, ed. Barnor Hesse (Zed Books, 2000), 5–6.
[26] "Having accepted that these migrants were of different 'race', there was a certain logic in the argument that immigration was producing a 'race problem' in Britain because it was through immigration that the different 'races' were being brought into contact" (Robert Miles, 'The Riots of 1958: Notes on the Ideological Construction of "Race Relations" as a Political Issue in Britain', *Immigrants & Minorities* 3, no. 3 [1984]: 269).

the police, while framing the presence of non-white communities on British soil as the cause of social disorder, as the very reason for unbalancing otherwise stable race relations. The discourse of race relations then attempted to translate them into a discourse on social order, well before Margaret Thatcher's more explicitly racist calls for law and order that, on the one hand, provided justification for calls to tighten immigration controls, and on the other, directly affected the living and working conditions of black people in Britain. By translating racist concerns into the apparently depoliticised language of race relations, racism itself was overlooked "as a significant political force in Britain,"[27] and policy efforts focused instead on regulating the field in an attempt to stabilise and make race relations balanced.

From 1962 to 1978, bipartisan consensus shaped increasingly restrictive immigration policies, starting with the Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962, reflecting a shared approach between Labour and Conservative governments that did not question but rather confirmed similar policies over the years.[28] As the political scientist Anthony Messina observed, this consensus was built on the attempt to "depoliticise" racial issues by systematically excluding them from party-political competition, at least until Thatcher's rise to the Conservative Party leadership in 1975.[29] Yet this process of depoliticisation extended well beyond the institutional sphere. The race relations framework did not simply remove racism from political discourse; it actively masked it

[27] Ibid., 270.

[28] The Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962 marked the beginning of the gradual restriction of colonial subjects' right to enter and reside in Britain, and their formal legal codification as *immigrants*. The Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962 changed the relationship between the former mother country and the Commonwealth nations by retaining colonial citizens' legal status as British subjects, but preventing them from permanently moving to Britain by limiting the right of residence to those born in the British Isles. The 1962 Act also introduced the system of work permits (vouchers), the number of which varied from year to year to respond to labour shortages in certain sectors and to regulate the entry of workers formally designated as immigrants. The Act was later amended by the Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1968 in response to the crisis of Asian refugees fleeing independent Kenya, which further restricted the right to abide for those who could claim at least one parent or grandparent born in Britain. This policy would inspire the *patriality* principle for the 1971 Immigration Act (Layton-Henry, *The Politics of Immigration*, 75–79; Spencer, *British Immigration Policy*, 129–43; Randall Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration in Post-War Britain: The Institutional Origins of a Multicultural Nation* [Oxford University Press, 2000]; Duranti, *Dis-union Jack*, 75–102).

[29] Anthony M. Messina, 'Race and Party Competition in Britain: Policy Formation in the Post-Consensus Period', *Parliamentary Affairs* 38, no. 4 (1985): 423–36. For an analysis that also takes into account grassroots and non-institutional forces—either racist or anti-racist—as well as certain experiences of black political organization in determining these policies, see Gideon Ben-Tovim and John Gabriel, 'The Politics of Race in Britain, 1962-79: A Review of the Major Trends and of Recent Debates', in *'Race' in Britain: Continuity and Change*, 2nd edn, ed. Charles Husband (Hutchinson, 1987).

by naturalising "not racial belonging but racist conduct."[30] The state's approach aimed to neutralise and manage potential social conflicts originating from racist premises by reframing them as individual prejudices, which was how racism was mentioned to operate in a new society freed from the phantom of racist ideologies as a legitimate political reason. This logic underpinned government interventions to counter racial discrimination, such as the Race Relations Acts of 1965 and 1968, which addressed discrimination as a social problem to be managed through education, conciliation, and limited legal redress. Rather than tackling racism, these policies effectively facilitated a reconfiguration of racial discourse that enabled its persistence in a new fashion.[31]

Nevertheless, the increased racialisation of British politics was not merely a consequence of the political unavoidability of racial issues that led previously unwilling Cabinets to publicly discuss what used to be dealt with in secret. The alleged instability of race relations was deliberately exploited and actively promoted by figures such as Peter Griffiths and Enoch Powell, as well as by far-right organisations such as the National Front, both in terms of their racist propaganda and physical attacks on black people.[32] Simultaneously, the mobilisation and organisation of black communities in Britain provided a theoretical and practical critique of the institutional consensus on race relations as early as the 1960s. Rejecting the individualised language of race relations, black activists instead historicised the question of racism as a structural condition that pervaded all aspects of black lives in Britain. Their critique shifted the focus from interpersonal relations to white racism as the central issue, exposing and challenging the state's liberal approaches that sought to mediate and control blacks' possibilities and lives while claiming to be addressing the source of their oppression. Black struggles against racism thus anticipated, fostered, and dictated the pace of academic discussions and critiques of the race relations paradigm, as they would have been later "echoed in the context of

[30] Étienne Balibar, 'Is There a "Neo-Racism"?', in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, by Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (Verso Books, 1991; originally published as *Race, nation, classe. Les Identités ambiguës* [Editions La Decouverte, 1988]), 22.
[31] Gavin Schaffer, 'Legislating against Hatred: Meaning and Motive in Section Six of the Race Relations Act of 1965', *Modern British History* 25, no. 2 (2014): 251–75.
[32] Camilla Schofield, *Enoch Powell and the Making of Postcolonial Britain* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

production of knowledge about racism … to fix the theoretical debate on questions of power and inequality."[33]

However, black radical organisations rarely engaged in theoretical definitions of racism, opting to describe its concrete manifestations and transformations instead. Among the few explicit definitions found in their writings, in 1970, the BUFP defined racism as a doctrine of racial superiority, while shifting toward a more comprehensive analysis of its effects as their discourse evolved in the following years.[34] In their manifesto, the Black Workers' League, an organisation composed by African, Asian and Caribbean workers evolving from former British Black Power groups, distinguished between racism as a structural and systemic phenomenon embedded in capitalist and state institutions, and racialism as an ideological by-product—an internalised consequence of racism that shaped discriminatory attitudes at the individual level, particularly among the white working class. While retaining the older meaning of a belief in racial supremacy, apparently displaced by the post-war scientific critique, this distinction also tried to capture racism's contemporary transformation. Racism was generically framed as a set of more or less institutional practices that shaped interpersonal attitudes, and that described a peculiar form of management, oppression, and exploitation of black people, sustained and reproduced through material as well as cultural and ideological processes.[35] In this sense, racism took on a systemic character that directly implicated the overall reproduction of capitalist society and its main actors, eventually hindering class struggle.

The structural understanding of racism is thus a recurring theme in the conceptualisations developed by various grassroots organisations, albeit with different emphases. For some, racism is a pervasive and persistent condition that structures the entirety of black people's experiences in Britain—in housing, education, relations with the police and the state, employment, and labour organisations. Groups such as the RTC and the BWG highlighted how racism affected lived experiences and its consequences for black political organisations. They sought to identify specific instances of racism to frame it as a social problem, hold accountable those responsible, and demand political

[33] Solomos and Back, 'Conceptualising Racisms', 149.
[34] BUFP, 'Political Dictionary', *Black Voice*, September 1970, 4, GPI (NEW/14/1).
[35] Black Workers' League, 'Black Liberation in Britain. Black Workers' League Manifesto', *The Black Liberator* 1, nos 2–3 (1972): 79, GPI (JOU/3/2).

responses. From the "vantage position" of the black working class, the RTC argued, it was possible to articulate "a total view of the social order" that showed how racism underpinned the entire constitution of British society in a way that was at once unitary and all-encompassing—for it affected all social subjects in the same social formation—but differentiated and multifaceted with respect to its effects. As they wrote:

> Housing, the police, the courts, conditions of work, problems of one parent families present themselves to us, not as separate entities, but as a total experience to be fought in total terms.[36]

This is even clearer in the BWG's depiction of "the harsh realities of racism" that inform a specifically black definition of racism, opposed to the "over-simplification" advanced by white anti-fascist groups who reduce racism to the National Front. In the BWG's definition, racism is simultaneously the unified effects of oppressions experienced in education, housing, employment, and the relations to the state's institutions—so that "it is impossible to name one British institution which does not practice racism!"—and the peculiar experience of black women who lived its consequences in their intersection with sexism. This is seen in immigration debates, whenever sexism becomes "a tool of racism" for government claiming to be willing to stop dependants' immigration mostly referring to wife and fiancés, or in the adoption of "racist child benefits schemes" such as the 1975 Child Benefit Act that restricted the payment of the allowance to mothers (previously it was paid to any parents) whose children are living in Britain with her (previously it also counted children living abroad).[37]

Those who explicitly linked racism to the operations of capital or the capitalist state shared a structural understanding of racism, too, although their analysis sought more to highlight the instrumental nature of racism as a deliberate tool of capitalist exploitation. The BUFP and TBL explicitly defined racism as a form of oppression embedded in

[36] RTC, 'Judgement Has Come and Mercy Has Gone', *Race Today* 7, no. 6 (1975): 123.
[37] BWG, 'Editorial', in *Speak Out! A Brixton Black Women's Group Reader*, by BWG, ed. Milo Miller (first published in *Speak Out!* 1: 2-3, 1977; repr., Verso, 2023), 18; BWG, 'Editorial', in *Speak Out! A Brixton Black Women's Group Reader*, by BWG, ed. Milo Miller (first published in *Speak Out!* 2: 2-3, 1979; repr., Verso Books, 2023), 72; BWG, 'The All-Party Select Committee on Immigration. Another Attack on Black People', in *Speak Out! A Brixton Black Women's Group Reader*, by BWG, ed. Milo Miller (first published in *Speak Out!* 2: 5-6, 1979; repr., Verso Books, 2023), 81; BWG, 'The Child Benefit Act. Racist Legislation Against Black Families', in *Speak Out! A Brixton Black Women's Group Reader*, by BWG, ed. Milo Miller (first published in *Speak Out!* 2: 7, 1979; repr., Verso Books, 2023), 84.

capitalist social relations.[38] The BLF extended this argument, asserting that racism was not merely a product of capitalism but was "deeply rooted in British society and its origins date back to the slave trade era and expansion of British imperialism."[39] In this view, racism served as a mechanism through which both state and capital managed class conflict, reinforcing both class domination and white supremacy. As the BLF argued, although originating from economic reasons, racism was now permeating the entirety of British society, becoming a constitutive part of its "way of life."

> It is not our duty to cure Euro/Anglo-Saxon of this mental disease. It is our job to see that we protect ourselves from racial discrimination and racial prejudice which are manifestations of this sickness. Even more insidious than individual racism is institutional racism which is instrumental in keeping Black people down.[40]

This system of discriminatory practices implicated the state in maintaining a stratified labour force and enforcing discipline within both the sphere of production and social reproduction, thereby ensuring that this workforce, while exploited, remained subdued. By highlighting the structural nature of racism, these movements thus questioned the very role of the state in perpetuating racial hierarchies and in suppressing social conflicts originating in the politicisation of race and the struggle against racism through its liberal mediation specifically devoted to racial topics. As historian Rosalind E. Wild notes, the "mundane daily struggles" black people had to face since their arrival in the United Kingdom sustained their political activities and reflections in the 1970s, and gave meaning to the framing of racism as a structural force determining black lives.[41]

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[38] See the editorial introduction to Black Workers' League, 'Work Situation and Black Workers. Black Worker's League Statement', *The Black Liberator* 1, no. 4 (1972): 183–87, GPI (JOU/3/3); and also, Alrick X. Cambridge, 'Marxism and Black Nationalism', *The Black Liberator* 2, no. 1 (1973): n. 46.

[39] BLF, 'The Black Liberation Front Accuse Britain of Racism', *Grassroots*, October 1978, 2, BCA (LIBFRONT).

[40] '50 Questions and Answers. Second Draft', n.d., 16, SOARES/2, BCA. Although not dated nor signed, this document is referenced as a BLF's internal discussion in 'Working Document on Proposed Changes in the BLF at the AGM', n.d., SOARES/2, BCA. The first draft was written by "Bro T," most likely Tony Soares (cf. 'Fifty Questions and Answers Bro T's Initial Draft', n.d., SOARES/2, BCA; on Soares, see Anne-Marie Angelo, '"We All Became Black": Tony Soares, African-American Internationalists, and Anti-Imperialism', in *The Other Special Relationship: Race, Rights, and Riots in Britain and the United States*, ed. R.D.G. Kelley and S. Tuck [Palgrave, 2015]).

[41] Rosalind Eleanor Wild, '"Black Was the Colour of Our Fight": The Transnational Roots of British Black Power', in *The Other Special Relationship: Race, Rights, and Riots in Britain and the United States*, ed. R.D.G. Kelley and S. Tuck (Palgrave, 2015), 34. Similarly, Sivanandan saying that the personal became political in Wild, 'Black Power in Britain', 34.

As will be further explored in the following chapters, the central debates were not over the conceptualisation of racism, nor on its structural nature as a force determining blacks' lives, but rather its relations to class, understood through the prism of race, and the forms of political organisation it necessitated. While theoretical divergences shaped their respective political strategies, reflecting broader disagreements about how to combat racism and build black liberation within British society, their common understanding lay in the recognition of racism's key role in the reproduction of social hierarchies. This is particularly evident in their discussions of black struggles against racism in education, a key site of social reproduction, for it fulfilled both class-based workforce reproduction and racial disciplining. In this sense, it inevitably became intertwined with struggles and critiques of housing and employment, thereby making reproduction a key site for black struggles.

1.1.3 Reproducing (through) racism

When *The Black Liberator* began publication in late 1971, it identified education as a crucial battleground for black struggle in Britain.[42] Just months earlier, Bernard Coard had exposed the systematic failing of West Indian children, based on IQ tests that classified them as "educationally subnormal" (ESN) and relegated them to special schools. This practice was closely linked to the dispersal policy, commonly known as 'bussing,' introduced by the Department of Education and Science in 1965. In response to white parents' alarms that immigrant children were impeding their children's education, this policy enforced a 30% cap on immigrant students per school, leading to the forced relocation of South Asian and Caribbean students to predominantly white schools far from their communities, as seen in areas like Southall and Brentford in London.[43] Officially presented as means of integration, these policies were framed as efforts to meet the 'special needs' of supposedly subnormal children or to prevent their ghettoisation in so-called 'immigrant schools.' By contrast, grassroots black organisations

[42] 'Reader's Note', *The Black Liberator* 1, no. 1 (1971), GPI (JOU/3/1).

[43] Bernard Coard, *How the West Indian Child Is Made Educationally Sub-Normal in the British School System* (New Beacon Books, 1971). For examples of black critiques of the British education system, see Kehinde Andrews, *Resisting Racism: Race, Inequality, and the Black Supplementary School Movement* (Institute of Education Press, 2013); Waters, *Thinking Black*, 125–64; Duranti, *Dis-union Jack*, 201–5. On 'bussing', see Olivier Esteves, *The 'desegregation' of English Schools: Bussing, Race and Urban Space, 1960s–80s* (Manchester University Press, 2018).

argued that these measures exposed the peculiar model of integration the British state wanted to impose on black children—one designated to mould them into a subordinate position within the hierarchical organisation of the workforce. Having previously relied on the inflow of migrant labour from the colonies in the post-war period, the tightening of immigration policies from the early 1960s onwards forced the British state to consider how to produce a home-grown black labour force within Britain itself.

TBL argued that racism played a key role in this process. "Racism, as part of the ruling class ideology of repression, is enforced and reinforced in the minds of black and white children by the school system," demonstrating how "cultural imperialism operates and permeates the entire fabric of the capitalist school system."[44] This critique locates racism as part of the ideological apparatus that characterises the complex reality of the capitalist state, rather than as a residual prejudice of individuals. Schools were responsible for reproducing the very same imperial ideology that had legitimised British century-old rule over its colonies, although reconfiguring and actualising it for the metropolitan context and the requirements of a highly industrial society. This entailed, firstly, reproducing workers with specific skills and, secondly, acclimatising the workforce to the systemic oppressions they would encounter daily—e.g., labour discipline and social oppression both inside and outside the factory. For the supposed social uplift promised by education and economic growth was in fact a deception, this qualification process was immediately and doubly particularised through racism. Within schools, the vast majority of West Indian students were denied access to higher education in light of their ESN classification. Outside school, even the few Caribbean youths who managed to leave with a reasonable level of education were systematically excluded from certain jobs, regardless of their qualifications, and channelled into low-skilled employment that reinforced and reproduced their class position within the capitalist order.[45]

For this reason, Alrick Xavier Cambridge, editor of *The Black Liberator*, in developing his critique of the British education system (and in formulating a programme of black self-education), linked the cultural and social effects of the transition from

[44] R H Leon, 'Critical Remarks on Bernard Coard's Book', *The Black Liberator* 1, no. 1 (1971): 22, GPI (JOU/3/1).
[45] Alrick X. Cambridge, 'Education and the West Indian Child - A Criticism of the ESN School System', *The Black Liberator* 1, no. 1 (1971): 9–19, GPI (JOU/3/1).

colonial to industrial British society to the systematic failure of Caribbean children in schools. He concluded that the education system operated as a "deliberate policy on the part of the capitalist ruling class governments, Labour or Conservative, and their education authorities" against black working-class students. On the one hand, he highlighted the contradiction between the British colonial education system in the Caribbean and the domestic British system.[46] Language difficulties—often exaggerated by teachers who held racist or paternalistic attitudes because of their "covert or overt xenophobia"—combined with a curriculum embedded with "inbuilt racist principles of superiority" and the poor conditions in which education was delivered. On the other hand, Cambridge argued that this contradiction must be understood within the broader social conditions in which Caribbean children lived—housing precarity, labour exploitation, and workplace discrimination.[47]

In this light, the ESN classification appeared as a proper disciplinary tool through which the British education system was not merely failing black children but actively structuring their oppression within Britain's capitalist and racial order. This criticism was explicit in the BUFP analysis that, by declaring "a perfectly normal child into a sub-normal child," the ESN system functioned as a mechanism of disciplinary subordination, performing the double task of ensuring that Black youth remained positioned within the lowest levels of the workforce and perpetuating racist ideas. Education was thus an instrument for reproducing a stratified and disciplined labour force through the exercise of racism in both schooling and employment.

> The Black child is placed in the E.S.N. school not because they are mentally retarded, but because they are from the lowest strata of the working class—THE BLACK WORKING CLASS—consequently, the most exploited and deprived section. … Then the process to prepare the Black child for the most menial jobs in the society or to become part of the unemployed pool of labour so necessary to capitalism.[48]

[46] Many West Indian intellectuals recall the relevance of these contradictions in framing their imaginaries and attitudes towards the metropole, see C. L. R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* (Stanley Paul & Co, 1963; repr., Duke University Press, 2013), 29–38; George Lamming, 'Western Education and the Caribbean Intellectual', in *Coming, Coming Home: Conversations II* (House of Nehesi, 1995); Stuart Hall, *Familiar Stranger*, 112–16.
[47] Cambridge, 'A Criticism of the ESN', 9–10.
[48] BUFP, 'The E.S.N. World We Must Not Accept', *Black Voice* 4, no. 4 (1973): 7, UCL (ALTER PRESS/Box 32).

In this context, the struggle for education was not merely about access to education but about dismantling the structures that systematically relegated black youth to the lowest tiers of British society. Therefore, according to the Indian-born teacher, writer and RTC activist Farrukh Dhondy, black children's struggles in schools have caused the British state to think "how to control them." The British state mobilised various governmental bodies to answer this problem, for the "old process of socialization … that had processed white labour power and passed it through the sieve of the meritocracy" was not giving the same results with black children.[49] On the one hand, the "majority black schools [did] not contribute efficient, well-trained, disciplined products for the assembly lines of the British economy," on the others, black parents held different expectations of education, that would have opened better doors for their children with respect to "mount the wage differential" and to provide their children "with culture, with identity, and so with strength."[50] Their aspirations for their children were shaped by a colonial memory in which education offered limited opportunities for social mobility, even funding scholarships for working-class students to pursue further studies in the metropole. Such expectations profoundly clashed with the reality of British schooling, where these were neglected by racism and class subordination.

Black youth's experience of schooling was not synonymous with "education" but rather with "training," as the system was designed to reproduce a segmented labour force and to freeze the working class as such. Even in the metropole, "the British system of concessions allowed a few from the working class to slip through the net and become doctors, lawyers,"[51] while presenting itself to most of them as a training ground for exploitation and racist oppression.

> School is their most immediate experience of a state institution, if indeed it isn't borstal or jail. Their rejection of work is a rejection of the level to which schools have skilled them as labour power, and when the community feeds that rejection back into the school system, it becomes a rejection of the functions of schooling. It is this rejection that causes the buyers of labour most anxiety, and it is in this context, that of labour and capital, in which we must set the black experience of schools.[52]

[49] Farrukh Dhondy, 'The Black Explosion in School', *Race Today* 6, no. 2 (1974): 44.
[50] RTC, 'Who's Afraid of Ghetto Schools? Busing in Ealing', *Race Today* 7, no. 1 (1975): 9.
[51] Farrukh Dhondy, 'Teaching Young Blacks', *Race Today* 10, no. 4 (1978): 80.
[52] Dhondy, 'Black Explosion', 45.

As the RTC noted, black youth who perceived the "school as a factory in which they are graded into skilled and unskilled labour, disciplined into collective productive behaviour and in which they are forced into the routines they rebel against," were reacting to a process of socialisation into racist hierarchies embedded with school curricula and practices.[53] Black youth resistance in school, then, was as much about resisting the discipline that the school was supposed to provide on behalf of capital (meaning, discipline at work) as it was about rejecting the peculiar commodity (culture) that education offered. While the school promised to eradicate racism by integrating black children and exposing them to white peers, the experience of racism in British schools could not be reduced to interpersonal hostility or cultural ignorance. Rather, racism was embedded in the structural function of education "at the junction of labour and capital." Racism, as experienced, manifested itself as a complex disciplinary structure that permeated the school's curriculum and was intertwined with what took place outside the classroom. In line with the race relations paradigm described above, black children were seen as a problem to be dealt with. The dispersal policy itself—critically experienced as a form of "enforced migration"—was justified on the basis of racist premises: either the need to overcome "the natural handicap of being non-English," or the need to make white working-class children comfortable with "the customs and culture of the blacks they are required to live and work with."[54]

It was within this context of struggle, on the part of black families and youth, that demands for multicultural education emerged, initially led by anti-racist teachers and later supported by official institutions such as the British Parliament's Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration. These demands aimed to incorporate "Black studies" into school curricula to counter the systemic neglect of black history and culture and to respond to black parents' mobilisations.[55] However, once institutionalised by entering schools, "the impetus that gave rise to black studies, which was an inspiration to know yourself and your power, drifted into the formalities of history and geography," or even in seeing black studies "as a response to the special needs of the black student."[56]

[53] RTC, 'Policing Schools', *Race Today* 8, no. 1 (1976): 3.
[54] RTC, 'Ghetto Schools', 9–10.
[55] Max Farrar, 'Racism, Education and Black Self Organisation', *Critical Social Policy* 12, no. 36 (1993): 53–72; Waters, *Thinking Black*, 154–64.
[56] Dhondy, 'Black Explosion', 47.

In line with his thorough demystification of schooling, Dhondy's critique directly questioned the real possibilities and aims of multicultural education once it has been subsumed by the state, showing how it linked and reproduced together race and class. The educational valorisation of black culture became one of the official responses—alongside increased policing[57]—to the disproportionately high numbers of black school leavers, who had come to see education as serving the interests of capital rather than their own. Even when African history or slavery was introduced into the curriculum, these inclusions did "little to alter the fact that … school will still produce a small percentage of skilled workers, a larger percentage of semi-skilled ones and a very large percentage of unskilled ones." The ideal of culture to be taught continued to be rooted in "Britain's imperial history and high cultural artefacts," thus reshaping Black culture to fit within a white cultural framework, while excluding the radical energies that emerged from "the primary fact of working class life—the struggle against the ownership of wealth and distribution of wealth in a capitalist society."[58] According to Dhondy, if one were to paint this struggle in black, looking at black youth's everyday resistance to police, their refusal of degrading jobs, and their wider conflicts with the structures of British capitalist society, one would find what culture means to black people—namely, "political freedom."[59]

The introduction of specific classes in Black Studies was ultimately insufficient as long as the foundational racist assumptions underlying black students' broader lived experience remained unchallenged. Therefore, as Dhondy acknowledges, "black students in schools will more readily concentrate on the interference of police in their lives and educational institutions, than they will on the quality of the curriculum."[60] For this reason, students demanded black studies be reimagined as moments to engage with the wider social experience of racism—eventually understood as "a unified system of repression and oppression"[61]—sustained through its own institutions and intermediaries, which were seen to operate like "a kind of colonial office for the black community in this country."[62]

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[57] RTC, 'Policing Schools'; Hazel V. Carby, 'Schooling in Babylon', in *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain* (Hutchinson & Co, 1982; repr., Routledge, 2005), 193 ff.
[58] Dhondy, 'Teaching Young Blacks', 85–86.
[59] Dhondy, 'Black Explosion', 45.
[60] Dhondy, 'Teaching Young Blacks', 83.
[61] RTC, 'Who's Educating Who? The Black Education Movement and the Struggle for Power', *Race Today* 7, no. 8 (1975): 186.
[62] RTC, 'Black Parents and Students on the Move', *Race Today* 8, no. 10 (1976): 197.

The critique of education as a mechanism for the reproduction of labour power seeks to make visible a structural antagonism rooted in both the specific contours of post-war British capitalism, marked by its enduring imperialist character,[63] and its concrete articulations through the race relations industry. This apparatus served to manage the working class as a whole, and its black component in particular. The broader process of reproducing workers as members of the working class was permeated by and enacted through racism, a system that maintained and deepened the stratification and fragmentation of waged labour. Racism then operates not merely as an ideological addition but as a constitutive mechanism of capitalist reproduction.

This becomes particularly clear in the BUFP's critical analysis of the conditions of black doctors in Britain. Despite their education and professional training, these doctors were consistently regarded as less qualified than their white counterparts. As the BUFP argued, this perception was not incidental but was explicitly produced to degrade the standing of black workers as a whole, thereby contributing to the division of the working class. Such practices functioned to instil and reproduce the very sense of inferiority that racism presupposes. They reinforce a hierarchy within the medical profession and the NHS, wherein black doctors were often excluded from certain positions or channelled to inferior roles. As the BUFP noted, "by attacking the Black doctors the state gives the impression that they are not needed in this country," thereby legitimising calls for stricter immigration controls and successive demands for repatriation. In this dynamic, racism plays different roles, operating both as the ideology that explains labour and social

[63] The importance of the anti-imperialist struggle was another factor common to the various black radical groups. Many of these were part of anti-imperialist circles, and attention to national liberation struggles in the colonies was emphasised in all their newspapers through specific sections reporting and analysing developments from the colonies, and through attempts to forge political links between struggles in Britain and anti-imperialist struggles. While some theorised imperialism within historical analyses of world capitalism, for others—such as the BLF—imperialism pointed to the racist nature of this unified system of oppression: "the world today is ruled by international white Power (sometimes defined as imperialism)" ('50 Questions', 14). This has had the effect of making racism the primary contradiction for black people worldwide, because the oppression of black people was not only economic, but "in every other fashion by the entire white society," including the white working class (from which "the most intense racist oppression" emanates) and labour organisations such as parties and trade unions. It is also a global phenomenon and the result of a long colonial history, repeated with neo-colonialism and the continued exploitation of the Third World even after the end of the empires, and with oppression in the metropolises that allows white society to maintain its position of political (command) and economic (exploitation, higher standards of living) privilege (BLF, *Revolutionary Black Nationalism. A Paper for Discussion* [London, 1973], 1–2, GPI (JRL/3/1/4)). For anti-imperialism's topicality in British Black Power, see Narayan, 'British Black Power'.

hierarchisation and the material force of the state that implements this process. In this way, racism is embedded within the social relations of production and reproduction. Therefore, the targeting of black doctors was to be understood in relation to the material demands of the NHS and the need to train new medical professionals. By drawing on the pools of black doctors educated in the former colonies, the British state externalised the costs of their training to poorer Commonwealth countries.[64] This example illustrates a broader critique advanced by the BUFP: the need to understand how the superstructure of imperialism operates, and to undertake a more thorough analysis of the relation between racism and the state.

1.2 Racism and the state

1.2.1 Divide and rule

Within the political elaborations of the BUFP, racism is not confined to its most violent or extreme manifestations, which have become increasingly vocal since the mid-1960s, but it is theorised as a fundamental logic "in the development of the society," "an integral part of this society [that] penetrates its every aspect."[65] The reproduction of capitalist society rests on the assurances granted by racism, which is nonetheless not a natural or innate disposition stemming from social interaction, nor can it be attributed to individuals born as racists.[66] By contrast, there are some institutions responsible for the ordered reproduction and development of capitalist society, which perpetuate racism to make it appear as if it were a natural process responding to its own logic. These institutions, integral to the functioning of the contemporary capitalist state, thus mask the realities of violence and coercion that capitalist social production and reproduction entail.

Against the backdrop of the rise of neo-fascist groups, they thus argue that the re-emergence of racism is not a symptom of a crisis in democracy, but a structural condition that shapes even liberal regimes. As early as 1973, the BUFP wrote that regardless of the authoritarian or democratic form of the state, capitalist and imperialist powers "become 'fascist' when their internal economy and 'law and order' reach crises pitch; when progressive forces threaten the fabric of the State," which leads the ruling class to resort

[64] BUFP, 'Blatant Racism', *Black Voice* 6, no. 2 (1975): 5, BCA (RC/PERIODICALS/59).
[65] BUFP, 'Racism at Labour Club', *Black Voice* 10, no. 1 (1979): 8, UCL (ALTER PRESS/Box 32).
[66] BUFP, 'Know the Enemy', *Black Voice*, 1976, 1, BCA (RC/PERIODICALS/59).

to coercive measures to secure its rule.[67] Racism, thus, is intended, from their earlier writings, as a strategy and a weapon at the disposal of the state, to be used at times when the struggle against a certain economic or political order intensifies.

Accordingly, the political presence of racism as an organised force is not to be attributed solely to "the rise of the fascist organizations," but must be traced "from the passing of the first Commonwealth Immigration Act in 1962." As already analysed, this legislation moved racism from the margins of political discourse into the realm of legitimate state and social policy. Racism, in other words, took the form of both a social force and a legislative initiative. Before this moment, it was not considered acceptable "to make racist noise" in public and racist rhetoric and concerns had to remain concealed and relegated to the backbenches of Parliament. The introduction of measures aimed at curbing immigration, framed around the notion that racial tensions stemmed from the growing numbers of black immigrants, gave credibility to explicitly racist propaganda and political organisations. In this framework, the BUFP argued, the difference between liberal parties and fascist movements did not lie in the degree of racism expressed but in the modalities of its implementation: while the National Front openly advocated for repatriation and was responsible for racist attacks on black people, the Labour and Conservative parties perpetuated and legitimised racism through the courts, the police, the education system, the labour market, and immigration control measures.[68] For this reason, the BUFP programme paper identifies racism as a social phenomenon that

> to a great extent overshadowed the class question, but of course could not eradicate it; for racial oppression and class exploitation were both realities, only at that time one (racism) took precedence over the other because of its broad support of which class boundaries seemed to dissolve without the slightest resistance.[69]

Racism is thus not just a concern for the black people who experience its violent effects personally, but it is of general significance to the class struggle in Britain, for it "remains a product and a strong tool of capitalist oppression."[70] Racism emerged as a

[67] BUFP, 'Editorial', *Black Voice* 4, no. 3 (1973): 2, UCL (ALTER PRESS/Box 32).
[68] BUFP, 'Rise of the Fascist Organizations', *Black Voice* 11, no. 1 (1980): 12, GPI (NEW/14/18).
[69] R. L. and J. L., 'What Is the B.U.F.P.?', 3 May 1974, 5, DADZIE/2/1/7, BCA. Initials most probably refer to Roger and Joan Lofters, listed as main party members in Goulbourne, 'Africa and the Caribbean', 87.
[70] BUFP, 'Black People Are Part of the Working Class', *Black Voice* 6, no. 2 (1975): 3, BCA (RC/PERIODICALS/59).

dominant force at certain moments in the post-war conjuncture, when class lines were either too faint to be noticed or too clear to be ignored. In the first case, part of the reason that allowed a section of the white British working class to *never have it so good* was the movement of colonial workers to the former imperial metropole and their adaptation "to the complexity of a highly developed industrial labour market," characterised not only by a higher degree of mechanisation and industrialisation, but most importantly by racism. Although this was "not entirely new" for black workers, racism in the metropole was pervasive throughout society, determining black people's possibilities and shattering their expectations of wellness in Britain, as they found themselves relegated to the slums of the labour hierarchy and the worst housing, both of which were vacated by the upward movement of a section of the working class.[71] This stood as a serious class problem, an internal contradiction within the working class and its organisations, as seen in what the BUFP considered to be the inadequate claims that black workers were economically super-exploited compared to white workers. According to the BUFP, "Black workers have an added oppression of racism, of which the white worker is unaffected."[72] The use of racism is not primarily a means of intensifying economic exploitation—understood as the extortion of a greater surplus value from black workers, since "the system represented by the state, has no discrimatory [sic] policy to whom they should exploit and how"—but is politically employed as a weapon to secure the continual accumulation of capital by controlling and weakening the working class through divisions—either division of labour in production or racial divisions in society.[73]

Coherently, even when they note that black workers are overwhelmingly relegated to the worst jobs (where they still find a few white counterparts), racism intervenes as a governing rather than exploitative force. Analysis of exploitation is thus rarer in the BUFP writings compared to their extensive consideration of racism for its pure political significance when enacted by the state to repress or prevent social conflicts. In this sense,

[71] L. and L., 'What Is the B.U.F.P.?', 5.
[72] Ibid., 6.
[73] Ibid., 16. The fact that the system discriminates on the basis of race not in order to exploit more but in order to control black workers, is also illustrated by the limited opportunities for access to some of the better positions in the labour hierarchy. For example, while it is true that "in most of the jobs requiring skills and even some' of the unskilled jobs, Black workers found difficulties in getting placed in those jobs on racial grounds even though there was a demand for labour in those fields," at the same time, in order to meet the increased demand for labour power when "it was clear that there was [*sic*] no white workers for that job, demand overshadowed race" (ibid., 6).

they are less interested in how the state intervenes in organising labour to capital's need—for instance, through immigration control—but in how it can secure the best conditions to capitalist accumulation in terms of social order. Racial differences are thus exploited "in order to divert and so weaken this class."[74] This is even clearer in a period characterised by economic instability and tense workers' struggles, against which racism can be strategically used to impede political communication within the working class, making black labour less adversarial and less inclined to strike than their white counterparts. This strategy was implemented through both legislative measures and the propagation of the state's liberal ideology.

The "racist Immigration Act," such as the 1971 Act, aimed at making black labour "amenable, supple,"[75] and was to be paired in its effects with the concomitant and complementary Industrial Relations Act.[76] This Act, intended to curtail the trade unions' actions and obstruct workers' insubordination, functioned in tandem with racism as a mechanism of labour subordination. Immigration control was thus taken into consideration not only for its material effects (who and how many could enter and reside, and under what circumstances and conditions) but most interestingly for its "psychological" consequences, for this Act contributed to black workers' alienation from British society. According to the BUFP, they were encouraged to see themselves not as settlers with social and political rights but as "a migratory labour force" who had no say and nothing to ask for as long as they were guests in Britain, except to rely on state institutions and commissions—the so-called race relations industry—to counter any form of discrimination.[77]

The state presented itself as the legitimate and sole authority capable of addressing racial issues, thereby privatising and individualising experiences of racism. The BUFP referred to this dynamic as a "two-pronged attack. On the one hand, they pretend to want liaison with the Black community, and on the other hand they have increased their

[74] BUFP, 'Revolution Means Change', *Black Voice* 6, no. 1 (1975): 8, GPI (NEW/14/15).
[75] L. and L., 'What Is the B.U.F.P.?', 9.
[76] BUFP, 'Editorial', *Black Voice* 4, no. 5 (1973): 2, GPI (NEW/14/13). Such connection was already analysed in previous issues of *Black Voice*, see BUFP, 'Editorial', *Black Voice* 2, no. 2 (1971): 3; BUFP, 'We Make No Apology for Being Here', *Black Voice* 2, no. 2 (1971): 10; BUFP, 'Black Workers Fight Industrial Relations Act', *Black Voice* 3, no. 2 (1972): 1, 3, UCL (ALTER PRESS/Box 32).
[77] L. and L., 'What Is the B.U.F.P.?', 8.

terrorism."[78] By doing so, the state could disguise its own role as a perpetrator of "institutional racism"[79] as a mechanism of social and political division, presenting itself as an active agent ostensibly combating racial discrimination and prejudices through its apparatuses. As the BUFP observed,

> After taking great pains to sow the seeds of racism within the whole of the society the state then creates a law to outlaw racial discrimination, but this law is not applicable to institutional racism which is the root cause; it only has power to tackle individual racism.[80]

In light of this analysis, the relationship between the state and individual subjects must be understood as ideological, for the state serves as the organising power of the dominant class, concealing the underlying contradictions, oppression and exploitation that characterise capitalist social relations. As the BUFP noted, "within all capitalist societies the state is the cohesive force to perpetuate and defend capitalism."[81] In this context, it makes use of racist ideas "in their attempts at distracting the working class from seeing the mess the state is in economically."[82] This ideological function was enacted through a network of state institutions that serve to reproduce racial distinctions as integral to the functioning of capitalist society, contributing to the confusion of racism's social character with some sort of naturalness, thus making it ever-present. BUFP considered education's "primary role in keeping racism going,"[83] too, though they were mostly focused on the engagement of "the professional dividers of the working class" for the ideological reproduction of racism as a divisive tool. These included both the functionaries of the race relations industry and the coercive arms of the state. While the judiciary and police are conventionally seen as instruments of repression, they also played ideological functions. Through their verdicts and public statements, magistrates and law enforcement officials participated in the narrative construction of black presence as a societal problem to be resolved through law-and-order responses: "We live in a racist

[78] BUFP, 'Events That Can Only Warrant Positive Action', *Black Voice* 6, no. 3 (1975): 5, UCL (ALTER PRESS/Box 32).
[79] L. and L., 'What Is the B.U.F.P.?', 10.
[80] Ibid., 14.
[81] Ibid., 21.
[82] BUFP, 'Know the Enemy', 5.
[83] Black Youth Revolutionary Force, 'B.Y.R.F. Statement', *Black Voice* 5, no. 1 (1974): 2, BCA (WONG/7/64).

capitalist society, which on the one hand sets up its law and order machinery and on the other hand sets us up as fodder for feeding the machinery."[84]

This ideological machinery is not confined to overtly state-run institutions. It also permeates the organisations of the working class itself, including the Labour Party and trade unions, which, despite their emancipatory rhetoric, remain complicit in the racial stratification of the working class. Racism "is rampant" within these organisations, which function not as oppositional forces but as internal mechanisms of the post-war social democratic consensus. The idea of racial superiority remains at the core of working-class social consciousness, for "the social conditions under which they live make racism as natural as breathing."[85] Eventually, a vital role in cementing and disseminating state ideology resting on the naturalisation of racism is played by the media—"the State's mouthpiece"[86]—for they render the process of indoctrination more effective precisely by concealing its character as an imposition from above. In this respect, the ideological hegemony of the ruling class is most effective when the beliefs and assumptions it seeks to instil are internalised and reframed—let alone reproduced—by the working class itself.

Even more than what the state and media say, what is significant, for it proves the success of the state's strategy, are "the reactions of white workers to what is stated in the media," whether they prompt a self-reproducing dynamic of signification and meaning attribution that makes sense of reality in the same way the media and the state want (for instance, in cases where social issues such as housing shortages are attributed not to state's deficiency of social provision but to the increasing presence of black people, thus confirming the narratives about Britain "being swamped").[87] In a 1977 article, commenting on the spread of live TV shows that allow public call-ins, the BUFP remarked that "the working class people of a country such as Britain are under the illusion that they live in a free and democratic society. They will be astonished to learn that they live in a very sophisticated and repressive state—so sophisticated is this state that it needs to produce very little of its own propaganda."[88] In this respect, mass media thus allows to

[84] BUFP, 'Judge Whips up Racism and Violence', *Black Voice* 6, no. 3 (1975): 3, UCL (ALTER PRESS/Box 32). This article takes off from the racist declaration of judge Gwyn Morris, to which a series of racist violence followed in Brixton and Clapham.
[85] BUFP, 'Racism at Labour Club', 8.
[86] BUFP, 'Judge Whips Up', 3.
[87] L. and L., 'What Is the B.U.F.P.?', 14.
[88] BUFP, 'Editorial', *Black Voice* 8, no. 4 (1977): 2, UCL (ALTER PRESS/Box 32).

"democratise" mechanisms of ideological reproduction, making the working class not just an object of ideologisation but an active transmitter of state ideology.

Although this understanding is grounded in a functionalist notion of ideology as a false consciousness imposed upon the working class through an active process of mystification carried out by the dominant class in order to obscure its economic interests and obstruct political organisation,[89] the BUFP here demonstrates an awareness of certain dynamics that would later become central to critiques of the racialisation of British public discourse, particularly through the construction of "moral panics" and an emphasis on the active role the media play in this process.[90] This perspective leads them to partially absolve the white working class from their racist conduct, for they are victims of a racist education system and media that instil in them "subjective prejudices" and anxieties over housing and employment competition. As they argue, "preconceived ideas of race … are carefully developed and nurtured to complement the norm of society."[91] This ideological distortion, enacted through racism as a political project, implies the subjugation of both black and white workers' consciousness, albeit in different ways. Black workers are left convinced of their inferiority and of their limited capacity to act upon their condition. White workers, by contrast, are nurtured in their racial superiority complex and misunderstand their social position, one that aligns them more closely with white capitalists than with their black fellow workers. This distortion is then grounded in the alleged incontestability of nature, which presents historically determined social relations as spontaneous and necessary. The ideological relationship between white and black

[89] By contrast, the Marxian understanding of false consciousness and ideology as a *camera obscura* works precisely because of the impersonality of a "complex form of domination that is both abstractly systematic and concretely individual" (Maurizio Ricciardi, *The Provisional Power: Marx and Politics as a Critique of Society* [2019; Brill, 2024], 9; specifically, on Marx's critique of ideology see Maurizio Ricciardi, 'L'ideologia come scienza politica del sociale', *Scienza & Politica. Per una storia delle dottrine* 27, no. 52 [2015]: 175–81).

[90] See Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*, Routledge Classics (MacGibbon and Kee Ltd, 1972; repr., Routledge, 2011). The researchers of the Birmingham CCCS developed their critical analysis of social reaction to 'muggings' drawing on Cohen's study, pointing out similar conclusions to those advanced by BUFP (Stuart Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* [1978; Palgrave Macmillan, 2013]). Nonetheless, they did so while attempting to reframe a non-deterministic notion of culture and ideology, as will be further discussed in this chapter with reference to Stuart Hall's early writings on ideology (see *infra* §1.3.2). On muggings, also see BUFP, 'Editorial', *Black Voice* 6, no. 1 (1975): 2, GPI (NEW/14/15).

[91] L. and L., 'What Is the B.U.F.P.?', 13.

workers is "dependant on how the state uses at any given time its ability to divide and rule."[92]

> It is evident that the white worker is not born a racist, just as the Black worker is not born an inferior man; that these attitudes are carefully developed and nurtured by the system for its own purpose. … The state being the cohesive force within society is the conscious, active, developer of racial ill feelings for the benefit of capitalism. The state being the main protagonist of racism and exploitation in society is the main enemy of Black and white workers.[93]

The way in which the working class experiences the structural contradiction with capital is therefore directly determined by the state's operation. For this reason, BUFP theorists went back to Lenin's theory of the capitalist state, drawing upon his contribution to describe the state as "an organ of class *rule*, an organ for the *oppression* of one class by another; it is the creation of 'order', which legalises and perpetuates this oppression by moderating the conflict between the classes."[94] In their historical reconstruction of the transition from feudalism to capitalism, the BUFP highlights not so much the difference in the mode of production as the fact that, to assert it against the feudal lords and the Church, the bourgeoisie had to "seize state power," turning its social force as an emerging class into a constituted political power.[95] They remained thus quite loyal to the Leninist (and already Marxian) problem of the state as class rule, making Lenin's writings still central for understanding the general mechanisms of the state functioning and the specific transformation of capitalism on a world scale that took place between the last decades of the nineteenth century and the 1914-1919 imperialist war. However, his analysis required updating in light of the structural—and above all superstructural—reconfiguration of imperialism following the rise and fall of Nazi-fascism and the post-war reorganisation of the global economy.

Lenin himself recognised in his "popular outline" that, while having summarised the development of capitalism towards imperialism in a few (and still valid) "basic features" by outlining the "*principal* economic features of imperialism," he put less

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[92] Ibid., 14.
[93] Ibid., 15.
[94] V. I. Lenin, '*The State and Revolution*', in *V. I. Lenin Collected Works* (1917; Lawrence and Wishart, 1964), 25:387.
[95] BUFP, 'Revolution Means Change', 8.

emphasis on "non-economic aspects of the question."[96] In this regard, Leninist analyses of imperialism and the state are revisited in light of the contributions of authors such as Franz Fanon, Mao Zedong, Walter Rodney, and George Jackson—the black revolutionary who, in his writings from San Quentin prison in California, traced the monopolistic and corporative development of American capitalism and the state.[97]

For the theorists of the BUFP, "the new type of state that superseded the laissez faire type of state is what is considered to be the corporate state," identifying this as the form taken by the British state "from as early [as] 1911."[98] While having been theorised, perfected, and actualised by Mussolini's regime,[99] corporatism also characterises parliamentary democracies, which attempt to reconcile antagonistic interests within the unity of the state. Rather than giving expression to the "actual contradictions between social classes," parliaments obscure them, thus becoming one of the arenas of bourgeois political domination over the proletariat. The bourgeoisie, which appears not as an individual actor but rather as an imperialist class, owes all its power to finance capital, which subsumes all other forms of capital under itself. Social democracy emerges as the ideology of the corporate state, aimed at concealing class contradictions and thus "cannot be seen as something other than bourgeois and imperialistic." Within the corporate state, "all forms of community protest and opposition are made to find full expression within the state structure," which leads to their institutionalisation within the race relations

[96] V. I. Lenin, '*Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism. A Popular Outline*', in *V. I. Lenin Collected Works* (1916; Lawrence and Wishart, 1964), 22:266–67, 195. "Whereas Lenin did most of the analysis on the economic base, he was not able to carry out the same meticulous and stringent analysis on the political superstructure as he had economic base to develop the theory of the state; this he has left for us to continue" (L. and L., 'What Is the B.U.F.P.?', 22). By contrast, in his *33 Lessons,* Negri is explicit about the fact that Lenin, specifically in *State and Revolution*, develops a theory of the state, see Antonio Negri, *Factory of Strategy: Thirty-Three Lessons on Lenin* (Columbia University Press, 2014); also the preface to the new Italian edition, Sandro Mezzadra, 'Ricominciamo a dire Lenin', in *La fabbrica della strategia. 33 lezioni su lenin*, by Antonio Negri (manifestolibri, 2023).

[97] BUFP, 'The Basis for Unity', *Black Voice* 5, no. 2 (1974): 8, GPI (NEW/14/14). According to Jackson, corporative ideals "reached their logical conclusion in the U.S." Tracing the earliest symptoms of this transformation since the aftermath of the Civil War, Jackson contended that American capitalism tended to move towards the creation of monopolies (represented by families such as the Rockefellers, Fords, etc.) and the incorporation of labour to neutralise their revolutionary power. In this sense, the New Deal is equated with fascism (George Jackson, *Blood in My Eye* [Random House, 1972], 119). See also ARM, 'George Jackson, Monopoly Capitalism and the Fascist Type of State', *The Black Liberator* 2, no. 3 (1975): 227–42, GPI (JOU/3/6); Alberto Toscano, *Late Fascism: Race, Capitalism and the Politics of Crisis* (Verso Books, 2023).

[98] L. and L., 'What Is the B.U.F.P.?', 22.

[99] 'La dottrina del fascismo' in Benito Mussolini, 'Fascismo', in *Enciclopedia Italiana* (1932). An English translation of this text is quoted in L. and L., 'What Is the B.U.F.P.?', 25.

industry—thereby neutralising the potentially disruptive force of self-organisation. As such, "negative and defensive politics is absorbed forming part of the state structure, positive and offensive politics (class) remains unabsorbable and if not a present threat, is an eventual threat, thereby expressing itself within its own framework."[100]

The state imposes ideological closure, redirecting everything back to its mechanisms of operation and its administrative and institutional mediations. Community relations offices and courts, trade unions and parties—these are all instances of the corporative nature of the state. The analysis of the relationship between racism and the state, in conclusion, can only be understood by starting from the concrete experience of the state, which, as a political superstructure, has adjusted itself to the movements of the economic base in the transition from *laissez-faire* capitalism to its highest stage, imperialism.

1.2.2 Institutional racism, or the political economy of migration

Most of the themes central to the BUFP's analysis are echoed in Sivanandan's writings on the state and racism. By his own admission, he felt to be "a sort of unofficial member of the BUFP."[101] In his work, however, these ideas acquire greater theoretical depth and structural coherence, although some critics highlighted that his few definitions of racism "shift without explanation."[102] While it is true that in Sivanandan there is no definite conceptualisation of racism, as his definitions are always specific in terms of both context and the time under analysis, they still maintain some critical commonalities, such as racism's articulation with processes of capital's accumulation and the power relations racism describes and secures.

In a 1973 essay, Sivanandan begins by recognising that racism as a fully-fledged ideology of racial superiority structured in a "coherent philosophy" existed only in South Africa at that time. By contrast, in Britain (and in Western societies more broadly), racism was "a deep-rooted way of life," grounded in and perpetuated by "an exploitative economic system" and a "white power structure." Beginning with this early analysis, racism is conceptualised as a question of power within society, operating along the oppressive axes of race (i.e., one's position within "the white power structure") and class

[100] L. and L., 'What Is the B.U.F.P.?', 23–24, 26.
[101] Wild, 'Black Power in Britain', 94.
[102] Robert Miles and Malcolm Brown, *Racism* (1989; Routledge, 2003), 69.

(i.e., one's position within the "exploitative economic system").[103] Racism thus meant more than what sociologists of race relations have referred to as *racialism*—that is, the practice, but not the doctrine, of racial discrimination—because it has become increasingly enmeshed with the institutional policies of both the state and capital, affecting possibilities and experiences of lives for black people in the UK, despite not being formalised into a clear ideology.

What prevents racism from presenting itself explicitly as such, as in South Africa, is the liberal framework within which even colonial racism had to operate. While racism, racialism, and racial prejudice all have their roots in the colonial phase of capitalist expansion, during which racialism emerged as "the commensurate philosophy of justification" for the enslavement and proletarianization of colonial populations, this development unfolded within the "social philosophy" of liberalism.[104] Liberal ideals of political democracy, freedom, and equality evidently denied legitimacy to slavery and the tenets of racialism, and yet they coexisted for centuries, although not without friction. Liberalism, as the dominant ideology of the bourgeoisie, has always been a discriminating rather than universal ideology. Drawing on Marios Nikolinakos's insight that in capitalist relations of production "you discriminate that you may exploit,"[105] Sivanandan redefines liberalism as an ideology of differentiation that simultaneously proclaims the principles of equality that it systematically denies, and it is as such an integral logic of capitalist reproduction. Although differentiation-for-exploitation is not necessarily based on race, racism has historically justified and operationalised the production of differences for capital in the colonies,[106] reappearing in new forms in the post-colonial context. Reconstructing the transformations in the meaning and functions of racism in Britain in the 1950s-1980s through a critique of the political economy of migration, Sivanandan conceptualises the emergence of institutional racism,[107] which occupies an intermediate

[103] A. Sivanandan, 'Race, Class and Power: An Outline for Study', *Race* 14, no. 4 (1973): 383.
[104] Ibid., 384.
[105] Marios Nikolinakos, 'Germany: The Economics of Discrimination', *Race Today*, November 1971; quoted in Sivanandan, 'Race, Class and Power', 387.
[106] A. Sivanandan, 'Race, Class and Caste in South Africa. An Open Letter to No Sizwe', in *A Different Hunger: Writings on Black Resistance* (first published in *Race & Class* 22, 3: 293-301, 1981; repr., Pluto Press, 1982), 165–67.
[107] For a reconstruction of the various uses of 'institutional racism' in Britain, see Jenny Williams, 'Redefining Institutional Racism', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 8, no. 3 (1985): 323–48; and more recently,

position between racism as a racial doctrine and racialism as a prejudice inherited from the colonial period.

Against this backdrop, "the history of post-war race relations in Britain is the history of second-class production factors." For Sivanandan, the British state attempted to combine "the worst features of both" the South African apartheid, in which "there is in it no inherent contradiction between the ideology of exploitation and the ideology of discrimination" and the German contract labour system, through which "is able to entertain within its liberal democratic ethos an entirely different, yet successful, form of discrimination."[108] The necessity to continue producing such factors clashed with the impossibility of resorting to openly segregationist policies as in South Africa, although the colonial prejudice with which migrants were met in Britain determined the types of work they performed, the conditions of their exploitation, and the quality of their reproduction: in employment, racism "did not debar black people from work per se. It operated instead to deskill them, to keep their wages down and to segregate them in the dirty, ill-paid jobs that white workers did not want."[109] As Sivanandan starkly puts it, "everyone made money on the immigrant worker—from the big-time capitalist to the slum landlord," exploiting their labour and their alleged disposability, as they had been "reared and raised, as capitalist under-development had willed it, for the labour markets

Adam Elliott-Cooper, 'Abolishing Institutional Racism', *Race & Class* 65, no. 1 (2023): 100–118. Elliott-Cooper traces both the use of the concept by grassroots anti-racist and anti-police violence movements and the link between the British debate in the 1970s and the theories of Carmichael and Hamilton in the US from the previous decade. Here again, Sivanandan's elaborations resonate with a series of interventions by the BUFP (such as 'A Tool of Racism', *Black Voice* 2, no. 4 (1972): 5), which Elliott-Cooper reconstructs in detail before reviewing the subsequent liberal and deradicalised reworkings of the concept, especially after the Macpherson Report following the murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1999. On this, also see Stuart Hall, 'From Scarman to Stephen Lawrence', *History Workshop Journal* 48, no. 1 (1999): 187–97; A. Sivanandan, 'The Rise and Fall of "Institutional Racism"', *Campaign Against Racism & Fascism* 53 (December 1999): 2; Jenny Bourne, 'The Life and Times of Institutional Racism', *Race & Class* 43, no. 2 (2001): 7–22.

[108] Sivanandan, 'Race, Class and Power', 388. For this reason, BWG could argue that "Enoch Powell [then Minister of Health], when he toured the Caribbean in the late fifties and early sixties and invited people of the Caribbean to come and work in England, was no less racist then than when he made his 'Rivers of Blood' speech" ('...And What Did We Found?', in *Speak Out! A Brixton Black Women's Group Reader*, by BWG, ed. Milo Miller [first published in *Red Rag* 13: 16-18, 1978; repr., Verso Books, 2023], 63).

[109] A. Sivanandan, 'From Resistance to Rebellion: Asian and Afro-Caribbean Struggles in Britain', in *A Different Hunger: Writings on Black Resistance* (first published in *Race & Class* 23, 2/3: 113-152, 1981; repr., Pluto Press, 1982), 3.

of Europe," and profiting from the fact that they "came to Britain as a single man—as a unit of labour—unaccompanied by his family," thus saving in terms of social capital.[110]

While the profits from the exploitation of immigrant labour accrued almost entirely to capital, the social costs associated with the reproduction of migrant labour as a "second-class production factors" were borne by the majority of society—that is, by the working class. This dynamic produced contradictions which crystallised around race, enabling the mediation of class conflict through "a common 'ideology' of racism" that unified white workers and capitalists. Yet, this shared 'ideology'—deliberately placed in inverted commas to differentiate this political, more common sense meaning from that describing the political philosophy operating in South Africa—worked differently for each class: for capital, racialism constituted a means of discrimination to maximise exploitation; for the working class, it was experienced primarily as racial prejudice directed at colonial labourers. Still, the political consequences were significant because they brought white capitalists and workers together. If racialism as discrimination is part of the history and politics of capital and a tendency of its development, within the contradictions generated by that same development, racism served to prevent "the horizontal conflict of classes through the vertical integration of race—and, in the process, exploits both race and class at once."[111] Racism, in other words, enabled capital to extract a larger share of value through the production of a racial difference, while also integrating into the same social bloc different groups that would otherwise stand in conflict. While initially in the hands of capital in a "system of laissez-faire discrimination," the growing "social cost of discrimination" led to the active intervention of the state, ushering in what Sivanandan calls the "era of institutional racism."[112]

Sivanandan interprets the Immigration Act of 1962 as a response to the 1958 Notting Hill race riots and the increasing politicisation of the black underclass. The Act represented an attempt to resolve the social tensions produced by racially segmented sections of the working class living side by side, without undermining capital's access to the colonial labourers. Beginning with the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, the state

[110] A. Sivanandan, 'Race, Class and the State: The Black Experience in Britain', in *A Different Hunger: Writings on Black Resistance* (first published in *Race & Class* 17, 4: 347-68, 1976; repr., Pluto Press, 1982), 103–4.
[111] Ibid., 104–5.
[112] Sivanandan, 'Race, Class and Power', 389–90.

increasingly regulated the composition of the workforce through successive changes to immigration laws. The 1962 and 1968 Immigrants Acts sought to limit the number of individuals permitted to enter Britain by prioritising skilled and professional workers from the Commonwealth. In this sense, institutional racism initially aimed to reconcile "the economics of discrimination with the sociology of dislocation, while hanging on to the ethos of liberal democracy," by restricting the entry of new Commonwealth migrants to Britain. Simultaneously, it was intended to address the existing pool of reserve labour already present in the country, tackling the politicisation of class and racial conflicts during times of recession, which had become increasingly vocal among migrant workers and the second generation. Having put "Black settler migration … firmly under control" did not solve the problem against which blacks were organising, nor the fact that "once in, the black 'immigrant' could remain in the UK indefinitely." For this reason, Sivanandan sees the 1971 Immigration Act as the fulfilment of the system of institutional racism inaugurated a decade earlier, with the explicit intention of completing the replacement of Commonwealth citizenship with a German-style *Gastarbeiter* work permit, making the immigrant "finally a migrant, the citizen an alien."[113]

For Sivanandan, institutional racism is conceived as a mechanism for governing the whole working class by the targeted management of its black migrant component. Through the institutionalisation of a formal system of discrimination against migrant labour, the state codified the discriminatory logic upon which capital had previously relied, and since colour was written into racialism, the state eventually ended up "institutionalising racism."[114] This transformation of racism responded to the attempt to regulate black labour's mobility, their right to reside in Britain, and their overall reproduction—including family life, for instance, by denying the entry of dependants—

[113] Sivanandan, 'Race, Class and the State', 110–11. The German guest-work system was a highly organised recruitment system set in place between 1955 (when the first agreement with Italy was signed) and the mid-1970s. It granted a migrant workforce to work in agriculture, construction, and industry, selected in foreign countries by recruitment offices which employed labourers to specific jobs and areas, to which their residence permit was linked. Workers were usually hosted in groups in huts on the work site, so family reunification was discouraged, although not officially forbidden (Stephen Castles, 'The Guest-Worker in Western Europe—An Obituary', *International Migration Review* 20, no. 4 [1986]: 761–78). The temporary and disciplinary nature of the stay granted by the system, which depended on the arbitrariness of labour demands and employers' needs, was therefore what interested Sivanandan in constructing his parallelism.
[114] Sivanandan, 'Race, Class and the State', 113.

as well as to deal with their political mobilisations "as a class and as a people."[115] The overtly political nature of these measures is most evident in what Sivanandan calls "the politics of the White Paper" of 1975, which outlined the subsequent Race Relations Act of 1976. The proposal to guarantee "self-government to black people" by assigning some of them roles within the Community Relations Commission and integrating them into the institutional structures dealing with racial discrimination exemplifies, for Sivanandan, an instance of control through discrimination.[116]

By the mid-1970s, the state was shifting its focus from preventing the uncontrolled entry of new migrants to addressing the political mobilisation of settled black communities against racism. Black political organising was in fact seen as a form of "negative protest," to be defused by yet another reconfiguration of the meaning and function of racism.[117] For blacks' presence and struggles threatened "to disrupt society as a whole" as the "social costs of racism" fostered racial prejudices and attitudes that no longer aligned with the evolving needs of capital, the British state operated another shift in the political meaning of racism.[118] Ideologically, the 1976 Act reiterated the restriction of the meaning of racism to mere discrimination, as opposed to the more systemic sense that black radical movements were advancing and contesting through their struggles. Anti-discrimination policies were thus sustained as the answer to these problems, while actually attempting to disarticulate radical struggles around racism. Politically, it determined an important change that Sivanandan describes as the transition "from institutional racism to domestic neo-colonialism."[119]

Social control was extended well beyond migrants' mobility to the active management of those already settled, who would now "be integrated into the system through a process of domestic neo-colonisation which, once the 'black bourgeoisie' has come of age, is a far more viable proposition that institutional racism."[120] While the latter had led to the reproduction of racial prejudices at the popular level, to the point of requiring the development of a race relations industry, racism as neo-colonialism operated

[115] Sivanandan, 'From Resistance to Rebellion', 23.
[116] A. Sivanandan, 'Editorial. The Corporate Face of Capital', *Race & Class* 17, no. 1 (1975): 2.
[117] Sivanandan, 'Race, Class and the State', 124.
[118] A. Sivanandan, 'Race, Class and the State (2): Report on the West Indian Community', *Race & Class* 19, no. 1 (1977): 74.
[119] Sivanandan, 'Race, Class and the State', 120–21.
[120] Sivanandan, 'The Corporate Face', 2.

through positive discrimination "in favour of the disadvantaged blacks" who, while sharing disadvantages with other marginalised groups in society, were considered to be the ones who accumulated the worst disadvantages. The state's supposed fight against racial discrimination, without setting itself the goal of "outlaw[ing] discrimination," instead becomes a means of further differentiating the working class into its various racial factions, while the need to spread the fight against discrimination through a more pervasive bureaucratic apparatus "into every area of society—housing, education, employment, trade unions, local government, vocational training bodies, etc." leads many migrants to cooperate with the state.[121] The shift from institutional racism to neo-colonialism hence functioned to preserve the economic, political, and social effects of racism—discrimination to exploit and control—and to secure the power structures that sustained it:

> For capital requires racism not for racism's sake but for the sake of capital. Hence at a certain level of economic activity (witness the colonies) it finds it more profitable to abandon the idea of superiority of race in order to promote the idea of the superiority of capital. Racism dies in order that capital might survive.[122]

This change was part of wider transformations: a reconfiguration of the state's approach to race management, evolving public and parties' attitudes towards migration and race, and a broader restructuring of global capitalist production. While not its sole architect, this shift coincided with the rise of Margaret Thatcher as leader of the Conservative Party. Her overt deployment of racism was not merely a means to manage the working class, as had been the case with previous post-war governments, but an attempt to eventually defeat it. Even before her election as Prime Minister in 1979, Thatcher's rise signalled the end of this consensus and inaugurated a new governmental rationale—repatriation—framed around the preservation of a "British way of life" and the fear that Britain might be "swamped by people with a different culture."[123]

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[121] Sivanandan, 'Race, Class and the State', 123. Sivanandan refers to these individuals using the colonial concept of "comprador," that is natives acting in the political and economic interests of colonial powers. The aspiring black bourgeoisie, in this view, reproduces colonial dynamics within a post-colonial context (Sivanandan, 'The Corporate Face', 2).

[122] Sivanandan, 'Race, Class and the State', 124.

[123] A. Sivanandan, 'From Immigration Control to "Induced Repatriation"', in *A Different Hunger: Writings on Black Resistance* (first published in *Race & Class* 20, 1: 75-88, 1978; repr., Pluto Press, 1982), 132. Sivanandan quotes some famous remarks made by Thatcher during a television interview a year before her election: "…people are really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a

Importantly, this new approach had already been anticipated by the Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration—a cross-party body whose reports laid the groundwork for future legislative reforms, some of which were later enacted under Thatcher, most notably the British Nationality Act of 1981.

Outside the realm of institutional politics, the same ideology was echoed and reinforced by an increasingly hostile media and public discourse targeting black presence in Britain and broader migratory patterns.[124] These policies combined racism with sexist assumptions that instrumentalised and strengthened the patriarchal family order to restrict migration. While the supposed defence and respect of 'their culture' was used to justify the attempt to force women to return to their countries of origin to reunite with their partner, thereby reaffirming that the woman's place was with her husband and family, any "unproductive additions to working-class black families" in terms of children or elderly dependants were depicted as "unwanted. If you want family life, 'go home'." The new imperative to curtail future arrivals and to induce repatriation was eventually reinforced by the increased policing powers, which subjected black communities—apart from exploitation as the sole motivation for their staying—to constant surveillance and control, for otherwise "how do you distinguish between an 'illegal immigrant' and a legal one when they are all black."[125]

The belief that "fewer blacks made for better race relations" underpinned both post-war concerns around limiting migrants' entries, first of workers, then of their dependents, and this emergent philosophy of repatriation. Yet while the ideological premise remained consistent, the methods diverged. Prior to Thatcher, the management of race relations had functioned as a mechanism for controlling the working class. The prevailing tactic, then, was to incorporate the most militant segments of the class by addressing their 'extra-

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different culture and, you know, the British character has done so much for democracy, for law and done so much throughout the world that if there is any fear that it might be swamped people are going to react and be rather hostile to those coming in. So, if you want good race relations, you have got to allay peoples' fears on numbers" (Margaret Thatcher, 'TV Interview for Granada *World in Action* ("rather Swamped")', interview by Gordon Burns, 27 January 1978, MTF, https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103485; see also Zig Layton-Henry, 'Race and the Thatcher Government', in *Race, Government and Politics in Britain*, ed. Zig Layton-Henry and Paul B. Rich [Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1986], 73–79; Duranti, *Dis-union Jack*, 222–29).

[124] See Editorial Working Committee, 'Editorial', *Race & Class* 18, no. 1 (1976): 1–2.

[125] Sivanandan, 'Induced Repatriation', 134–35. On the patriarchal character of immigration legislation, see Pratibha Parmar, 'Gender, Race and Class: Asian Women in Resistance', in *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain*, ed. Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (1982; Routledge, 2005).

economic' demands. Thatcher's strategy, by contrast, aimed "to defeat the class, and the tactic is to divide it." No longer content with attempting to govern the British working class through institutional racism, the new strategy sought to relocate class conflict onto the arena of the global market. This marked domestic face of a broader transformation in the global organisation of capitalist production. Within Britain, popular racism remained a powerful political instrument—one that Thatcher not only exploited but actively intensified with deadly consequences, most viscerally felt "down in the ghetto—far removed from Thatcher country—[where] the majority, whose fears the Tory lady wished to allay, have literally taken the law into their own hands and begun to terrorise the black population."[126]

1.2.3 Racism in the Silicon Age

The structural changes in the global capitalist system that Sivanandan recognised in the second half of the 1970s were driven by technological development (most notably the microprocessor), a reconfigured geography (with the increasing relocation of production to the Third World), and new forms of control over labour mobility. The state played a pivotal role in paving the way for the emergence of this nascent economic order, first, by constructing the legal and political infrastructure that enabled the offshoring of production and the reorientation of Third World economies towards export-oriented production; and second, through its repressive function, as "the demands of international monopoly capital" were no longer to accommodate the welfarist form of Western states.[127]

According to Sivanandan, this marked the advent of a "new imperial dominance" which, though rooted in the early post-war reorganisation of the global economy around Bretton Woods institutions, intensified in the 1970s. While Britain initially attempted to resist this process by continuing the racial exploitation of its former colonies, the reshaping of immigration policies and most forcefully "the present calls for repatriation" were both part of the attempt "to reverse the colonial trend and to catch up with Europe and the new world order." Indeed, the previous trend of labour migrating from the periphery to the centres to meet the needs of metropolitan capital has begun to reverse, as

[126] Sivanandan, 'Induced Repatriation', 138–39, 137.
[127] Sivanandan, 'The Corporate Face', 1. Sivanandan's references to 'monopoly capital' are Paul A. Baran and Paul M. Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital* (Monthly Review Press, 1966); Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (Monthly Review Press, 1974).

multinational corporations expanded into Third World economies and secured the exploitation of cheap, abundant labour there. Advanced capitalist economies now export technology and expertise directly to the former colonies, which had historically been relegated to the provision of raw materials. Thus, it was capital that moved towards the peripheries, while labour more intensely circulated between these peripheral zones.[128]

A new industrial revolution driven by microelectronics and the relocation of capital to the periphery was not a mere economic operation, but relied on political coercion to lay the foundations for capital accumulation. Sivanandan directly questions the role of the United States, alongside that of authoritarian regimes in the Third World, which enacted the violence required to facilitate this new economic order. He synthesised this logic in the objectives of think tanks such as the Trilateral Commission, whose goal was to "reconcile the contradictions of transnational capital" by subordinating national policies to the imperatives of non-territorialised capital. Specific roles were assigned to different peripheral regions—some relegated to (re)producing cheap, exploitable labour under quasi-slavery conditions, others designated as energy providers—resulting in patterns of regionally "distorted 'development'." The redefinition of centre-periphery relations had profound implications for the control of labour migration across these regions and required the repressive and authoritative character of Third World regimes as the "basic infrastructure of power and communication" through which labour could be disciplined and exploited.[129]

The increasing socialisation of labour on a global scale, and the concomitant concentration of property and wealth in a smaller share of multinationals, necessitated a form of social mediation distinct from that provided by liberal democracies. This new arrangement was governed through corporatism, "for in as much as liberal democracy was the political expression of the old industrial revolution, the corporate state is the necessary expression of the new."[130] Already in 1975, Sivanandan described "the corporate face of capital" as the repressive mediation of the state in response to an increasingly militant working class that challenged capital's sway in the metropoles.

[128] A. Sivanandan, 'Imperialism and Disorganic Development in the Silicon Age', in *A Different Hunger: Writings on Black Resistance*, by A. Sivanandan (first published in *Race & Class* 21, 2: 111-126, 1979; repr., Pluto Press, 1982), 146, 144.
[129] Ibid., 146, 148.
[130] Ibid., 155.

Racism played a key role in this repression, both domestically as it did internationally. In Britain, it was mainly directed against the increased politicisation of the black section of the working class, and against migrant labour in general, for the management of its movements. Since the replacement of the Industrial Relations Act with a new Trade Unions and Labour Relations Act in 1974, Sivanandan observed that state intervention on behalf of capital "cannot be directed against the working class as a whole but only against those rightless sections of the class defined as migrant or foreign." Against these groups, the state deployed a "crude *political control*" in the form of discrimination, surveillance, and calls for deportation, shaping that sort of neo-colonial subjugation already analysed.[131]

Globally, this strategy enabled capital to maintain and exploit differentials across contexts, unequally socialising the costs of capitalist reorganisation. Beyond the reliance on cheap labour, authoritarianism facilitated the imposition of worse conditions on workers, especially migrants. Sivanandan cites examples from various Third World countries, such as Singapore, where "apart from the usual strictures on *Gastarbeiters* that we are familiar in Europe," further constraints such as no possibility of marriage, lack of housing beyond slums, and a general denial of workers' rights prevailed. "And yet the plight of the indigenous workers of these countries is not much better. The economic miracle is not for them." As with any industrial revolution, even the productivity leap engendered by the microprocessor "redounds to the few at the cost of the many." This new division of labour configured "a global assembly line run by global corporations that move from one pool of labour to another," exploiting polarisations between national workforces and between central and peripheral workers, "for, the chip, produced in the pleasant environs of 'Silicon Valley' in California, has its circuitry assembly in the toxic factories of Asia."[132]

That is the "size of the new world" Sivanandan describes, anticipating in this way debates that would become central in later decades about the transnational and violent nature of neoliberalism. Contrary to claims that neoliberal globalisation entails a weakening of the state, Sivanandan insisted instead on the state's enduring and adaptive

[131] Sivanandan, 'The Corporate Face', 2.
[132] Sivanandan, 'Disorganic Development', 149, 155–56.

role in shaping its functions along authoritarian lines. By reconfiguring and operationalising racism, the state retained its repressive character and functioned as the 'servant' of capital, continuing a dynamic previously highlighted in the analysis of the political economy of migration. The management of workers' movements across borders, violent political repression within nation-states, and the use of racism to police black workers "are all aspects of the concerted manner in which monopoly capital moves, they are also indicative of the common denominators of struggle between the various sections of the working class, between the oppressed and the exploited, between race and class."[133] The free market economy and the corporate state "are but two shades of the same authoritarianism, the one more modern than the other, but neither speaking to the birth of a new society that waits in the wings of the new industrial revolution."[134]

The restructuring of imperialism in the Third World, therefore, could not be celebrated as a step towards socialist revolution. Instead, it needed to be understood through the contradictions it generated. In a scathing review of Bill Warren's *Imperialism: Pioneer of Capitalism* (1980), Sivanandan denounced "the Marxist playboys of the Western world" for advancing theories with "no bearing on the lives of Third World peoples for whom imperialism is, first and last, the palpable experience of foreign domination."[135] What Warren presented as capitalist progress in the periphery was, for Sivanandan, "platitudinous," as it ignored the fact that:

> Quite clearly capitalism's economic project in the Third World has not generated the political freedom and 'the moral and cultural standards' that it did in the West. The economic, political and cultural dimensions of capital have not kept pace with each other, do not have the symbiotic relationship that reinforces the capitalist mode and

[133] Sivanandan, 'The Corporate Face', 3–4.

[134] Sivanandan, 'From Resistance to Rebellion', 50. On Sivanandan's insights on neoliberalism, see Narayan, 'New Times or New Circuits'. Narayan convincingly argues that, to show the full progression of Sivanandan's interpretation of neoliberalism as the reshaping of new circuits for imperialism, 'Disorganic Development' should be read together with two other texts that go beyond the temporal scope of this dissertation, see A. Sivanandan, 'New Circuits of Imperialism', in *Communities of Resistance: Writings on Black Struggles for Socialism* (first published in *Race & Class* 30, 4: 72-74, 1989; repr., Verso, 2019); A. Sivanandan, 'All That Melts into Air Is Solid: The Hokum of New Times', in *Communities of Resistance: Writings on Black Struggles for Socialism* (first published in *Race & Class* 31, 3: 1-30, 1990; repr., Verso Books, 2019). Sivanandan's is part of a wider attempt at reconceptualising imperialism which had been going on since the 1970s, see Tony Brewer, *Marxist Theories of Imperialism: A Critical Survey* (Routledge, 1990), 136 ff; Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *The Rest and the West: Capital and Power in a Multipolar World* (Verso, 2024), 141–48.

[135] A. Sivanandan, 'Warren and the Third World', in *Communities of Resistance: Writings on Black Struggles for Socialism* (Verso Books, 2019; originally published as *Capitalism, the Highest Stage of Imperialism? Warren and the Third World* [*Race & Class* 24, 2: 189-193, 1982]), 164.

> allows it to regenerate itself despite periodical crises (not least, by benefit of imperialism).[136]

Almost a decade after his first *outline* for the study of racism, the contradiction between capitalist exploitation and cultural values and ideologies is still relevant and determining for Sivanandan, as they imply serious effects on people's lives and set the scene for possible political transformations. To the frictions among capitalism and liberalism, he now added the reconfiguration of imperialist domination, experienced in terms of the clash between distinct value systems, "two sets of social relations, characterised by exchange value in the one and use value in the other—and the contradiction disorients them and removes them from the centre of their being." Going beyond Samir Amin's notion of unequal development, Sivanandan argued that the kind of development Third World countries were experiencing was "disorganic" because capitalism as a complex social system was "at odds with the cultural and political institutions of the people it exploits."[137]

The contradiction between the capitalist mode of production and the Third World is, therefore, superstructural, for "the base and the superstructure do not complement and reinforce each other … and exploitation is naked, crude, unmediated."[138] This contradiction reveals two key insights of Sivanandan's analysis. First, it highlights his sustained attention to the global dimension of capitalism, countering any Eurocentric interpretation of Marxism.[139] Rather than producing homogeneity through a singular, progressive historical trajectory, capitalism engenders difference—manifested, in this instance, through distinct political superstructures (such as the corporate state and authoritarianism), as well as through economic divergence (with certain zones of the world market geared towards production, others towards consumption), and ultimately through cultural differentiation. It also signals what he had previously articulated in an essay from 1974 concerning "the cultural and psychological dimensions of black oppression," first registered in the colonial context, which made their exploitation "quite

[136] Ibid., 166–67.
[137] Sivanandan, 'Disorganic Development', 157–58.
[138] Ibid., 158.
[139] "The cornerstone of his [Sivanandan's] social thought has always been the systemic concept of imperialism. His politico-intellectual practice has always been anti-imperialist, and hence universalist and internationalist, in the first instance" (Neil Lazarus, 'The Prose of Insurgency: Sivanandan and Marxist Theory', *Race & Class* 41, nos 1–2 [1999]: 37).

unparalleled" and "qualitatively different" from that experienced by the white working class.[140]

> The whole structure of white racism is built no doubt on economic exploitation, but it is cemented with white culture. In other words, the racism inherent in white society is *determined* economically, but *defined* culturally.[141]

In relation to racism and the reconfiguration of imperialism—and, crucially, the struggle against both—this leads, for Sivanandan, to a transformation of "the very terrain of class struggle itself," as Lazarus observed,[142] complicating the understanding of revolution in the Third World—whether as a class movement or a nationalist one. Rather, revolutions "are mass movements with national and revolutionary components—sometimes religious, sometimes secular, often both, but always against the repressive political state and its imperial backers."[143]

1.3 Racism, ideology, culture

1.3.1 Ideological and repressive apparatuses

These latter remarks indicate that Sivanandan did not reduce the superstructure to a mere reflection of the economic base. However, in his analyses of racism appears to be limited attention to racism as an 'ideology,' even only in inverted commas, since they were primarily rooted in the political economy of migration and the technological[144] and political restructuring of global capitalism. In the same years, influential works such as Martin Barker's *The New Racism* and CCCS's *The Empire Strikes Back* were interrogating the ideological dimension of racism. These studies emphasised its conjunctural character and sought to rethink determination beyond a rigid base–superstructure dichotomy, contributing to a broader Marxist debate.[145]

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[140] A. Sivanandan, 'The Liberation of the Black Intellectual', in *A Different Hunger: Writings on Black Resistance* (Pluto Press, 1982; originally published as *Alien Gods* [Allen & Unwin, 1974]), 94.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Lazarus, 'The Prose of Insurgency', 45.
[143] Sivanandan, 'Disorganic Development', 159.
[144] Jerry Harris, 'Sivanandan and the Technological Revolution', *Race & Class* 41, nos 1–2 (1999): 49–57.
[145] Martin Barker, *The New Racism: Conservatives and the Ideology of the Tribe* (Junction Books, 1981); Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, *The Empire Strikes Back*. Both Barker and the researchers at the CCCS approached the transformation of racism in 1970s Britain by grounding their analysis in the economic, political, and social crisis of the British state through the lens of culture and ideology. While Barker examined the rearticulation of racism in cultural rather than biological terms, emphasising how

Central to this debate were the writings of Louis Althusser, who identified two principles within Marxist materialism: "determination in the last instance by the (economic) mode of production" and "the relative autonomy of the superstructures and their specific effectivity." This reconfigured determination not as a mechanical reflection of the economic base, but as a complex process of overdetermination. Since each instance within society actively shapes the very contradiction that determines it—"the contradiction between the forces of production and the relations of production"—then, "the economic dialectic is never active *in the pure state*" but always overdetermined.[146] The fact that the social relation of capital is not determined solely at the economic level leads Althusser to analyse ideology and the state, describing the former as an unconscious system of representations, images, and concepts, through which men and women make sense of their relations with the social and material world.[147] Ideology ensures the reproduction of social relations of production, since labour must be reproduced not only biologically and technically, but also socially and culturally. This occurs through a series of ideological state apparatuses responsible for reproducing ideological life.[148]

These readings were fundamental to TBL's elaborations on racism and the state, particularly as developed by Alrick X. Cambridge and Cecil Gutzmore. Like the BUFP, TBL conceptualised the state as the cohesive factor within capitalist society. However, they sought to move beyond a linear understanding of the relationship between the state and the economic base found in BUFP writings and, as they affirmed, in early

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nationalist discourses ultimately reproduced racialised logics of belonging, the CCCS focused on the relationship between racism and the authoritarian turn of the British state. They argued for "a conception of racism which is historical rather than sociological," that is one attentive to the historical transformation of British Empire over the three decades following the Second World War, in terms of shifts in its international political status, the reorganisation of the international division of labour, and the increasing politicisation of race and racism. In this regard, their objective is to analyse the transformation of racism in relation to broader socio-economic changes without rigidly determining one in terms of the other, nor entirely disarticulating them. In doing so, they polemically engage with "the approach popularized by Hindess and Hirst which relies on a notion of necessary non-correspondence" (ibid., 9, 34).

[146] Louis Althusser, 'Contradiction and Overdetermination', in *For Marx* (François Maspero, 1965; repr., Verso, 2005), 111, 99, 113.

[147] Louis Althusser, 'Marxism and Humanism', in *For Marx* (François Maspero, 1965; repr., Verso, 2005), 231–34.

[148] Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (first published in *La Pansée* 151, 1970; repr., Monthly Review Press, 1971).

contributions by Darcus Howe and Iain McDonald in *Race Today*.[149] According to their critique, such texts reduced "any part of the State" to a mere "question of political economy," and specifically focusing on the role of the police, they frame the state as capital's repressive force. By contrast, drawing on Nicos Poulantzas, Cambridge defined the state as "the *totality* of the exercise of *political power* through the *power centres* by the ruling class(es) over the exploited classes." The state is thus not a unitary apparatus but a set of institutions aligned with different social classes, which enact political powers in distinct ways. While their aggregate function is to guarantee the conditions necessary for the "maintenance of the relations of production," most of these institutions (such as "school, church, family, mass media, political parties, trade unions, other than revolutionary ones") indeed operate through mechanisms of consent and ideological engagement rather than coercion and repression.[150]

This analysis led Cambridge to the critique of "*sub-State* institutions" such as the Race Relations Board, Community Relations Commission, or private institutes such as the Runnymead Trust and the old Institutions of Race Relations. While not all formally state bodies, these entities fulfilled similar ideological functions that sustained capitalist reproduction. They were "mobilised in defence of their functions via the ruling ideology and its ritual communal spirit (democracy, justice, liberalism, civil liberties, multi-racialism)," acting as unifying agents within a fragmented social formation otherwise

[149] According to Macdonald, the creation of the modern police force aimed at "(1) regulating the conditions of class struggle, and (2) tying the working class to the wage" at a time when the worker "was still paid in part out of the product of his labour" and this made them feel entitled to thefts, thus jeopardising capitalist expansion. While in the metropoles the police had to be veiled with the same cloak of universality already worn by the state, in the colonies—where "there was little pretence about who was master"—police methods were more brutal and direct, thus determining the different experience colonial workers still had about the police, as well as their struggles against police racist violence (Ian Macdonald, 'The Creation of British Police', *Race Today* 5, no. 11 [1973]: 331–33). Against black communities, the police were still exerting the same old function of binding them to wages, especially to counter blacks' refusal to work. This is a central position in the RTC, as argued in the next chapter. According to Darcus Howe, in the aftermath of the 1958 Notting Hill riots, the British state has been "organising with the object of breaking the rebelliousness of the youth whom they propose to delivered to capital on capital's terms[;] having completely eliminated the self-organised community institutions of the unemployed, the state has now assumed total control of the community" (Darcus Howe, 'Fighting Back: West Indian Youth and the Police in Notting Hill', *Race Today* 5, no. 11 [1973]: 337).

[150] Alrick X. Cambridge, 'Black Workers and the State: A Debate inside the Workers' Movement', *The Black Liberator* 2, no. 2 (1974): 184–85. Compare Cambridge's definition of the State with Poulantzas's: "The State is precisely the factor of cohesion of a social formation and *the factor of reproduction of the conditions of production of a system* that itself determines the domination of one class over the others" ('The Problem of the Capitalist State', *New Left Review*, no. I/58 [1969]: 73).

marked by "several levels dislocated by uneven development." Crucially, these institutions derived legitimacy and ideological effectiveness from recruiting personnel from outside the ruling class, especially black staff.[151] By incorporating individuals from black communities, these bodies formally operated through inclusion and consent, while simultaneously reinforcing the racial division of the working class, "monitoring 'immigrant' workers for the capitalists," and contributing to the fragmentation of the black community. As Cambridge and Gutzmore later argued, even when these institutions ostensibly aim to influence political decisions "in the 'interest' of Blacks," they actually served to "map the strategies for the ruling class in relation to the Black Masses" and to "ensure that what it regards as a tiny minority of powerless Black workers, are kept in their place even if they have the timerity [*sic*] to struggle against it."[152]

In this sense, state violence manifests in multiple modalities and yields different social results. Even its most evident expression—such as police repression during strikes—serves not only economic and class control purposes but also acts as a vector of racial discipline, specifically targeting black workers to dissuade their collective and political actions: "as the police allows racialists to cross the line" and is "prone to express its racialism in brutal physical assaults on Blacks."[153] Racism here denotes the specific oppression inflicted upon black workers, experienced as a "black minority."[154] It is operationalised through both private and public violence—so that policing blacks is described as "anti-black terrorism"[155]—and through the ideological reproduction of the state. Racism, therefore, stabilises the reproduction of capitalist social relations through ideological, political, and economic apparatuses.

To grasp the "real nature and extent of racism in this society" also requires an understanding of "the extent and depth of the bribery and corruption of the English

[151] Cambridge, 'Black Workers and the State', 185. Here, Cambridge engages again with Poulantzas's concern regarding the composition of state bureaucracy, not in terms of their social background, but highlighting the specific function they perform. As part of the state apparatus, "they have as their *objective function* the actualization of the role of the State. This in its turn means that the bureaucracy, as a specific and relatively 'unified' social category, is the 'servant' of the ruling class" (Poulantzas, 'The Problem of the Capitalist State', 74).
[152] Alrick X. Cambridge and Cecil Gutzmore, 'The Industrial Action of the Black Masses and the Class Struggle in Britain', *The Black Liberator* 2, no. 3 (1975): 200–201, GPI (JOU/3/6).
[153] Ibid., 200.
[154] Cambridge, 'Black Workers and the State', 184.
[155] Alrick X. Cambridge, 'Summation', *The Black Liberator* 1, nos 2 & 3 (1972): 53–56, GPI (JOU/3/2).

working class—a bourgeois, stratified, social-democratic working class, deeply imbued with and culturally deformed by racialism."[156] Racism, in this analysis, does not merely mystify exploitation but constitutes a key mechanism for reproducing and securing "that very exploitation through a hierarchy of labour power."[157] The stratification of the working class is therefore ideologically sustained, with racism integral to maintaining production relations. TBL's critique of RTC eventually warned that prioritising the understanding of the instances of racism—and on blacks' ideological reactions—risked obscuring the central, active role of the state as a complex apparatus mediating and sustaining capitalist society and the specific articulations of racism within that system.

Gutzmore deepened this analysis in two extensive essays tracing the evolution of racialism—understood as the ideological component of racial oppression—alongside transformations of "the European-dominated capitalist world economy" and British imperialism in particular.[158] He identifies four historical stages in the development of British capitalism, each "associated with" a particular configuration of racialism.[159]

The first stage corresponds to the period of so-called primitive accumulation. Internally, this involved enclosures that dispossessed peasants and generated a landless proletariat; externally, the mobilisation of merchant capital established exploitative and extractive relations "with the Black World," from the Atlantic slave trade to the Monsoon system in the Indian Ocean. During this phase, "Blacks were primarily of interest as objects to be exploited, as property," an ideological stance which was gradually debated by emerging abolitionist discourses maintaining blacks' humanity. Yet, Gutzmore warns against interpreting emancipation as a simple liberal concession. Rather, it reflected, first,

[156] Alrick X. Cambridge, 'On the Metro Saga: Interview with Tony Mohipp and Ranny Dufeal at the Black People's Information Centre', *The Black Liberator* 1, no. 4 (1972): 168, GPI (JOU/3/3).
[157] Editorial introduction to Cambridge, 'Black Workers and the State', 182.
[158] Cecil Gutzmore, 'Black Liberation and World Revolution', *The Black Liberator* 2, no. 1 (1973): 1.
[159] Cecil Gutzmore, 'Imperialism and Racialism: The Crisis of the British Capitalist Economy and the Black Masses', *The Black Liberator* 2, no. 4 (1976): 282, GPI (JOU/3/7). The lexical choice ("associated with" rather than "originated") explicitly reflects the difficulty of locating the origins of phenomena such as anti-black or anti-Semitic sentiment as consequences of capitalism, for they likely predate the origins of capitalism. Gutzmore's emphasis is instead on their transformation alongside capitalist development. The necessary or contingent character of capital's articulation with racism still allows for varied interpretations in contemporary debates on racial capitalism, as in Robinson, *Black Marxism*. Among the immense literature, see Julian Go, 'Three Tensions in the Theory of Racial Capitalism', *Sociological Theory* 39, no. 1 (2021): 38–47; Robin D.G. Kelley, 'Racial Capitalism: An Unfinished History', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 46, no. 16 (2023): 3562–68; Marcel Paret and Zachary Levenson, 'Two Racial Capitalisms: Marxism, Domination, and Resistance in Cedric Robinson and Stuart Hall', *Antipode*, 2024, 1–28.

the consolidation of capitalist production in Europe, which rendered slavery economically obsolete after it had laid the foundations for European material development. In this light, "abolitionism did not mean anti-racialism," rather taking the forms of economic critiques and civilising discourses.[160] Furthermore, the decisive force behind emancipation, Gutzmore argued, was the struggles of black slaves against slavery, which represented the "single humanising feature of this process." Still, emancipation did not translate into genuine freedom, resulting instead in new forms of exploitation of black people in America and in the new colonies, involving "more direct political and economic domination" and the reshaping of racialism.[161] Between 1775 and 1875, as British imperialism peaked, new forms of exploitation in West Africa emerged, targeting blacks as cheap labour and producers of low-cost goods for global markets. Racialist narratives—portraying blacks as indolent and rebellious and simultaneously positing white Europeans' superiority—justified the imposition of wage labour, particularly in contexts where they resisted by attempting to sustain peasant autonomy, as in the West Indies.

The last stage corresponds to the long decline of British imperialism, marked by Britain's "*progressive fall from a place of centrality, or dominance*, in the world capitalist economy to one of *relative marginality* or *impotence.*" After the Second World War, Britain sought to preserve its imperial status through gradualism, fostering regional federations to postpone decolonisation and in the meantime establishing neo-colonial trade ties via a "whole strata of professional 'Commonwealth lovers'" in collaboration with the black bourgeoisie in the former colonies. This imperial reconfiguration reshaped racialism both in Britain and within the Commonwealth. Internationally, the restructuring of empires amidst decolonisation and anti-imperialist movements prompted the strategic deployment of economic aid to "develop" colonies toward independence. However, as Gutzmore notes, such funding actually provided the social infrastructure for capital to better exploit the former colonised population: "this too is British racialism."[162]

Domestically, the post-war "importation of the Black Masses into Britain" enabled specific sectors of the British economy to substitute "cheap labour power for capital

[160] Gutzmore, 'Imperialism and Racialism', 282, 284.
[161] Gutzmore, 'Black Liberation', 1–2.
[162] Gutzmore, 'Imperialism and Racialism', 284, 286–87, 289.

investment." Racial oppression thus allowed capital to redirect savings into innovations that raised relative surplus value, while maximising absolute surplus value through the super-exploitation of black workers in terms of "a combination of factors in production (low wages leading to high overtime working) and outside production (poor conditions of life/reproduction)." Racialism thus legitimised the marginalisation of black workers in poor conditions of reproduction and their subordinate position within the hierarchy of labour, while mobilising the white working class against them, much like former colonial settlers and soldiers. The state's liberal façade enabled this dynamic by tolerating racism in public discourse while positioning specific state agencies as arbiters of race relations. Therefore, TBL highlighted how such race relations initiatives did not combat racism but ensured its reproduction within a framework that formally repudiates it, too. These initiatives "stopped short of physical violence," which was rather legitimately practised "under the cover of a formal state institution, by working class policemen," thereby serving to contain and monitor the black masses.[163] In this sense, "British racism" has become an "anti-racialist" racism, one that:

> Condemns 'Apartheid' while benefitting from massive investment in South Africa; condemns the 'racialism' of the National Front while remaining silent about the racialism of the police forces of Britain; happily passes racialist legislation on immigration while condemning racialism.[164]

1.3.2 Post-war crisis, post-war racism

A sustained concern with the historical specificity of racism and its articulation within the changing dynamics of capitalist society lies at the heart of Stuart Hall's work as well. His insistence on the historically contingent nature of racism reflects his refusal to impose a fixed or universal definition upon it. As he writes:

> There have been many different *racisms*—each historically specific, each articulated in a concrete and specific way with the other structures and relations of the social formations in which they appear. Racism is always historically specific. Though it may draw on the cultural traces deposited by previous historical phases, it always takes on specific forms. It arises out of *present*, not past conditions. Its effects are specific to the present organization of society.[165]

[163] Ibid., 289.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Stuart Hall, 'Race and "Moral Panics" in Postwar Britain', in *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*, by Stuart Hall, ed. Paul Gilroy and Ruth Wilson Gilmore (1978; Duke University Press, 2021), 59.

This open-ended character of the concept of racism, however, has drawn criticism. Robert Miles, for instance, argued that Hall failed to identify the common elements that allow these historically determined forms of racism to be recognised as indicators of the same phenomenon. According to Miles, what unites Hall's various analyses is his approach to racism as an ideological expression or, at most, as a "rational abstraction," that is, as a concept that can be adapted across different contexts precisely because it does not point to a sole, specific historical configuration.[166] It is worth quoting at length the passage on which Miles comments that, while substantially similar to the one cited above, it further clarifies several critical elements. In his well-known 1980 essay on South African capitalism, race, and articulation, Hall writes:

> Racism is not dealt with as a general feature of human societies, but with historically-specific racisms, beginning with an assumption of difference, of specificity rather than of a unitary, transhistorical universal "structure." This is not to deny that there might well be discovered to be certain common features to all those social systems to which one would wish to attribute the designation "racially structured." But—as Marx remarked about the "chaotic" nature of all abstractions which proceed at the level of the "in-general" exclusively—such a general theory of racism is not the most favourable source for theoretical development and investigation … Racism in general is a "rational abstraction" in so far as "it really brings out and fixes the common element and saves us repetition" [K. Marx, *1857 Introduction to Grundrisse*].[167]

As it reads, the notion of "rational abstraction" functions here as a methodological observation rather than as a claim about the content of racism as such. The abstraction refers to the process of conceptualisation that, for Hall, must match the complex and dynamic social reality in which racism emerges as "the concrete in history." This complexity cannot be posited once and for all, but must be mentally reconstructed by grasping the various determinations that historically constitute racism as a social phenomenon and as a relevant object of inquiry, eventually giving rise to "the concrete in the mind."[168] This is a methodological premise that Hall drew from his reading of Marx's *1857 Introduction* to the *Grundrisse*, which, however, does not prevent him from working

[166] Miles and Brown, *Racism*, 62.
[167] Stuart Hall, 'Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance', in *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*, by Stuart Hall, ed. Paul Gilroy and Ruth Wilson Gilmore (1980; Duke University Press, 2021), 234.
[168] Stuart Hall, 'Marx's Notes on Method: A "Reading" of the "1857 Introduction"', in *Selected Writings on Marxism*, by Stuart Hall, ed. Gregor McLennan (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1973; repr., Duke University Press, 2021), 38.

at different levels of abstraction and from providing a general definition of racism. In fact, Hall goes on to say that, at the most abstract level of analysis, racism refers to

> those social features which fix the different positions of social groups and classes on the basis of racial ascription (biologically or socially defined) from other systems which have a similar social function. However, "some determinations belong to all epochs, others only to a few. Some will be shared by the most modern epoch and the most ancient." This is a warning against extrapolating a common and universal structure to racism, which remains essentially the same, outside of its specific historical location.[169]

Racism is understood as the mechanism which, based on specific socially inscribed racial characteristics, enables the differentiation of social groups and classes, assigning them historically fixed and naturalised positions within "racially structured" social formations. Yet definitions and analyses of racism, as well as the struggle against its deadly effects, must go beyond reiterating this general principle. They must instead concentrate on identifying those new elements which, "in common sense, appear to be variants of the same thing." In other words, a general definition should be regarded at most as a point of departure. The analysis must then interrogate how these elements are historically articulated within the complex web of economic and cultural processes, as well as political and ideological struggles. This requires disentangling and rearticulating these determinations through theoretical work, with an emphasis on possible historical discontinuities and contextual differences. For this reason, Hall argues that:

> There might be more to be learned from distinguishing … the racism of the slave South from the racism of the insertion of blacks into the "free forms" of industrial capitalist development in the postbellum North; or the racism of Caribbean slave societies from that of the metropolitan societies like Britain, which have had to absorb black workers into industrial production in the twentieth century.[170]

Hall traces the emergence of post-war racism as an active social force stemming from the material conditions of British society, rather than treating it merely as a colonial residue—although it is indeed from the colonial past that the racial imaginary has grown. He reconstructs its ideological development and its articulation with "the relations, structures and events which become harnessed to, or articulated through, race" in the metropole. The analyses developed in the Seventies thus focus on these specificities,

[169] Hall, 'Race, Articulation', 234.
[170] Ibid., 235.

emphasising both their multifaced aspects and their overall effects. Since race becomes the prism through which the wider ("organic") social crisis of British post-war capitalism is interpreted—particularly in the period between the arrival of the Empire Windrush, decolonisation and Britain's declining imperial position, the post-war economic reconstruction and successive crisis, and the cultural and political upheavals of 1968—the critique of racism necessarily entails an analysis of capital and state's transformations, the reconfiguration of political rule, and the increased relevance of ideology as a primary determining element. As Hall underlined, "this [was] not a crisis *of* race," but political reactions and public discourses were constructed around race, so that it was made to "periodise and punctuate the crisis," reframing a peculiar sense of post-war racism.[171]

This analysis finds its most complete form in the collective volume *Policing the Crisis* (1978), in which Hall and his collaborators trace the erosion of consensus beginning in the early 1970s, a process that reaches its culmination with Thatcherism, and finds its blueprint in the social reactions to the phenomenon of 'mugging.' Though initially applied to a cycle of petty crimes, the label 'mugging' took with it not just the description of criminous acts but a whole set of meanings around its interpretation. Imported from the American context, 'mugging' referred less to a specific crime and more to a broader societal crisis threatened by workers' strikes, student unrest, civil rights and black power movements. The rise of such conflictual subjects led to claims that Britain had become ungovernable through the same consensual politics that had prevailed throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The coalescence of multiple social issues into the sole phenomenon of 'mugging' was thus shaped by ideological paradigms that projected an image of society under siege, where an alleged English way of life was now under threat from 'muggers.'[172]

Three "turning points" marked the emergence of racism as a legitimate social force in contemporary Britain: the already analysed Notting Hill riots in 1958; the racist electoral campaign which led to the election of Conservative MP Peter Griffiths in Smethwick in 1964;[173] and the global politicisation of blacks. These events and processes

[171] Hall, 'Race and Moral Panics', 60, 65.
[172] Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis*, 138–48.
[173] Rachel Yemm, 'Immigration, Race and Local Media: Smethwick and the 1964 General Election', *Contemporary British History* 33, no. 1 (2019): 98–122.

gradually displaced post-war optimism around blacks' possibility of assimilation, fostering racist reactions that eventually gathered around the emergence of Powellism as "an 'official' racist politics at the heart of the political culture itself."[174] Though excluded from formal political power, Powellism "dominated and defined the ideological terrain" upon which the broader 1970s "backlash" was constructed and enacted. It provided both institutional and street politics with the tools to respond (and live through) the organic crisis that began with the unresolved tensions of post-war change. These tensions took the form of unease over the pace of social changes; anxieties over the erosion of traditions and rising permissiveness due to a new materialist culture based on consumerism, individualism, and youth countercultures; and the politicisation of these anxieties expressed both in students' protests, new waves of strikes, and black politics, countered by regressive societal reactions such as campaigns against trade unions, immigrations, riots, and terrorism. The 'mugger' was described as the personification of the reverse of all the positive social images summed up in the definition of Englishness—and, since Englishness was constructed as white, the mugger was by definition black.

> Blacks become the bearers, the signifiers, of the crisis: racism is its "final solution." The class which is called upon to bear the brunt of the economic crisis is divided and segmented against, and within, itself—along racial lines. If racism had never existed, as a plausible way in which the underclasses of society could be impelled to "live through" the crisis of the social formation, it would surely have had to be invented in the 1970s.[175]

According to this ideological closure, "racism in Britain has had the effect of finding, in the very material conditions of this divided class, and in its unreconstructed 'common sense,' an authentic popular basis."[176] The development of racism as a political and social force in the 1960s and 1970s contributed both to the construction of a popular authoritarian ideology and the legitimation of the strong state and its coercive apparatus. This legitimation was successful not because it was imposed from above, but because racism emerged from the very breakdown of the post-war consensus. It is precisely this 'popular' character that enabled the New Right to "disentangle and *dislocate* the existing ideologies of class—of economic class demands and of the class struggle—and helped to

[174] Hall, 'Race and Moral Panics', 63.
[175] Ibid., 65; also see Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis*, 160.
[176] Hall, 'Race and Moral Panics', 69.

reconstruct and recompose them into ideologies of 'the nation' and 'the people.'"[177] Powellism paved the way for the rise of a popular authoritarianism, that is, for a social consensus in favour of repressive and violent responses to perceived threats to social order. This was then institutionalised in the drift toward a law-and-order society,[178] with policing becoming a normalised and routinised practice primarily targeting black youths, and an ideological convergence around the legitimacy of violence. It is this form of managing political power through the state, backed by social consent, that characterises Thatcher's authoritarian populism.

In this sense, *Policing the Crisis* was meant "to contribute to the development of a specifically Marxist theory of the state."[179] In a central section of the book, Hall and his co-authors trace the reconfiguration of the state in response to the evolution of capitalist modes of production, emphasising not the linearity of its instrumental character but the contradictions it generates. The state does not evolve mechanically to accommodate the needs of capital, even as it is committed to securing the best conditions for capital's reproduction and accumulation. Rather, it must reckon with the other side of capital—labour—and with class struggle. Hence, the limitation of the working day or the expansion of suffrage and representation are to be understood as workers' victories that simultaneously provoke adaptations in capital's strategies (such as the intensification of exploitation via technological innovation) and transformations in the state itself. While in the phase of primitive accumulation, the state primarily operated through coercion (enclosures, disciplining of labour), the parliamentary system and expanded suffrage increasingly foregrounded consent—becoming central to the welfare state, both in its rudimentary form of the 1930s (with early iterations of the social wage) and in its post-

[177] Ibid., 69.
[178] Stuart Hall, 'Drifting into a Law and Order Society: The 1979 Cobden Trust Human Rights Day Lecture', in *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*, ed. Paul Gilroy and Ruth Wilson Gilmore (Cobden Trust, 1980; repr., Duke University Press, 2021).
[179] Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis*, 193. At the CCCS, out of the Marx Reading Group developed the Cultural Hegemony and the State working group whose 1976/77 session focused on analysing the role of the state in the process of labour force's restructuring in Britain, framing this investigation through diverse theoretical references: the work of Hirsch and Altvater in Germany; the work of Braverman in the US; some papers of the so-called "Italian school" (Tronti, Gambino, Panzieri, and Bologna); and the Brighton school developing on Nicos Poulantzas. See *The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies Report 1977-1978*, in Records of the Centre of Contemporary Cultural Studies, UB/CCCS/A/3, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham, 13–15; 'Untitled [Draft on Italian School]', n.d., SHA/US121/11, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham; Stuart Hall, 'Nicos Poulantzas: State, Power, Socialism', *New Left Review*, no. I/119 (1980): 60–69.

war maturity. "This whole period is one transfixed end to end by the question of 'labour'. It is a transitional phase when the capitalist state is just able to *dominate* the class struggle, although it cannot lead."[180]

The inability to lead—and therefore to govern—class struggle meant that it could not be permanently pacified, despite the state's expanded functions: its role in the economy (as an interventionist state), in society (as a welfare provider), in ideology and culture (through education), and international affairs (as a coordinator of capitalist actors). Indeed, this very expansion must be read as an attempt to govern "the *political* class struggle"—a struggle that, on the one hand, became institutionalised within the state through parties and Big Labour, and on the other, exceeded the organisational limits of the labour movement, re-emerging as a full-blown crisis of hegemony and, therefore, as a social crisis as a whole.[181] In this way, the state's hegemonic crisis, as a social crisis, is also a crisis of legitimacy—hence an ideological crisis—which is especially acute for the "modern corporate capitalist state," a political formation reliant on the "hidden hand" of consensus.[182] In this context, racism did not emerge from a confident class, but rather as

> a "racism" of a divided ruling class: a racism, not of economic dominance but of economic decline: a racism which, far from expressing—as it does in South Africa—the element of enforced cohesion and imposed unity by a ruling class unified by a racist ideology, is a racism which emerges out of the breakup of social cohesion and consensus.[183]

1.3.3 Racism and the neglected theory of superstructures

Within this reconstruction, racism does not emerge as a conspiracy from above, disseminated by the state via its apparatuses, but rather as a social force deeply intertwined with material contradictions. The latter must be analytically understood and disentangled not only to grasp racism's meaning in post-war Britain, but to struggle

[180] Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis*, 209.
[181] Ibid., 211. A few pages earlier, Hall and his co-authors described the way in which the legal apparatus of the state, for its promise of order, has come to stand for society itself: "the law thus comes to represent all that is most impartial, independent, above the play of party interest, within the state. It is the most formal representation of universal consent. Its 'rule' comes to stand for the social order—for 'society' itself. Hence a challenge to it is a token of social disintegration. In such conjunctures 'law' and 'order' become identical and indivisible" (ibid., 205). Before concluding this section of the book and moving on the analysis of black political forms, they would finally define the crisis as "the form assumed by the class struggle in this period" (ibid., 315).
[182] Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis*, 212.
[183] Hall, 'Race and Moral Panics', 68–69.

against it. This approach eventually complicates interpretations that frame Hall's understanding of racism as reducible to a simple ideology—a view shared by different scholars who identify a bifurcation in racism studies between those who approach it as ideology and those who treat it as a social relation.[184] For Hall, such a binary is unhelpful. Instead, he is primarily concerned with the way in which ideology is both constructed by and constitutive of social relations. Ideology is not merely a reflection of social practices; rather, social practices and relations are themselves unintelligible outside ideology—that is, outside the system of representations through which men and women experience their lives.

This reveals a profound concern with a reformulation of the very concept of ideology, which occupied a central place in Hall's theoretical work during the 1970s. It was part of a broader intellectual project at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, characterised by a sustained critical dialogue with Marx and Marxism to contribute to the elaboration of a "neglected theory of superstructures." The aim was to account for cultural dynamics without reducing them to mere epiphenomena, as a fetishized form detached from any determinations.[185] It is within this intense and ongoing "wrestling" with Marxism that Hall seeks to articulate the relationship between the cultural and the social in terms of form and content, while clarifying that this distinction should be understood as a heuristic metaphor rather than a precise analytical definition.

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[184] See Hund, '"Racism"', 61. However, consensus on this division remains elusive. For instance, while David Camfield positions Hall and Oliver Cox as representatives of the ideological approach, in contrast to the Black Panther Party's emphasis on racism as an oppressive social relation, Barnor Hesse identifies Hannah Arendt as paradigmatic of the ideological position and Cox as focusing on racism as a social relation (David Camfield, *Elements of a Historical-Materialist Theory of Racism*, 24, no. 1 [2016]: 31–37; Barnor Hesse, 'Im/Plausible Deniability: Racism's Conceptual Double Bind', *Social Identities* 10, no. 1 [2004]: 9–29). According to Hesse, Hall is part of a "dialogical resistance to the Eurocentric tradition" of study on racism—together with Cesaire, Fanon, Carmichael and Hamilton—that sought to emphasise the colonial dimensions of racism against a definition only tied to European contemporary history (ibid., 23; also see Barnor Hesse, 'Racism's Alterity. The Alter-Life of Black Sociology', in *Racism and Sociology*, ed. Wulf D. Hund and Alana Lentin [LIT Verlag, 2014]).

[185] Under the direction of Stuart Hall, the CCCS started a cycle of General Theory seminars which constituted also of the study of Marx's and Marxist texts. These seminars were then incorporated in specific research groups at the CCCS, such as the Sub-cultural group, Cultural History group, Cultural Hegemony and the State group, Women's Study group, and in the Media, Language, and Ideology groups. See the Centre's Annual Reports in Records of the Centre of Contemporary Cultural Studies, UB/CCCS/A/3, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham; see also the unpublished paper presented at the closure of the first phase of the Media/Ideologies seminar, Stuart Hall, 'Signification and Ideologies II. Or "Where Do Ideologies Come From?"', March 1974, SHA/US121/10, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham.

> If the term 'social' refers to the *content* of the relationships into which men involuntarily enter in any social formation, then 'culture' refers to the forms which those relationships assume. … 'Culture,' in this sense, does not refer to something substantively different from 'social': it refers to a different *aspect* of essentially the same phenomena.[186]

Social relations, though independent of individuals' consciousness, only exist through the cultural forms in which individuals are entailed. As Hall acknowledges, the term culture is inherently ambiguous, for it may refer both to the lived practices and experiences of a particular social group or class (culture *stricto sensu*) and to the mental structures (sometimes also referred to as ideologies) through which such experiences are rendered meaningful. In order to address the relationship between culture and ideology, Hall turns to Marx's theory of representation (*Darstellung*). In *Capital*, Hall observes, market relations are at once "real" and "ideological," as they represent a complex system of production and exchange as if it were a simple, self-evident process dominated by exchange. Therefore, the ideological character of the capitalist modes of production lies in the partial representation of a totality. Firstly, it is partial because one part of the process (exchange) is made to stand for the whole, thereby concealing other critical aspects (exploitation in production). In Marxian terms, the "real relations" of the capitalist mode of production appear through their "phenomenal forms." But this appearance is not false in a conventional sense; it is a *real* illusion, grounded in lived experience and constitutive of the societal taken-for-granted that also shapes (and is retroactively shaped by) the juridical-political superstructure. Secondly, the partiality of ideology lies crucially in the reproduction of capitalist domination and its specific power relations, as well as in their contestation. For the ways in which capitalist social relations are represented ideologically take on the guise of universality, they come to achieve social dominance over others, becoming the dominant understanding within a given society.[187]

> Culture, then, consists of the prefabricated ideological significations which appear to have successfully produced the worlds of the superstructure as coherent and

[186] Stuart Hall, 'Culture, the Media and the "Ideological Effect"', in *Essential Essays 1: Foundations of Cultural Studies*, by Stuart Hall, ed. David Morley, 2 vols (Edward Arnold, 1977; repr., Duke University Press, 2019), 301–2.

[187] Ibid., 307–8, 316. For the analysis of Marx's theory of representation, see Stuart Hall, 'Rethinking the "Base and Superstructure" Metaphor', in *Selected Writings on Marxism*, by Stuart Hall, ed. Gregor McLennan (Lawrence and Wishart, 1977; repr., Duke University Press, 2021), 78–81. Interestingly to note for the relevance the concept assumes in Hall's further elaborations, in this essay, he translates the German term '*Darstellung*' both as "representation" and "articulation" (ibid., 79, 86).

> understood worlds of meaning: ideologies are the preferred mappings of these domains which produce these worlds as lived relations in a manner which provides the coherence of the formation overall, the cement of the society, as Gramsci called it: the work of ideological reproduction—which we must remember, must be problematic since it has the whole field of the class struggle as its terrain—which assigns particular items within these prefabricated meaning-structures, and generates, from its preconstituted elements, further surface strings which are appropriate to new events—this work is ideological signification.[188]

The problem of a materialist understanding of culture is thus framed in terms of both what determines social ideas and how those ideas relate to the ensemble of practices, institutions, forces, and contradictions that constitute a social formation. In this view, ideology functions as a social framework made of different images, concepts, and premises which are articulated into a distinct chain of meanings. These precede individuals, who formulate their intentions within ideologies socially constructed through collective processes and practices. Finally, ideology works by constructing individuals' subjective positions, mirroring them at the centres of the ideological discourse from—and through—which they make sense of lived experiences. Hall, therefore, adopts a constructivist understanding of ideology—one that explains how social groups and classes interpret their world, as well as how ideology becomes a material force capable of sustaining the hegemony of a historical bloc at specific conjunctures.[189]

This perspective is informed by Louis Althusser's notion of interpellation as well as Hall's interpretation of Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony.[190] Ideology is

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[188] Hall, 'Where Do Ideologies', 26.

[189] Stuart Hall, 'The Whites of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media', in *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*, by Stuart Hall, ed. Paul Gilroy and Ruth Wilson Gilmore (Lawrence and Wishart, 1981; repr., Duke University Press, 2021), 100.

[190] On Hall's interpretation of Gramsci, see Stuart Hall et al., 'Politics and Ideology: Gramsci', in *On Ideology*, by Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Working Paper in Cultural Studies 10 (Hutchinson, 1977); also see Diego Lazzarich, 'Gramsci nella prospettiva di Stuart Hall', in *Marx e Gramsci. Filologia, filosofia e politica allo specchio*, ed. Anna Di Bello (Liguori, 2011); Miguel Mellino, 'Note sul «momento gramsciano» di Stuart Hall. Il marxismo come epistemologia politica e la questione della razza', *Studi Culturali*, no. 1 (2023): 67–86. Important for Hall's critical dialogue with Althusser, and for the evolution of his understanding of ideology, Stuart Hall, 'Signification, Representation, Ideology: Althusser and the Post-Structuralist Debates', *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 2, no. 2 (1985): 91–114. As noted by Jorge Larrain, while elaborating on Marx's texts, in which the study of ideology is always a critique and thus the notion is conceived as intrinsically negative, Hall developed a more neutral sense, drawing precisely on the mediations of Althusser and Gramsci. This is increasingly evident as Hall's analyses of ideology intersect with his critique of Thatcherism and new elaborations on ideology are taken into consideration, such as those by Ernesto Laclau and Michel Foucault. Although Hall never definitively conceded to substitute 'ideology' for 'discourse,' he will for sure develop a "'discursive' conception of ideology" (Stuart Hall, 'The Problem of Ideology: Marxism Without Guarantees', in *Selected Writings on*

constitutive of social and power relations. For this reason, Hall writes that "ideologies are therefore a distinct type of social struggle"[191]—one that does not rest upon the truth or falsity of representations, but rather on the relations of force they sustain and reproduce, and on the actions they enable or constrain. It is not so much a battle of ideas or the camouflaging of some truth in the form of a false consciousness imposed by the dominant on the dominated, but rather the recognition in the everyday actions of individuals in society of practices that legitimise or challenge contradictions arising from society.[192]

This is why the reproduction of racism at the level of ideology cannot be limited to a denunciation of its falsification of real relations, nor merely to pointing out that racism divides the working class. The ideological reproduction of racism involves both the political and social forces that materially and symbolically affirm its effectiveness and relevance in providing meaning to specific experiences, and the power to define or delimit representations and meanings socially recognised as legitimate—and therefore available—for making sense of one's social experience.

> It is the real conditions of existence of the poorer classes of society—lived, through racism, in a thoroughly ideological and "imaginary" way—which gives reality to its structure, which grounds its appeals and its rhetoric, which supports a racist "common sense." It is to this crisis, in its full economic, political and ideological dimensions … that we must look, and struggle for a solution.[193]

In this process, specific actors are involved in the ideological reproduction of society. The functioning of the media in contemporary British society is one of the principal testing grounds for Hall's analysis of ideology and its relation to racism. The media exhibits a "systematic tendency … to reproduce the ideological field of a society in such a way as to reproduce, also, its structure of domination."[194] Although structural, this tendency is anything but uncontested, because it is crisscrossed by a (class) struggle over meanings and representations. The way media encode their meanings in a message is not necessarily how those meanings are decoded by different classes and social groups

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Marxism, by Stuart Hall, ed. Gregor McLennan [Duke University Press, 2021], 140). Larrain focuses mainly on texts from the second half of the 1980s, whereas an analysis of his earlier works and criticism of the media and racism reveals greater "accuracy" to Marx's writings, especially in his attempt to answer the question "where do social ideas come from?", albeit reinterpreted from the outset in an Althusserian (overdetermination) and Gramscian (hegemony) key.

[191] Hall, 'Whites of Their Eyes', 101–2.

[192] See Ricciardi, 'L'ideologia come scienza politica del sociale'.

[193] Hall, 'Race and Moral Panics', 70.

[194] Hall, 'Ideological Effect', 334.

interpreting it.[195] Thus, the specific role of media is to secure this process of decoding, bridging and delimiting the interpretative possibilities within the dominant ideological framework. The encoding of media messages implies, in other words, their naturalisation—that is, the sense that the code is not one among many possible, but the only legitimate one, because it appears spontaneous and self-evident. The point is therefore not to view the media as mere mouthpieces of the state, but to understand how they help legitimise or restrict what is thinkable and admissible—thereby structuring the ideological field.

> They have progressively *colonized* the cultural and ideological sphere. As social groups and classes live, if not in their productive then in their "social" relations, increasingly fragmented and sectionally differentiated lives, the mass media are more and more responsible (a) for providing the basis on which groups and classes construct an "image" of the lives, meanings, practices, and values of other groups and classes; (b) for providing the images, representations, and ideas around which the social totality, composed of all these separate and fragmented pieces, can be coherently grasped as a "whole."[196]

This is particularly evident with the portrayal of race and migration. For a considerable period, media discourse mirrored a "liberal-consensus assumption that we are all proceeding, slowly but inevitably, towards a racially integrated society," thereby reproducing the terms of debate and the political aims "set up by the race relations industry." As a result, media coverage systematically dismissed black conditions of exploitation, deprivation, and oppression, as well as their attempts to survive under such conditions. By reflecting this liberal consensus, the media structurally occluded two essential dimensions: first, the shared working-class status of the overwhelming majority of black people—especially those excluded from media visibility, not "a handful of middle-class blacks—like me—and spokesmen *for* the black community" permitted to intervene publicly); and second, the specific forms of racial oppression and the political identifications and mobilisations that black communities were forging, both locally and internationally. Instead, black subjects are attached as puppets "to some set of issues defined as 'black problems.'" This shift, while seemingly putting an end to black invisibility in British history and public life, in fact repositioned black presence within

[195] Stuart Hall, 'Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse', in *Essential Essays 1: Foundations of Cultural Studies*, by Stuart Hall, ed. David Morley, 2 vols (1973; Duke University Press, 2019).
[196] Hall, 'Ideological Effect', 327.

white frameworks of representation. Blacks were no longer confined to the colonies—they were now physically present in the metropole—but they were predominantly portrayed as the source of racial tension.[197]

Therefore, Hall's approach to news production closely mirrors the theoretical method set out for his elaborations on ideology, seeking to unveil "the hidden premises, the invisible attitudes and loyalties, the concealed links between broadcasting and power, broadcasting and class which prevent the media from articulating this experience in clear and authentic terms. … the constraints are written into broadcasting structures." Since his earliest works on the subject, Hall emphasised that ideological reproduction through the media must be understood structurally. That is, media output is not merely the product of individual broadcasters, specific schedules, or isolated programmes; rather, it emerges from a mutually constitutive relationship between media institutions, societal common sense, and state politics. Thus, the fact that mass media presented black immigrants as a social problem cannot simply be attributed to "bad racialist" broadcasters. Even those considered "good liberal" were, as Hall argues, "constrained by these structures."[198]

In this sense, media representation does not stem from the prejudices of individuals but is embedded in the structural functions media perform as main characters in the reproduction of ideology. Mass media, Hall observes, "reflect overwhelmingly middle-class attitudes and experience," not only by selecting key social issues and defining them as matters of public concern, but also by providing particular interpretations of them. In this sense, their relationship with common sense is reciprocal: on the one hand, they pick out questions considered socially relevant; on the other hand, they ensure that these issues remain perceived as such.

Hall insists that the relationship between media and racism cannot be confined to the direct production of racist ideology, for mass media "are so powerfully constrained constrained—'spoken by'—a particular set of ideological discourses" that, in turn, are capable of constraining "a very great variety of individuals: racist, antiracist, liberals, radicals, conservatives, anarchists, know-nothings and silent majoritarians." What the media guarantees is a public ground for expressing racist beliefs, though even more

[197] Stuart Hall, 'Black Men, White Media', in *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*, by Stuart Hall, ed. Paul Gilroy and Ruth Wilson Gilmore (1974; Duke University Press, 2021), 51–53.
[198] Ibid., 55, 51.

crucial is the fact that they maintain a discursive perimeter whose premises, logics, and conclusions are formulated as "racist one."[199] Here, Hall returns to the absent/present dialectic that we have already analysed in his reading of the Marxian critique of ideology, now applied to describe the condition of historical forgetfulness of the black presence in British history, economy, and culture, eventually made untenable by the national liberation struggles and their migration to the former imperial metropole.

> The very definition of "what it is to be British" the centrepiece of that culture now to be preserved from racial dilution—has been articulated around this absent/present centre. If their blood has not mingled extensively with yours, their labour-power has long since entered your economic bloodstream. It is in the sugar you stir: it is in the sinews of the infamous British "sweet tooth": it is the tea-leaves at the bottom of the "British cuppa." The indigenous racism of the postwar period *begins* with this profound historical forgetfulness.[200]

Even if ideology takes on a more discursive guise, that is, an ideological discourse that articulates fragments of common sense in a political direction, then the critique of ideology through the media returns to Marxian themes such as the concealing of power relations and their historical character, thus selecting the visible elements while confining others to absence. More than the imposition of a coherent ideology, Hall is ultimately interested in the "enormous *ideological labour*" involved in bringing order to a process—the ideological class struggle—that is inherently disordered. It is this constant work that characterises the role of the media,[201] as well as "the ground where Powellism, Thatcherism and the National Front have, in recent years, made such remarkable headway." To challenge racism within the ideological sphere, Hall argues, involves engaging with the underlying premises on which it is grounded, "the muddy and confused middle-ground." Upon the same terrain act both the New Right racist offences and the leftist defence of that liberal consensus, which Thatcher put an end to. In any case, the latter had not contained but rather actively "organised racism in place" through the legal and sociological paradigm of race relations, for it was "the linchpin of what I called 'inferential racism'."[202] Such paradigms, he argues, reproduce racism ideologically and

[199] Hall, 'Whites of Their Eyes', 115.
[200] Hall, 'Race and Moral Panics', 58.
[201] Hall, 'Ideological Effect', 328.
[202] Hall, 'Whites of Their Eyes', 116–17.

socially reiterating the present/absent dialectic of ideology, rendering it "largely *invisible* even to those who formulate the world in its terms."[203]

It is precisely on this unconscious basis—on the fact that it represents a hidden, inferential structure—that the attempt to politicise racism as an anti-working-class strategy has been made possible. Racism has been reorganised politically and overtly to serve as "specifically, a racism *for* the working classes and the petty-bourgeoisies." This is why racism eventually results in "a crisis *for* the working class itself," insofar as "the growth of racism has helped to *contain* the representative strategies and struggles of the working class and of the organized labour movement, confining them to struggles which, being race-specific, cannot surmount racism."[204]

[203] Ibid., 106.
[204] Hall, 'Race and Moral Panics', 68–69.

2 Disputing race and class

Building on the elaboration reconstructed in the previous chapter, this chapter examines how structural understandings of racism inform different interpretations of the relationship between race and class in post-war Britain. Through a close reading of the concluding chapter of *Policing the Crisis*—and of the debates referenced or critiqued therein—it seeks to reconstruct competing definitions of race and class as they emerge within the tension between sociological and political discussions. The chapter explores several ways of theoretically articulating race and class, beginning with a discussion on the political conceptualisation of class with reference to different sociologies of black labour. These not only impacted the conceptual definition of class, but also generated distinct representations of the black political subject, its struggles, and its potential for both black and class liberation. The chapter then turns to address specifically the relation of race and class following different analyses that emphasised, in turn, their autonomy, their hierarchical relation, or their constitutive interdependence. The overall aim is to demonstrate how divergent interpretations of the ways in which racism redefines class—assigning a specific position, function, or condition to black labour—opened multiple possibilities for the politicisation of race, class, and their articulation.

2.1 Sociologies of black labour

2.1.1 Structures of secondariness

Although they adopt different definitions, the political, economic, and ideological accounts of racism analysed above aimed at challenging both the naturalisation of race relations and the reduction of racial discrimination to individual psychological attitudes. By emphasising the structural mechanisms and processes that have shaped the oppression of black people and their place within Britain's class structure, these approaches illuminate a variety of ways in which racism acquires a specific theoretical and political significance. Whether racism is understood as a social relation of oppression—mediated or justified ideologically—or as a mechanism rooted in capitalist dynamics of exploitation, it ultimately functions to identify a specific target group and to position it

within a broader social hierarchy. The analysis of different conceptualisations of racism is therefore closely linked to both a theory of social stratification and a political theory of class.[1]

While the post-war reconstruction period fostered the illusion and even the theorisation of the end of class society, for post-colonial migrants, the notion of a classless society was neither a lived reality nor an available ideological fetish.[2] The vast majority entered Britain as waged workers, thereby sharing the same formal relationship to capital as indigenous workers. Yet it was precisely the experience of racism that rendered this class condition not universally defined, raising the problem of how to assess their class

[1] Social stratification and class theory offer two possible readings of class society. The first approach emphasises the multiplication of class positions, following Max Weber's distinction between classes as an objective, economically determined position without a necessary collective identity, and "status," socially recognised honour that shaped hierarchies before capitalism and coexists with class today. Both, for Weber, are distinct yet interlinked systems of power distribution (Dennis L. Dworkin, *Class Struggles* [Pearson Education, 2007], 15–35). Although starting from a description of social stratification, too, the second approach draws on Marx and is more interested in class than in class*es*. This involves examining the "the form of the working class's political existence within the limits of the capitalist 'system'" (Étienne Balibar, 'In Search of the Proletariat. The Notion of Class Politics in Marx', in *Masses, Classes, Ideas. Studies on Politics and Philosophy Before and After Marx* [Routledge, 1994], 128). This theoretical-political approach focuses on the political subject of Marx's analysis (namely, the tension between the proletariat and the working class) as much as it does on class politics as a politics of liberation (Sandro Mezzadra, 'Politica di classe. Un problema marxiano e le sue metamorfosi', *Parole-Chiave* 11, no. 1 [2024]: 73–83).

[2] The publication of John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (1958; Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998) provoked intense debate about whether prosperity had transformed or even eroded traditional class divisions. The American economist argued that reconstruction had ended the era of scarcity through sustained low unemployment, rising wages, welfare provision, and the widespread access to consumer goods. These developments fostered upward social mobility and altered the experience of workers, who appeared to suffer less from their exploitation as they were increasingly integrated into a wider system of mass consumption. For some commentators, these changes pointed to the embourgeoisement of the working class and the emergence of a classless society (John H. Goldthorpe et al., *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure* [Cambridge University Press, 1969]). Such a debate was thus crucial for the implications it had on how to understand class relations (Eugenia Low, 'Class and the Conceptualization of Citizenship in Twentieth-Century Britain', *History of Political Thought* 21, no. 1 [2000]: 114–31). Galbraith himself referred to a "new class" of superintendents and technicians, yet the growing prominence of the "middle class" and the "affluent worker" appeared to eclipse the working class both as a social reality and as a political subject (Roberta Ferrari, 'Un liberalismo in bilico. John K. Galbraith tra tecnostruttura e countervailing power', *Scienza & Politica. Per una storia delle dottrine* 35, no. 69 [2023]: 177–200; Matteo Battistini, *Middle Class: An Intellectual History Through Social Sciences: An American Fetish from Its Origins to Globalization* [2020; Brill, 2022]). Parallel debates were unfolding within the British Labour Party. Anthony Crosland redefined socialism as the advancement of equality within a prosperous, regulated economy, while Hugh Gaitskell attributed Labour's electoral defeats to the changing character of labour and to lifestyles increasingly shaped by new forms of cultural and economic consumption. Such discussions would receive sustained critical attention in the newly founded *Universities and Left Review*, see Stuart Hall, 'A Sense of Classlessness', *Universities and Left Review* 5 (1958): 26–32; Raphal Samuel, 'Class and Classlessness', *Universities and Left Review* 6 (1959): 44–50; Edward P. Thompson, 'Commitment in Politics', *Universities and Left Review* 6 (1959): 50–55; Stuart Hall, 'The Big Swipe', *Universities and Left Review* 7 (1959): 50–52.

position. In *Racism and Migrant Labour*, sociologist Robert Miles reviews three common approaches to this issue. The first, which he terms the *unitary theory*, holds that although migrant workers face specific forms of racial prejudice and discrimination, they nonetheless occupy the same class position as indigenous workers. The second perspective places greater emphasis on the structural nature of racial discrimination, arguing that migrant workers are situated below the working class, forming an *underclass* in terms of access to employment, housing, and education. Their class positions are thus distinct and structured in a hierarchy that rests on racial characteristics that affect economic processes. The third theory presents the idea of a *divided working class*: both migrant and indigenous workers share the same position within the relations of production, yet migrants occupy a parallel, economically disadvantaged position due to lower wages and restricted social mobility. This produces a subjective sense of separation within the same class, ultimately resulting in a working class divided into two distinct strata.[3]

For Miles, these three approaches conflate the primacy of the relations of production with the ideological process of racial categorisation. Although the latter has real and material effects, it must neither be overstated nor considered autonomous from the processes of capital valorisation. It is the mode of production that determines "the sites or structure of class position," while the historical analysis of economic, political, and ideological relations defines who occupies those specific positions. Racial categorisation refers to the process by which a group within another is distinguished based on presumed hereditary, biological, or cultural characteristics. Though initially ideological, this process has repercussions in the economic and political spheres, fragmenting the class through "the allocation of material and other rewards and disadvantages to groups so categorised within the class boundaries established by the dominant mode of production." These groups constitute 'class fractions,' a concept that—Miles argues—should account for internal divisions within class boundaries without bypassing them (as in the unitary theory), overstating them (as in the underclass thesis), or reducing them to subjective experience (as in the divided class thesis). These fractions result from the coincidence of economic, political, and ideological positions which, while

[3] Miles, *Racism and Migrant Labour*, 151–53.

not altering the structure of social relations, specify their historically distinctive form. In this sense, migrants constitute a "racialised fraction within the working class," occupying "a structurally distinct position in the economic, political and ideological relations of British capitalism," and this adds a specific dimension to class struggle.[4]

Racial categorisation, or racialisation, as a social process, affects both the direction and the form of class struggle, not only due to the fragmentation of the working class but also due to "the production and reproduction of particular political interests which are expressed in a specific ideological form." On one hand, racialisation has historically stratified the labour force by confining migrants to specific levels within factory hierarchies and the broader social division of labour. On the other hand, Miles is careful to stress that racialisation "does not in itself determine the existence of the positions," which are produced by the mode of production.[5] By relegating racial categorisation to a secondary level, this is seen as relevant only from an ideological perspective. It is at this level that false perceptions grounded in the notion of 'race' emerge, as well as particular struggles which ultimately operate as negotiations internal to historically determined relations of production, and thus remain structurally limited in their effects.

Miles's analysis of racism and the class position of migrant labour opens up a broader discussion about the concept of class in the tension between a structural, socio-economic definition and an experiential, historical-cultural understanding.[6] A further difficulty arises when class is defined as a political force, derived from either conception. While Miles is careful not to entirely separate the definition of class as a relation to capital

[4] Ibid., 157, 159, 165.
[5] Ibid., 169, 185.
[6] This distinction echoes Marx's famous passage on the social determination of individual existence and consciousness (Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* [1859], 263; in *Marx and Engels Collected Works* [Lawrence and Wishart-International Publishers, 1987], 29:257–417). That same passage has been interpreted, besides outlining the deterministic relationship between structure and superstructure, as the basis for a dogmatic notion of class. Against this interpretation, E.P. Thompson proposed a historical understanding of class as a social relationship that "must always be embodied in real people and in a real context," and that therefore cannot ignore the meaning that these real people give to their experience, which is historically determined by the mode of production. "Class is defined by men as they live their own history, and, in the end, this is its only definition" (Edward P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* [Vintage Books, 1963], 9, 11; and, for a critical discussion of Thompson's contribution for a theory of class, see Ellen Meiksins Wood, 'The Politics of Theory and the Concept of Class: E.P. Thompson and His Critics', *Studies in Political Economy / Recherches En Économie Politique* 9, no. 1 [1982]: 45–75; William H. Jr. Sewell, 'How Classes Are Made: Critical Reflections on E. P. Thompson's Theory of Working-Class Formation', in *E. P. Thompson: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Harvey J. Kaye and Keith McClelland [Polity Press, 1990]).

from its historically determined cultural, ideological, and political experience, he also detaches the definition of class, which retains a descriptive outlook, from that of class struggle. As a consequence, he tends to dismiss as necessarily reactive those struggles that manifest at the ideological or cultural level, rather than viewing them as integral parts of the class struggle. This reflects a notion of ideology as external, rather than internal, to the process of class reproduction, as previously discussed.

By contrast, in reviewing the economic and political character of Marx's concept of class, Stuart Hall focuses precisely on the articulation of classes and class struggle. Like Miles, Hall reaffirms the centrality of the mode of production in determining social classes, but shifts the focus from the structural positioning to the antagonism characterising their relation—that is, to the class struggle and the way it intervenes and interacts with the logic of capital, making its development less linear and uncontested than it is often portrayed.[7] Though analytically precise and open to the possibility of reciprocal determination, Miles's distinction between the economic and the ideological-political levels ultimately reinstates a sequence rather than recognising different forms of the same class struggle. Drawing on a letter from Marx to Friedrich Bolte, Hall emphasises that, when viewed through the lens of class struggle, Marx's notion of the political is neither a mere reflection of the economic nor an entirely autonomous sphere. Rather, the political is constitutive of the economic insofar as class antagonism ensures that the organisation of the workers' economic struggles has political implications beyond the confines of the factory floor. The proletariat thus comes into being as a class opposed to that of the capitalists. In this sense, "the terms 'economic' and 'political' appear to be used, here, to designate *where*, in any specific conjuncture, the class struggle appears to have pertinent effects."[8]

What Hall calls "the specificity of the political" does not refer to the autonomy of institutional politics, but to the concrete form and political effects that the antagonism

[7] Hall expresses this with a fine oxymoron when he writes that, following the elaboration in *Capital*, "the so-called 'simplification of classes and class struggle'" as stated in the *Communist Manifesto* must now be called "the *complex simplification* of classes and the logic of class struggle within the 'logic' of capital's historic development" (Stuart Hall, 'The "Political" and the "Economic" in Marx's Theory of Classes', in *Selected Writings on Marxism*, ed. Gregor McLennan [1977; Duke University Press, 2021], 109–10).
[8] Ibid., 113. See Karl Marx, 'Letter to Bolte', 23 November 1871; in *Marx and Engels Collected Works* (Lawrence and Wishart-International Publishers, 1989), 44:251–259; see also Maurizio Ricciardi, *The Provisional Power: Marx and Politics as a Critique of Society* (2019; Brill, 2024), 105–7.

generated by the mode of production assumes in real struggle—a process that necessarily involves a "*re-presentation* of the objective class content of the forces arrayed and the means and condition of the political struggle."[9]

> It follows that we cannot conceive of "the class struggle" as if classes were simply and homogeneously constituted at the level of the economic, and only then fractured at the level of the political. The political level is "dependent"—determinate—because its "raw materials" are given by the mode of production *as a whole*: a process of "representation" must have something to represent. But classes are *complexly constituted* at each of the levels of the social formation—the economic, the political and the ideological. … Thus to grasp the "unity" of the class struggle, so constituted, is of necessity to grasp the question of classes *in its contradictory form*.[10]

The reproduction of the capital-labour relation is itself complex and differentiated, since the dominant capitalist mode of production does not develop "in their 'pure' state, on their own" but it is "always combined with, and stand in a complex articulation to, other, previous or subordinate, modes of production." These modes are tied to specific political and ideological relations and give rise to distinct forms of class struggle. For Hall, the conceptualisation of class and class struggle must reflect and account for this complexity. Without disregarding the overall and contradictory effects of different forms of class struggle, its global conceptualisation hinges on the "ability to grasp the *global* effect" and therefore cannot do without a "Marxist theory of representation, of *Darstellung*."[11]

The most clearly developed and systematic analysis of the combination of economic, political, and ideological factors that determine the differential reproduction of the working class in post-war Britain is to be found in *Policing the Crisis*. In the face of a capitalist reorganisation that—in Great Britain as in continental Europe—was becoming increasingly dependent on migrant labour, Hall and his collaborators highlight the structural relevance of racism as a key mechanism in the production and reproduction of the working class. Unlike Miles, their focus is not on determining whether racism is ideological or not. Regardless of the level of the social formation in which it emerges, racism articulates in complex and encompassing ways with the mode of production. This

[9] Hall, 'Marx's Theory of Class', 114, 118.
[10] Ibid., 123.
[11] Ibid., 128–30.

articulation is most visible in the processes of "decomposition and recomposition of black labour"—through immigration laws regulating migrants' entry and stay; the mechanisation of production leading to deskilling; quick and mass lay-offs during economic downturns; residential concentration in specific areas then subject to political restrictions, heightened social discipline, and increased control.[12] These processes show how the reproduction of class relations

> assumes a specific and differentiated form in relation to the stratum of black labour. There are specific mechanisms which serve to reproduce what almost appears to be a 'racial division of labour' within, and as a structural feature of, the general division of labour.[13]

This specificity in class reproduction is closely linked to the fact that capitalism has historically operated by producing fractures and competition among different segments of the working class—thus reproducing the working class as a set of differences rather than as a universal condition. While capital relies on diverse structures, the centrality of migration in the reorganisation of post-war capitalism has led racism to assume a specific and central role in the reproduction of the class "in a racially stratified and internally antagonistic form." Although the history of British colonialism "plays a significant part in this story,"[14] the redefinition of post-war racism must be analysed through those structures that,

> working within the dominant 'logic' of capital, produce and reproduce the social conditions of the black working class, shape the social universe and the productive world of that class, and assign its members and agents to positions of structured subordination within it.[15]

It is through the intertwining of black people's labour experiences, social and cultural realities, and political status resulting in an everyday subordination in Britain, that race emerges as a "key constituent of this reproduction of class relation." A circular dynamic ensues, in which sequential distinctions collapse and effects reinforce the preconditions. On the one hand, race becomes one of the material conditions that enable racism to exist, grounding itself in a material and social base that allows racist ideology to thrive. On the other hand, race—as an economic and social element—is itself brought

[12] Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis*, 336–37.
[13] Ibid., 338.
[14] Ibid., 340, 339.
[15] Ibid., 340.

into being by racism, which structures the reproduction of post-colonial British class society. Race thus appears as the result of an oppressive structure, the visible colour of subordination in British society. Precisely for this reason, it simultaneously represents

> the principal modality in which the black members of that class 'live,' experience, make sense of and thus *come to a consciousness* of their structured subordination. … Race is therefore not only an element of the 'structures'; it is a key element in the class struggle—and thus in the *cultures*—of black labour.[16]

The Marxian problem of reproduction, concerning the preservation and multiplication of the "race of workers,"[17] thus becomes the problem of the reproduction of workers through race, which gives rise to specific "structures of secondariness" determining black labour's subordination. This is a question that must be addressed historically, by tracing the social processes and relations of domination that persist into the present from the past. It must be examined socially, in terms of the intertwining of production and reproduction within post-war capitalism in England and the world market. Ultimately—and importantly—it must be considered politically, by identifying not only the forces of oppression and command, but also the practices of resistance and refusal aimed at liberation.

While Miles already points to conflicting sociologies of black labour in Britain among academics, the same debate characterised black radical organisers and intellectuals. Outside the academic sphere, however, the analysis of the class position of the black working class had to recognise and highlight a political difference, contributing to its organisation. The different interpretations of how racism redefines class therefore indicated multiple possibilities for politicising class, race, and the articulation between the two. The concluding chapter of *Policing the Crisis* is a meticulous, engaging, and complicit critical review of these differentiated theoretical and political analyses. Some, such as the debate between the RTC and TBL, are discussed explicitly, while others emerge through reading between the lines or cross-referencing the historical, sociological, and political elaborations considered. What follows is an attempt to reconstruct these

[16] Ibid.
[17] Karl Marx, *Wage Labour and Capital* (1849); in *Marx and Engels Collected Works* (Lawrence and Wishart-International Publishers, 1977), 9:197–228, here 209.

analyses, which have remained largely unexamined until now,[18] highlighting the conceptual differences in the formulations proposed by these authors and the analytical and political consequences they entail. Then, the last section of this chapter will return to the theoretical-political reflection that concludes *Policing the Crisis*.

2.1.2 The autonomous class sections

The characterisation of black labour in Britain as a class section did not begin in the metropole. In his seminal intervention on the black-police conflict, *Race Today* editor Darcus Howe traces the arrival of the so-called Windrush generation back to the eventual failure of Caribbean workers' struggles in the colonies from the interwar period through the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. After having succeeded in placing workers' "representatives to power in almost every Caribbean countries [sic]," their compromise with colonial elites and foreign capital "led to the wholesale demoralisation of the masses as unemployment became a permanent feature of the colonial economy." The causes of postcolonial migration are thus rooted in the counter-offensive by metropolitan and colonial capital against workers' independentist struggles in the colonies. While this counter-offensive entrenched underdevelopment and structural unemployment in the Caribbean, it also encouraged the recruitment of a workforce already trained and potentially pliable for post-war reconstruction in the metropole. The demoralisation described by Howe was therefore the precondition enabling British capital to minimise the costs of labour reproduction and intensify exploitation by increasing the number of waged workers and subjecting them to disciplinary power both within and outside the labour process. From the standpoint of capital, Caribbean migrants fleeing colonial unemployment towards opportunities generated by metropolitan development were thus not so much "a section of the class of itself as anti-capital" but rather "human capital" essential to its valorisation.[19]

However, demoralisation leading to migration was not the sole outcome of being relegated outside of production. What defined the colonial urban unemployed as "a section" was that they had historically formed a "cohesive social unit," meeting their

[18] Only recently has part of this debate been reconstructed by Rob Waters in his important historical study on the emergence of black identity in post-war Britain, see Waters, *Thinking Black*, 177–207.
[19] Howe, 'Fighting Back', 333.

shared condition of being (voluntarily or not)[20] wageless with a range of strategies to acquire the necessities of life. These came together with cultural expressions such as calypso and steel bands, and distinctive forms of life that shaped the existence of a recognisable social group within the working class in the colonies. In Howe's view, if being unwaged—whether as an imposed condition or a conscious choice on the part of a section of the working class—represents ambivalence, or even an outright contradiction, as its critics would be quick to note,[21] it not only exposes the formal nature of capitalist freedom but also demonstrates that the condition of necessity imposed by capital—on which its authority is based—can be upturned into a potential for action. The refusal of work, born in the colonies, migrates alongside the migrants themselves into the cities of the metropole. The outcome of this process is the emergence of an internal differentiation within the working class, based on differing attitudes toward the acceptance or rejection of waged labour, between those who work and subsist on a wage, and those who do not work and must find alternative means of reproduction. This does not allow for a unitary understanding of the class. Rather, RTC contends that the working class in Britain is not

> a harmonious conglomeration of individuals … For us, it is clear that the working class is mercilessly divided; divided by the capitalist division of labour … In this hierarchy of labour each section is parcelled out according to race, sex, age and all other forms of ability and disability. … Each section is in conflict with capital, finding and discovering its own particularity, discovering differing modes of struggle, and organisation.[22]

The division between those who work and those who refuse to work is therefore only one of the possible distinctions within the working class. If these are determined by the capitalist division of labour, particular episodes of the broader class struggle then arise along these dividing lines. It therefore becomes necessary to understand how these divisions operate, what effects they have and what resistance and struggles they provoke in order to organise the general class struggle. The key issue in understanding who accepts or rejects work, how, and why is, first, to distinguish those within the class who are

[20] "In Jamaica, in Guyana, in Trinidad unemployment stands as something like 30% to 40% of the working population and at the same time in the sugar plantations there is an overwhelming shortage of labour, so that what one is seeing existing side by side, is the shortage of labour in a *key* area of the Caribbean economy and an overwhelming refusal to do that[,] representing inself [sic] in high unemployment in another area of the economy" ('Interview with Darcus Howe', interview by Tony Jefferson, October 1975, 1, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham (SHA/US121/12)).
[21] Alrick X. Cambridge, 'Fighting Back. Letter to the Editor', *Race Today* 6, no. 1 (1974): 16–17.
[22] RTC, 'One Year Later', *Race Today* 7, no. 1 (1975): 3.

engaged in production from those who are excluded from it. This is intended to grasp their specific social and political conditions, which also give rise to autonomous and often spontaneous forms of struggle, and to assess their reciprocal relationship—how they influence each other and how they might be connected.

Beginning with the wageless section, Howe differentiates between the earliest refusers who, amid economic growth and full employment, laid the foundations for the institutions that allowed West Indian migrants to build a community within the metropole, subverting "capital's plan for maximum surplus value from the immigrant work force." In this sense, the first clashes with the police were aimed at bringing these refusers back to the point of production. They initiated a tradition of struggles which was then inherited by the second generation who carried it forward by refusing "to do capital's shitwork." Crucially, they did so not from a position of demoralisation but with a sense of "boldness and confidence" of their own, shaped by the international influence of Black Power.[23]

The significance of black youth's struggles against exploitation lies primarily in their rejection of capital's command upon their lives—a command they encounter as early as the school system. This discipline seeks to render them disposable to harsh exploitation, available for harsh exploitation while employed and ready to be called up once they are not. Refusal of work is thus framed as an attitude towards exploitation, understood as a mode of command over their lives aimed at extracting unpaid surplus labour in factories. In this light, refusal becomes "a legitimate form of anti-capitalist struggle,"[24] binding together black young refusers with those engaged in production.

In factories too, black labour has long waged its own struggles, although conditions and compositions differ. Black labour—and this includes Asians as well—has been employed under markedly different circumstances. They could be found in "the backwoods of British industry," where a small number of workers were subjected to "filthy sweat shop conditions," with wage differentials fostering competition among them. Here, the white worker "appears as foremen or a handful of highly skilled workers with the prestige and privileges of tradesmen working in remote isolation and estranged from black workers," as well as from any concern with class struggle and unity. However,

[23] Howe, 'Fighting Back', 334, 336.
[24] Ibid., 334.

black workers were also employed in "larger factories with a modern production process", where both interdependence and conflict between black and white workers are more intense. While living "cheek by jowl on an assembly line," they are paid and treated differently, with trade unions negotiating the "productivity agreement to reinforce the division of labour along racial lines."[25]

> Yet in this very arena is a final resolution of the conflict within the working class possible. Alas, the very forces that perpetuate racism from the old world to the new, in actuality, create the conditions in which it is possible to subvert it.[26]

This, the RTC specify, does not mean disregarding struggles beyond the sphere of production (such as those in the service sector or among the wageless), but rather acknowledging that "the power accumulated in the modern production process among the higher echelons of black labour today is easily redistributed or made available to black people internationally."[27] Although divided and fragmented into sections scattered across multiple global market hierarchies and social divisions of labour, the working class is nonetheless a singular reality on an international scale. Not only because the growing importance of migration has tendentially made the reproduction of the working class a global process, but also because black workers in Britain

> work to send money home, because our labour in the sweat shops of the East End supports a family in Bangladesh, because the eight hour shift in Dagenham or on London Transport is necessary to support our families and relatives in Barbados and Jamaica. … We are, by definition, part of an international working class.[28]

This interdependence is, in every respect, a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it links the destinies of the First and Third Worlds, connecting the most advanced nodes of capitalist development with its more peripheral areas: every local victory thus resonates on a global scale. In this sense, interdependence is therefore both an objective fact and the subjective possibility of working-class internationalism. On the other hand, the willingness of a migrant worker to work overtime "is directly related to how much money he sends to Bangladesh, Gujerat or the Caribbean," likewise their possibility "to strike or

[25] RTC, 'Racism in the Working Class', *Race Today* 6, no. 9 (1974): 243.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.
[28] RTC, 'Building the International', *Race Today* 8, no. 11 (1976): 218.

not to strike will be partially determined by the letter which says things are hard in Sylhet, that prices have shot up in Trenchtown, that the bonus is not being paid in Bombay."[29]

Children of migration, yet distanced from the former colonies, black youth are thus in a position to more easily refuse "the jobs that society allocates to [them]" while simultaneously recognising the political value of their struggles as a continuation of those rooted in the workplace.[30] What binds together the struggles of the various sections of the working class is how they reverberate within the competition among buyers and sellers of labour. Following Marx's analysis, by refusing to work, they are in fact deciding not to participate in the competition which takes place among the sellers, causing "the commodit[y] offered to *rise* in price,"[31] that is, to demand higher salaries. The battle against work is therefore not solely the prerogative of youth situated outside the sphere of production, but represents the overarching meaning of the diverse struggles of the various segments of the working class, both globally and within Britain.

The reorganisation of post-war production was, in fact, anything but uncontested. The strength demonstrated by the white working class—willing and powerful enough "to determine where he works and for how much"—led capital, on the one hand, to resort to automation against labour, fragmenting "the skill of the craftsman … into a series of unskilled, repetitive, boring jobs" and on the other, to the mass employment of "unskilled workers" by drawing upon colonial reserves, so that "competition to subvert the refusal of whites to do shit work in foundries came from the small farms in the Punjab."[32] Once

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[29] Ibid.
[30] RTC, 'Power to the Black Wageless', *Race Today* 7, no. 3 (1975): 57.
[31] Marx, *Wage Labour and Capital*; in *MECW*, 9:205.
[32] RTC, 'Black Employment in the Black Country', *Race Today* 7, no. 6 (1975): 134. For a detailed analysis of this process, focusing on the dynamics of the workers' struggle at Ford in Britain, see Ferruccio Gambino, 'Ford britannica. Formazione di una classe operaia', in *Operai e Stato. Lotte operaie e riforma dello stato capitalistico tra Rivoluzione d'Ottobre e New Deal*, by Sergio Bologna et al. (Feltrinelli, 1972; repr., DeriveApprodi, 2024). This text was translated and republished by Red Notes Pamphlets already in 1976, demonstrating the interest of certain sections of the British left in Italian *operaismo*, as well as direct contacts between revolutionary political groups (see Kevin McDonnell and Max Farrar, *Big Flame: Building the Movements, New Politics* [Merlin Press Limited, 2024]). Archives also contain evidence of political communication between the British Black Panther Movement and the Italian organisation Potere Operaio: 'Europe's Blacks Besiege the Metropolis of Capital', English translation of an article published in *Potere Operaio*, 1 May 1971, JLR/3/1/5, GPI; and the report titled 'Potere Operaio -- 1969/1970 in Italy: A Wave of Struggles', n.d., LRA/3/8, GPI. In October 1971, Potere Operaio organised the third international conference in Florence, titled *For a New Revolutionary International*, with participants from various countries, including the USA, Israel, Ireland, the Dominican Republic, Switzerland, Germany and France, as well as at least three participants from the United Kingdom, who were introduced as "a comrade from

within the production process, the Asian workers in foundries struggled to overcome their brutal exploitation, using different methods at their disposal to subvert the logics of competition. Besides strikes, they made use of the capital's request to find new workers by having the already employed take in their kins, thus employing a power able to affect the composition of the workforce more favourably to them. While this strategy ensured that capital had access to a numerically adequate labour force at all times, the mass entry of migrant labour—automatically classified as 'unskilled'—also deprived capital of the ability to manage conflict through the divisions ensured by wage differentials, which were also structured along racial lines. Furthermore, the use of piecework and productivity bonuses as strategies to suppress basic wages and intensify competition backfired, as these mechanisms rendered wages a variable more difficult for capital to control. They also inadvertently fostered greater organisational autonomy among workers outside the traditional unions, which tended to mediate conflict primarily over the basic wage.

To view the position of Asians in factories merely as the result of the capitalist process of the social division of labour, characterised by racial discrimination, would mean overlooking "the independent self activity, generated from within the Asian working class" in which RTC sees "the potential for attacking the divisions within the working class, a necessary process in uniting the class as a whole." For this reason, the struggles of the Asian workforce in the factories of the Midlands have been understood as "an attack on the *wage differential* between black and white workers" and capital was once again compelled to respond by resorting to a racial principle—namely, employing white workers to undermine the position of strength that Asian workers had gained through their autonomous forms of organisation.[33]

The refusal of work re-emerges in these factory struggles, with the dual aim of working as little as possible while earning the maximum amount of money, and of targeting racial division and hierarchy in labour, as well as wage differentials that both

London," "an English comrade from the Black Panthers in London," and "a West Indian immigrant" ('Verso la conferenza d'organizzazione per una nuova internazionale rivoluzionaria. Materiali del convegno internazionale organizzato da Potere Operaio. Firenze, 1-2-3 Ottobre 1971', *Potere Operaio* 44, no. Speciale [1971]).

[33] RTC, 'Black Employment in the Black Country', 134, 136. The article refers to a series of collective redundancies at various factories, including Shotton Bros., Newby & Sons, and Midland Motor Cylinder Co., between 1968 and 1969. Following the redundancies and dispersal of the Asian workforce to lower-wage factories, recruitment resumed, with white workers given first option on jobs.

underpin and perpetuate competition. To the extent that this is an international tendency,[34] "which is increasing in every section of the class we look at, whether they be white workers, West Indian workers, young blacks entering the labour market, or schoolchildren," employers continue to turn to the less powerful section of the class "to tap those sources of labour." This is evident, for example, in the employment of women, who from the outset have proved no less militant than men, and whose experience has made even clearer that "the battle for time becomes as crucial as the battle for money" once seen from the perspective of ones who have always worked in and out of production, in and out the home.[35]

Ultimately, the refusal to work expresses a powerful struggle for equality within the class. This is because it can unite the various forms of working-class self-activity that different sections engage in against capital, based on their specific characteristics. According to Howe, this possibility first became visible during the 1974 energy crisis, which followed the Yom Kippur War in October 1973. Howe interprets the energy crisis as resulting from decisions made by Palestinians in the Middle East and miners in Britain to turn "their energy into 'unproductive activities.'" While the British state appeals to workers in the UK—both migrant and native—to take responsibility for the nation, this presents an opportunity to reopen the age-old battle over the standard working week. This is particularly pertinent in post-colonial Britain, given that "what has been normal for the British worker has not been the norm for the 'immigrant'," as migrants' working weeks were disproportionately longer. Therefore, against the government's demands for reduced working hours and pay in the name of austerity, black people in Britain can use the energy crisis to their advantage by decoupling wages and production and demanding to work three days but be paid for five.[36] Detaching the determination of wages from production time is, ultimately, what the wageless are attempting to achieve, "seeking to break, once and for all, notions of productivity—i.e. that you have to produce for capital before you

[34] "I would say that the phenomenon that we described as the black wageless exists in Toronto, New York and London, so that it is an international question." (Howe, 'Interview', 1; also see 'Black Wageless in Detroit. "The Embers Are Starting to Burn Again"', *Race Today* 7, no. 11 [1975]: 251–56).
[35] RTC, 'Black Employment in the Black Country', 137.
[36] Darcus Howe, 'The Energy Crisis: New Political Perspective', *Race Today* 6, no. 2 (1974): 35.

can get money." For this reason, the political demand to be advanced is that of a "social wage for the unemployed. Money in our pockets without having to be slave."[37]

2.1.3 The super-exploited sub-proletariat

Contrary to the idea of a class subject divided into several sections, TBL insists on the singularity of the working class, albeit one in which the entirety of black workers occupies a specific subordinated position. Rather than mapping the different sections of the class that emerge from the intersection between capital's command over labour and the subjective responses to it, TBL's editor, Alrick X. Cambridge, points to a hierarchical representation of the working class. Black labour is thus defined as a sub-proletariat, whose position and political possibilities must be enquired at the intersection of a dual mechanism of subjection: the specific exploitation of black workers employed in the labour process, that is, the greater extraction of surplus value compared to their white counterparts (super exploitation); and their racial oppression "as a black minority."[38]

To develop the concept of sub-proletariat, TBL draws on multiple intellectual traditions. Contemporary analyses of immigrant labour under post-war European capitalism, such as the one formulated in their seminal study by Stephen Castles and Godula Kosack, are discussed and critically evaluated in light of some black radical intellectual contributions that recognised a particularly intense form of exploitation tied to racial oppression.[39] In her analysis of the specific condition of the "Negro woman worker" in the US, Trinidadian communist and black feminist Claudia Jones had already drawn attention to the phenomenon of "super-exploitation," focusing both on wage differentials compared to Black and white men, and white women, as well as on "the conditions of ghetto-living—low salaries, high rents, high prices, etc."[40] In Cambridge's

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[37] RTC, 'The Police and the Black Wageless', *Race Today* 7, no. 2 (1975): 27.

[38] Cambridge, 'Black Workers and the State', 184. In the editorial introduction to this essay, TBL states that the author's position reflects an analysis which has been collectively developed and, in some points, already expressed in previous issues of the journal. For instance, in Meg Howarth and Alrick X. Cambridge, 'The Stanmore Engineering Workers: Interview with Eric Bogle/Tony Linton and Others', The Black Liberator 1, no. 4 (1972): 140 where 'sub-proletariat' appears next to 'labour aristocracy' to refer to the difficult alliance between black and white workers during strikes. While the key texts in which this position is clarified are Cambridge's, there are traces of this collective discussion also in 'TBL Programme Discussion on Black Working Class', n.d., DADZIE/2/1/7, BCA.

[39] See 'TBL on Black Working Class'.

[40] Claudia Jones, 'An End to the Neglect of the Problems of Negro Women', in *Claudia Jones. Beyond Containment*, ed. Carole Boyce Davis (1949; Ayebia Clarke Publishing, 2011), 76. In Claudia Jones's

reformulation of the concept, he explicitly recalls the political manifesto of the Black Workers' Movement, which had previously been republished in *The Black Liberator*. BWM's manifesto, too, described black workers' position in terms of both "the general subjection of any worker" and "the special subjection of a black worker," resulting in "a qualitatively different position (situation) from their white counterparts both in regard to the generality (universality) of workers' exploitation and also in regard to the specificity of their particular, national oppression as black workers."[41] Black workers are employed in the most menial, low-grade, and poorly paid jobs, which white workers generally refuse to do. They encounter unemployment first, as they are "last in, first out" of employment.[42] In Cambridge's rendition, indicators of this double subjection include:

> The *horizontal* and *(limited) vertical distribution* of the Black Masses into, (i.e. occupying) the bottom strata functions of the Metropolitan capitalist economy derived from the ideological operation of racism/racialism *in relations of production* and in *social (class) relations*; as the *lowest stratum* of a specific *hierarchy of labour powers* constituted by the production, reproduction, consumption functions of monopoly-capitalism; to a determinate level of subsistence, historically derived, for the *reproduction of Black labour-power*—i.e. a labour market structured to generate a process of *differential levels of subsistence* linked to destructively long working hours.[43]

According to Cambridge, these measurable, empirical evidences suggest that black labour maintains a distinct relationship to production and reproduction in comparison with white labour. This not only defines their subaltern position but also serves as an index of their super-exploitation. Racism intervenes to preclude any possibility of upward social mobility, fixing black labour at the lowest level of the social hierarchy. This specific position is not determined solely by a qualitatively distinct mode of social reproduction for the black proletariat. While racial oppression does not directly determine the rate of exploitation, it ensures a quantitatively inferior reproduction—measurable in the higher

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biography, Carola Boyce Davis points to A.X. Cambridge's debt to Jones, as he was her last assistant at the *West Indian Gazette* until she died in 1964, and to the *Black Liberator* importance in carrying forward her legacy (Carole Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones* [Duke University Press, 2007], 85 and passim). For a discussion of the super-exploitation of Black women in American communist debates and a revival of Claudia Jones—or often her absence—in contemporary debates on intersectionality, see Denise Lynn, 'Socialist Feminism and Triple Oppression: Claudia Jones and African American Women in American Communism', *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 8, no. 2 (2014): 1–20; Mezzadra, 'Intersectionality, Identity, and the Riddle of Class'.

[41] Editorial Introduction to Black Workers' League, 'Work Situation and Black Workers', 183.

[42] Black Workers' League, 'Black Liberation in Britain', 76.

[43] Alrick X. Cambridge, 'Glossary', *The Black Liberator* 2, no. 3 (1975): 280, GPI (JOU/3/6).

extraction of surplus value via lower wages, longer working hours, and an overall lower level of subsistence. These are precisely the conditions that Castles and Kosack describe as "marginal privileges" experienced by indigenous workers when compared to the "particularly intensive exploitation of immigrants." However, they argue, these are not sufficient to constitute a sub-proletarian condition.[44] By contrast, Cambridge argues that the empirical evidence of black workers' super-exploitation and racial oppression lies in "the *interlacing* of these specific mechanisms." While this evidence does not render the theoretical and political definition of super-exploitation any more straightforward,[45] this gives a theoretical relevance to those extra-economic conditions of oppression that may contribute to realising (by justifying and perpetuating it) the super-exploitation of black people. This point is reiterated in several instances, not only by Cambridge. In an article preceding his more formal elaborations, Meg Howarth, commenting on the inability of trade unions to oppose the 1971 Immigration Act, writes that the law aims to make:

> statutory the position of black *workers* as sub-proletariat—the *reserve army of labour*—through the annual renewal/refusal of the 'work permit' by which the black worker is not only being denied his 'right' to participate in protest on the shop-floor (this would be nothing new, a 'right' which is increasingly being denied white workers also), but his part in the labour force, an essential means of production, always that, like the women workers, of sub-proletariat most brutally exploited in the cities of monopoly/capital.[46]

This framing shifts attention from the intensity of exploitation to the very conditions that determine whether or not black workers gain entry into the labour force, in both its objective and subjective dimensions. The law effectively curtailed black workers' political possibilities and imposed new conditions on their stay and employment, such as the work permit system, which produced a migratory status, temporary and subordinated. This concern is echoed in TBL's introduction to a study on the political economy of black labour in Manchester, where it is argued that "the system of economic super-exploitation" operates both through exclusion from the labour market and through "social factors

[44] Stephen Castles and Godula Kosack, 'The Function of Labour Immigration in Western European Capitalism', *New Left Review* I/73 (June 1972): 14; for an extended discussion, see Stephen Castles and Godula Kosack, *Immigrant Workers and Class Structure in Western Europe* (Oxford University Press, 1973).
[45] As Cambridge himself admits "the mechanisms whereby surplus-value extraction is specified as peculiar to Black workers in the metropolitan economy is still to be worked out" (Cambridge, 'Glossary', 280).
[46] Meg Howarth, 'Imperialism and Social Democracy', *The Black Liberator* 1, no. 4 (1972): 134, GPI (JOU/3/3).

outside production such as housing policy."[47] It is this interplay of productive and reproductive mechanisms that allows capital to realise super profits at the expense of black labour. This applies equally in metropolitan centres and colonial or post-colonial peripheries, where "the entire working class forms the subproletariat of the international capitalist system."[48] If super-exploitation secures a segmentation of the metropolitan working class into a privileged stratum and a super-exploited, racially oppressed one, such distinctions collapse in the global market, particularly within the "*peripheral dependent social formations* which are a source of 'exceptional profits' over the average rate of profits." It is in these contexts that it becomes possible to impose "*brutal* mechanisms of surplus-value extractions (super-exploitation) other than those practised in the industrialised modes of production" such as starvation wages, payment in kind, prolonged working hours and child labour, further lowering levels of subsistence.[49]

Howarth's quote introduces another key element in TBL's and Cambridge's understanding of the sub-proletariat: the relationship between the sub-proletariat and the industrial reserve army. While RTC had dismissed this hypothesis, recognising that black youth had "uncompromisingly refused to budge," and thus to perform their role as an industrial reserve army,[50] Cambridge contends that Darcus Howe confuses the routine effects of capital's operations with a conscious refusal to work. From this perspective, RTC's thesis and its identification of black labour with the allegedly revolutionary subject of the wageless is at best an ideological reaction to a material condition of political ineffectiveness. Indeed, despite Howe's claims, refusing to work cannot undermine the process of capital valorisation:

> Implicit in the thesis is the notion that should the black unemployed be forced into productive labour the rate of exploitation (and surplus value) would be intensified? And isn't this true for other sections (white) of the working class? The truth is: theoretically and practically, the rate of exploitation (s/v) need not necessarily be intensified were the whole working class to be productively employed. But this is extreme. Employing the entire labour force of the (black and white) working class is

[47] Editorial introduction to Ron Phillips, 'The Black Masses and the Political Economy of Manchester', *The Black Liberator* 2, no. 4 (1976): 290, GPI (JOU/3/7).
[48] 'Glossary', *The Black Liberator* 2, no. 2 (1974): 193, GPI (JOU/3/5).
[49] Cambridge, 'Glossary', 280.
[50] RTC, 'The Police and the Black Wageless', 27.

> impossible under capitalist relations of production which *always* has need of a '*Reserve Army of Labour*.'[51]

Marx had already noted that the absolute increase or decrease of the number of workers employed does not correspond to a relative increase or decrease in variable capital ('v' in the formula measuring the rate of exploitation), as the ability to extract more or less surplus value from individual labour-power defines the degree of exploitation's intensity or extension.[52] Moreover, to ensure the continuation of production and accumulation, capital relies not only on the exploitation of an ever-expanding mass of wage labourers, but also "upon the constant transformation of a part of the labour force into an '*unemployed'* and '*underemployed'* disposable '*industrial reserve army of labour*'."[53] In this regard, Cambridge questions the causality RTC implied between black workers' condition of unemployment and their alleged refusal to work, as well as the specificity of this phenomenon as a defining feature of the *black* working class or a

[51] Cambridge, 'Black Workers and the State', 184.

[52] "The number of labourers commanded by capital may remain the same, or even fall, while the variable capital increases. This is the case if the individual labourer yields more labour, and therefore his wages increase, and this although the price of labour remains the same or even falls, only more slowly than the mass of labour rises. Increase of variable capital, in this case, becomes an index of more labour, but not of more labourers employed. … On the one hand, therefore, with the progress of accumulation, a larger variable capital sets more labour in action without enlisting more labourers; on the other, a variable capital of the same magnitude sets in action more labour with the same mass of labour power; and, finally, a greater number of inferior labour powers by displacement of higher" (Karl Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Volume I* [1867]; in *Marx and Engels Collected Works* [Lawrence and Wishart-International Publishers, 1996], 35:629).

[53] Cambridge, 'Glossary', 279. Since the already-mentioned Castles and Kosack, *Immigrant Workers*, the Marxian category of the reserve army of labour has been widely employed in analyses of the role that migrant workers play within capitalist production. Against the superimposition of migration and reserve army, and explicitly polemical with nationalistic understanding and usages of the category against migrant workers, see Pietro Basso, 'Marx on Migration and the Industrial Reserve Army: Not to Be Misused!', in *Rethinking Alternatives with Marx* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021). Similarly opposed to such readings, Lucia Pradella, in her study on globalisation, draws on the category to highlight not only the internationalist dimension of Marx's text, but also the equally international character of the working class (*Globalization and the Critique of Political Economy* [Routledge, 2014], 155–56). It is precisely by emphasising the behaviours of the contemporary "multinational migrant worker" that one can overturn the passivity to which the category of the industrial reserve army seems to confine migrants—portraying them as inert actors subjected to capital's planning needs—and instead highlight their strategies of mobility, exit, and turnover as forms of workers' insubordination (Gabriella Alberti and Devi Sacchetto, *The Politics of Migrant Labour: Exit, Voice, and Social Reproduction* [Bristol University Press, 2024], 62). This same concern underlies Sandro Mezzadra's discussion of the work of the important scholar of migration and critic of the reserve army category, Yann Moulier-Boutang. By recuperating the category of the industrial reserve army—in particular, Marx's tripartite distinction between "the floating, the latent, the stagnant" (Marx, *Capital I*, 635)—Mezzadra seeks to foreground a less rigid separation between employment and unemployment. In doing so, he proposes to emphasise the indeterminacy of the border between labour and non-labour, especially in relation to the various forms of withdrawal from work enacted by migrant workers ('Potenzialità dell'esercito industriale di riserva', *Cartografie Sociali* 15 [2023]: 167–80).

general attitude towards toil shared in the *whole* working class. What is, in fact, constitutive of the black sub-proletarian position—and intimately intertwined with super-exploitation, though not reducible to it—is their racial oppression.

On this point as well, RTC's position is flawed. According to Cambridge, exploitation is an economic reality that must be measured with respect to the extraction of surplus value with no corresponding wage *at the point of production*. He thus draws upon the debate on productive and unproductive labour, especially in response to claims concerning domestic labour: "a current misunderstanding about the Marxist theory of productive/unproductive labour found especially vocal in the work of Selma James and Mariarosa Dalla Costa." While these two Marxist feminists describe domestic labour as "productive" in the sense of being essential to capitalist reproduction as it produces and reproduces the worker and their labour-power, Cambridge agrees with the view that only labour "in direct relation with capital"—an aspect James and Dalla Costa allegedly fail to clarify. As such, since there is no extraction of surplus value, domestic labour is oppressed but not exploited.[54]

Similarly, and as previously noted, racial oppression may intensify or extend a given relation to capital based on exploitation, but it does not constitute that relation per se. Rather, it should be understood as national oppression, giving rise to specific and potentially contradictory forms of struggle. Within such struggles, the proletarian dimension must be emphasised to prevent them from devolving into regressive nationalist movements. The forms of "resistance (political, cultural, ideological and economic) of the *black working class*" must therefore be contextualised both "as levels (forms) of their class struggle," and within "the political class struggle of the working class and the bourgeoisie." It is not a matter of denying the political significance of the black working class's ideological struggles. However, it is crucial to avoid detaching those struggles from the material conditions and capitalist processes that generate them; otherwise, the

[54] Cambridge, 'Black Workers and the State', 185; see Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, 3. ed (Falling Wall Press, 1975). For the debate on the productive/unproductive character of domestic labour, which went on for several issues in the *New Left Review*, see Ian Gough, 'Marx's Theory of Productive and Unproductive Labour', *New Left Review*, no. I/76 (1972): 47–72; Wally Seccombe, 'The Housewife and Her Labour Under Capitalism', *New Left Review*, no. I/83 (1974): 3–24; Jean Gardiner, 'Women's Domestic Labour', *New Left Review*, no. I/89 (1975): 47–58; Margaret Coulson et al., ''The Housewife and Her Labour under Capitalism'--A Critique', *New Left Review*, no. I/89 (1975): 59–71; Wally Seccombe, 'Domestic Labour—Reply to Critics', *New Left Review*, no. I/94 (1975): 85–96.

risk is to overemphasise their impact (as in Howe's case) or reduce them to merely cultural and regressive nationalist forms (as in the case of the BLF). "The nationalist struggle with progressive effects is no more than another form (modality) that the political class struggle of the oppressed assumes in the presence of national oppression."[55]

2.2 Troubling class

2.2.1 On contradictions

While the aforementioned texts can be read primarily as sociologies of black labour in the UK, they also articulate a political conception of class. For RT, recognising the fragmentation of the class subject into its various sections means acknowledging a multitude of experiences that cannot be easily categorised into a vague, generally defined class interest. It is not the working class as such that fights against capital, but its various sections, which, within their concrete struggles, behave as a class. In practicing the refusal to work and in the confrontation with the British police, the West Indian working class "has made its first tentative steps towards testing itself as a class, feeling its way to new conceptions of its collective self and its relations with others," thereby enabling the construction of "new class alliance" among different sections of the working class in specific circumstances.[56] In this sense, politics follows sociological analysis—albeit the former intervenes and rewrites the latter, for, as Howe says, "we had succeeded in broadening and deepening the definition of working class."[57]

For TBL, the position is more contradictory. They begin by claiming to be interested "in nothing less than [the] whole" of the class struggle, but their analysis of the sub-proletariat ultimately prioritises that particular stratum of the working class over the whole class. Exploitation and oppression name not only two distinct forms of social subordination, but also two different subjects—the working class and the "Black masses"—whose intersection defines the super-exploited, racially oppressed sub-

[55] Cambridge, 'Black Workers and the State', 186. See also Gutzmore, 'Black Liberation'.
[56] Howe, 'Fighting Back', 333, 337. As an example of this class alliance, Howe provides the case of the Mangrove Nine trial; see Angelo, 'The Black Panthers in London, 1967-1972', 23–27; Paul Field and Robin Bunce, *Darcus Howe: A Political Biography* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 93–135; Waters, *Thinking Black*, 93–124.
[57] Darcus Howe, 'Foreword', in *Sex, Race and Class*, by Selma James (Falling Wall Press-Race Today Publications, 1975), iv.

proletariat. This allows them to trace a continuity between metropolitan super-exploitation and imperialist super-profits in the peripheries. Unsurprisingly, the proper name of the global sub-proletariat then becomes the "Black masses," comprising both the black metropolitan workers structurally excluded from top positions within factory hierarchies—who confront daily the racialised division of labour upheld by the alliance between white workers and white bosses—and the peasants and workers in the peripheries of world capitalism suffering neo-colonial dominance. Since black liberation entails the overthrow of this global system of domination and exploitation, the task is one of "supporting revolutionary class struggle in every theatre, but particularly those in which the black masses are engaged." The possibility of a unified class struggle, therefore, depends on the outcomes of these struggles, not only in overcoming exploitation but also in ending racism. This requires a harsh critique of those struggles that fail to address both imperatives. This is why they call "into question the revolutionary potential of the metropolitan workers' movement." The judgement passed on the British working class—and its organised form, the trade union—is scathing. Under both Wilson and Heath, it granted capital and the British state a series of victories, either on economic (cuts to social spending and wages), political (the Industrial Relations Act), and social (the Immigration Act) levels. These outcomes suggest there is little to expect from this class as a whole, and more from the stratum that has been most active in struggle in recent years—the black sub-proletariat.[58]

As previously discussed, the two analyses of the class position of black labour correspond to two distinct conceptions of exploitation. Whereas RTC favours a political understanding of exploitation as command, TBL emphasises its economic meaning as the extraction of surplus labour uncompensated by wages. The structural character of exploitation as *both* an economic *and* political principle organising capitalist society—resulting from the contradiction between capital and labour—is thereby broken down, or at least complicated, by a series of other determinations that overlay and alter its character. This is untenable for the BUFP.

[58] Gutzmore, 'Black Liberation', 5, 3, 7.

> The idea of Black workers being super exploited and the white worker only exploited does not hold up. What does hold up is the argument that Black workers have an added oppression of racism, of which the white worker is unaffected.[59]

Even if the proportions vary, white workers can also be found in the worst jobs and conditions—the same conditions in which the vast majority of black labourers are employed. Regardless of one's position in the labour hierarchy, what matters is "how this wage is earned and its instability," irrespective of skill level or pay grade.[60] In BUFP analysis, the attempt to understand the relationship between exploitation and racism thus leads to the two related relationships between the black working class and capital on the one hand, and between the black and white working class on the other. In a Maoist vein, these are framed in terms of primary and secondary contradictions.[61] "The contradiction between the black people and the white working class is only secondary," BUFP argues, for both the black people and the white working class are primarily in contradiction with the ruling class. Moreover, both are not only exploited under capitalism and imperialism but also suffer (although differently) the injection of "its racist ideology into every section of society."[62]

The BUFP thus asserts the need to develop, within Marxism-Leninism conceived as a critical praxis rather than a dogma, an analysis capable of grasping "the generalities of the particular and the particularities of the generalities"—that is, the specificity of their oppression in relation to the generality of exploitation shared with the white working

[59] L. and L., 'What Is the B.U.F.P.?', 6.
[60] Ibid., 10.
[61] "If in any process there are a number of contradictions, one of them must be the principal contradiction playing the leading and decisive role, while the rest occupy a secondary and subordinate position" (Zedong Mao, 'On Contradiction', in *Four Essays on Philosophy* [Foreign Languages Press, 1966], 53). The focus on Maoism and the Chinese Revolution is a common feature of the various strands of the radical black movement. Both the BUFP and the BLF recognise its influence and importance. Examples can be found in Mao's aphorisms scattered throughout the pages of *Black Voice*, as well as in Harry Goulbourne's (BUFP member) recollection ('Africa and the Caribbean', 79–111); see also BLF, 'What Mao Tse-Tung Meant to Black People', *Grassroots*, December 1976, 8, GPI (NEW/9/20). The BWG organises visits to China and studies Mao during internal political training seminars on imperialism (BWG, 'A Sister's Visit to China', in *Speak Out! A Brixton Black Women's Group Reader*, by BWG, ed. Milo Miller [first published in *Speak Out!* 1: 6-9, 1977; repr., Verso Books, 2023]; 'Strategies for National Liberation - Mao, Ho Chi Minh, Cabral', n.d., DADZIE/2/1/2, BCA; also see Kerry Pimblott, 'Britain's Black Left Feminists Look East: Claudia Jones, Olive Morris and Mao's China, 1949–1979', *Contemporary British History*, 2025, 1–39, https://doi.org/10.1080/13619462.2025.2495882). For an analysis of Mao's influence on black radical organisations (particularly in the US), see Robin D.G. Kelley and Elizabeth D. Esch, 'Black like Mao: *Red China and Black Revolution*', *Souls* 1, no. 4 (1999): 6–41.
[62] BUFP, 'Manifesto - Long-Term Programme', *Black Voice*, September 1970, 4, GPI (NEW/14/1).

class. This approach clarifies black workers' specific position within the broader working class and aims to link the black struggle to the class struggle.[63]

> What some Black people are not willing to admit is that they are part of the working class … We are not saying that the working class consists of us Black people alone; quite the opposite in fact. The majority of the working class in Britain is white as they are the indigenous people of Britain. One of the many political issues that we the BUFP put forward through Black Voice, is that of the contradictions between the white working class and the Black workers and those between the working class as a whole and the state.[64]

Identifying the generality of the primary contradiction within the particular oppression of black workers means not only recognising that "the majority of Black people have to sell their labour to get a wage" and that this condition is shared with "a large section of the white population," but also that the particular condition of racial oppression only appear to align black workers with "a very tiny minority of Black people aspiring to join the ruling class," and as such responsible for the perpetuation of racism. Recognising the principal contradiction makes it possible to distinguish between social forces that contribute to the revolutionary process of overcoming it and those that reinforce it by maintaining the primary and secondary mechanisms of oppression. BUFP thus seeks to draw a distinction within the black community, separating the position of the black working class from that of other black people, which it describes as "diametrically opposed," not just for their social status but focusing on how they act and what interests they pursue. However, this differentiation does not in itself facilitate the constitution of the working class as a political subject. Nor does the recognition that "the majority of Black people in Britain are workers (wage slaves) like the majority of white people," unless such recognition redefines the objective of the black liberation struggle as directed not solely against racism, but against the "racist capitalist system." If the adjective of the secondary contradiction (racist) also qualifies the primary contradiction (capitalism), it is through the operations of the latter that the fundamental antagonism is revealed. This, in turn, allows for political connection by redefining the polemical target of one's discourse and practice.[65]

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[63] L. and L., 'What Is the B.U.F.P.?', 21.
[64] BUFP, 'Cry for a Media to Express Collective Black Expression - Fulfilled', *Black Voice* 6, no. 3 (1975): 2, UCL (ALTER PRESS/Box 32).
[65] BUFP, 'Black People Are Part of the Working Class', 3.

This political value of racism is even more explicit in BUFP's definitions as an ideological and repressive tool in the hands of the ruling class (the State and capital). Racism thus assumes a social character that targets the entire working class, not only those who are racially identified as such, for it sets the contradiction between blacks and whites within the working class. The institutional reproduction of racism is, in fact, aimed at generating confusion regarding the class position of black people, who are misperceived as "'just Black people' regardless of [their] status or position in society." Stripped of their social determination in relation to the British class structure, blacks are constructed as individuals defined solely by their race. Similarly, blacks' struggle is reduced to a mere fight for racial survival, when it is rather to be understood as "wholly bound up with the struggle for equality and justice for the whole society."[66] This struggle engages black workers in distinct ways, as they are, on the one hand, affected by—and, consequently, struggling against—unemployment, underpayment, inflation, and lay-offs, as much as white workers. On the other hand, for them, racism is experienced not just as a mystifying force but also as a violent and oppressive reality. Despite occupying the same class position as white workers, black workers result as "the most oppressed, the most disadvantaged, the most brutalised section of the working class."[67]

In a similar vein, the BUFP rearticulates the relationship between black men and women. Here too, it is necessary to stress that the struggle for women's liberation is a class struggle "against the ruling class and the bourgeoisie state! NOT AGAINST OUR MEN!" Once again, it is the primary contradiction that determines the enemy, and evaluations of other contradictions and struggles—as well as potential alliances—must be based on their effects upon that principal contradiction. Hence, "the battle against our men's chauvinism is one that is carried out as a contradiction between compatriots," since black men are "miseducated people who have been told and who absorb what they've been told as proof of their superiority over the female sex." Contrary to what it may seem, the BUFP does not invoke a pedagogical action towards black men. What they suggest is rather a political struggle that asserts the contradiction between men and women within the broader class struggle through the politicisation of black working-class women:

[66] Ibid.
[67] BUFP, 'Home Is Where We Are', *Black Voice* 6, no. 3 (1975): 1, UCL (ALTER PRESS/Box 32).

> The larger political struggle for freedom from racism and exploitation will involve the question of women's liberation … For, the women's question, like the class and race antagonism, is an insoluable [*sic*] one in capitalist society. ... It is for us—as Black working class women—to solve our own problems from the standpoint of our race and class positions. … It is only when we as a class, suffering all the ills of an oppressive racist society, coupled with the sustained dominance of our menfolk, take the initiative in creating the necessary conditions in which meaningful change can be implemented, that there will be any real freedom for us as working class Black women.[68]

Patriarchal oppression requalifies the main antagonism (which remains that with the State as agent of capital) in light of a particular contradiction, which, in turn, cannot be resolved without confronting the general one. The point of departure for a critique and a struggle for women's liberation must therefore be their class position, avoiding any separation between the struggle for women's liberation and that against capitalism and racism. After all, the main sphere of social life for black women has always been labour, and thus they have always been part of the proletariat. From the early days of industrial capitalism, white women in Europe, "like men, were fully exploited by the capitalists," while in the colonies of the New World, a more complex stratification emerged. While reaffirming women's subordination to men, this stratification distinguished women based on their class and racial positions. White ruling-class women could enjoy "benefits and advantages of [their] wealth," although "enduring the immorality of a marriage based on property." In contrast, the indentured white woman and the black slave woman were both brutally exploited and oppressed, besides being sexually abused by their masters. If female slaves worked on plantations as much as male slaves, their gender would be exploited further through domestic work in their masters' homes, as well as through the reproduction of the enslaved workforce. After all, they were seen as people who could "mate and breed offsprings to be slaves" Apart from her status as a slave, therefore as a property, the social position of the black woman was thus very similar to that of "poor white woman in the Americas and the white working class woman in Europe," so that they can conclude: "each section of the oppressed women were victims of the same parasite and criminal—the capitalist system" and its males. This remains valid a century

[68] BUFP, 'Women - Revolution the Only Solution. The True Position of Working Class Women', *Black Voice* 6, no. 3 (1975): 6, UCL (ALTER PRESS/Box 32).

after the abolition of slavery, as women continue to be "oppressed because they're women and exploited because they're workers by the ruling class."[69]

While the emphasis on identifying primary and secondary contradictions may appear to facilitate the definition of an antagonistic subject, the analysis of racism and sexism reveals the greater complexity of the political organisation of that antagonism. In other words, even when the enemy is clearly identified, the ensemble of working men and women that stands out continues to be traversed by secondary contradictions that divide sections of the same social subject and ultimately render its political recomposition nearly impossible. Precisely because the distinction between primary and secondary contradictions is still understood in sequential and ideologically mystified terms, the authors themselves are confronted with a contradiction.

> Therefore, whilst we recognise the necessity to struggle against racism in general, it is essential to treat the contradiction between ourselves and the working class as a contradiction among the people, whilst the contradiction between ourselves and the ruling class is a contradiction between the people and the enemy.[70]

It is from the attempted recomposition of the contradiction between the "white *working class*" and the "black *people*" (emphasis mine) that eventually a political subject emerges—yet one which can do so only by renouncing, or at least concealing, its own class character in light of a secondary contradiction: the "black people." It is no coincidence, then, that their newspaper's subtitle reads "popular paper," conceived as a publication "from the masses to the masses." As the use of 'people' and 'masses' finally reveals, the BUFP hold onto a notion of class that proves unusable even after being rigorously defended—one that ultimately reflects the impotence of an international subject comprising West Indians, Africans, and Asians, who, despite being "an essential part of this country's work force," cannot exercise its power so long as they lack the proper organisation through which expressing it.[71] Unsurprisingly, then, they assert that the overcoming of the ideological character of secondary contradictions is already implied in the eventual resolution of the primary one, as "only in a socialist society building scientific socialism will male chauvinism be totally eradicated."[72]

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[69] Ibid., 6–7.
[70] BUFP, 'Manifesto - Long-Term Programme', 4.
[71] BUFP, 'The Struggle Is Where You Are', *Black Voice* 8, no. 2 (1977): 2, BCA (RC/PERIODICALS/59).
[72] BUFP, 'Women - Revolution the Only Solution. The True Position of Working Class Women', 6.

2.2.2 On race and sex

The question of power, and of the possibility of exercising it from one's social position, is central to the political voice of black women in Britain. From the moment of their arrival in the UK, black women have been pivotal in black radical movements and struggles, contributing to a redefinition of the working class through inseparable, racially and sexually defined experiences. By drawing parallels between the black movement and the (white) women's liberation movement, RTC activists Barbara Beese and Mala Dhondy (née Sen) identify key phases and internal tendencies within both movements. They do so in order to critique the misinterpretation of the "apparent contradiction" posed by the race-and-class and sex-and-class problematics, each of which has resulted in the subordination of one to the other. These include: the black nationalist movement and the corresponding separatism of radical feminists; the integrationist perspective of the black middle class, paralleled by the women's "Equal Righters"; and finally, the Black Left, which reproduces white organisational structures within black communities, adding "the struggle against racism and imperialism to their manifestoes," just as Socialist Women "have merely added the term sexist to their definitions of the white, male dominated left."[73]

Rather, to correctly frame their relation to class, race, and sex must be considered in terms of the power relations by which they are shaped and which simultaneously they contribute to constitute. By starting from the internal power relations within the class, Beese and Dhondy reveal particularised forms of class relations which cause race and sex to take on specific social and political meanings in light of the capital relation. In other words, it is not class that is redefined by race and sex, but race and sex that are themselves configured internally to class. As they write, "caste exists as a result of power relations within the working class. And that capital has used this division to perpetuate its hierarchy of labour powers which keeps the class divided against itself."[74] While race and sex exist independently of capital, they emerge as subordinated positions within a power hierarchy

[73] Barbara Beese and Mala Dhondy, 'Introduction', in *Sex, Race and Class*, by Selma James (Falling Wall Press-Race Today Publications, 1975), 6–7.
[74] Ibid., 7. The emphasis on power is central not only to the theoretical analysis of class in relation to race and sex, but also to the simultaneous accusation levelled against both capital and the organised left by "those of us who have been denied power" (ibid., 5).

(and are thus to be conceived as "castes") when inserted into and exploited by capital's circuit of valorisation precisely because of the differentials they secure.

Beese and Dhondy's brief analysis introduces the republication of Selma James's article *Race, Sex and Working Class Power*—originally published in *Race Today*—which itself builds on the theoretical-political work developed together with Mariarosa Dalla Costa within the International Wages for Housework Campaign. In Dalla Costa's contribution to their co-edited pamphlet, she states that "every analysis of women as a caste … must proceed from the analysis of the position of working class housewives." According to Dalla Costa, this is a peculiar figure in social production, simultaneously shaped by capitalist production yet excluded from direct production. It is precisely by reducing women's role to what lies outside capitalist production that "capital constructed the female role" as a set of sexed tasks and qualities necessary for the reproduction of labour power, thus inaugurating "the more intense exploitation of women *as* women." Although women's oppression predates capitalism, it is this specific social relation that produces the figure of the housewife, placing her in a subordinated position to "the man in the family," who is "the instrument" of women's subordination and the mediator of her exploitation on behalf of capital.[75] This is explained through an emphasis on the wage as the power to command the labour of others:

> Since Marx, it has been clear that capital rules and develops through the wage, that is, that the foundation of capitalist society was the wage labourer and his or her direct exploitation. What has been neither clear nor assumed by the organisations of the working class movement is that precisely through the wage has the exploitation of the non-wage labourer been organised. … That is, the wage commanded a larger amount of labour than appeared in factory bargaining. *When women are concerned, their labour appears to be a personal service outside of capital.*[76]

[75] Mariarosa Dalla Costa, 'Women and the Subversion of the Community', in *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, 3. ed, by Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James (1972; 3. ed, Falling Wall Press, 1975), 21, 23, 31.

[76] Ibid., 28. These passages on wages also reveal a tension between productive and unproductive labour as previously discussed. While Marx clearly defines a productive worker as "who produces surplus value for the capitalist, and thus works for the self-expansion of capital," in his presentation and formulation of surplus value, he emphasises that the social relation of capital "is essentially the command over unpaid labour." As a consequence, "the secret of the self-expansion of capital resolves itself into having the disposal of a definite quantity of other people's unpaid labour" (Marx, *Capital I* [1867], 510, 534). This command over unpaid labour resonates with Dalla Costa's analysis and the feminist critique of social reproduction. For a discussion of how some feminist thinkers (including Dalla Costa) have critically engaged with and made use of Marx's thought, see Paola Rudan, 'Il femminismo e Marx. Sul bordo di una frattura', *Filosofia*

Being apparently outside the sphere of capitalist production has several political consequences for women. The invisibilisation of their role in social production ("because only the product of her labour, *the labourer*, was visible there") translates not only into the unlimited nature of the working day—since there is no wage to delimit it and because "a woman's work is never done"— but also into their isolation within the domestic sphere, both far from other women and "external to the working class." It is to this isolated, subordinated, and exploited existence that the working-class woman is meant to reduce her social existence and realise her identity as a housewife. By contrast, claiming participation in social production through the reproduction of the worker re-inserts the woman into the "socialised struggle:"[77]

> In the sociality of struggle women discover and exercise a power that effectively gives them a new identity. *The new identity is and can only be a new degree of social power*.[78]

Selma James refers to the apparent exclusion of women's work from capital as a "hidden, mystified form" of their class relation. Women appear to be external to capital as a social relation—and therefore external to capital's constitutive counterpart, i.e., labour—while in fact being integral to its functioning. As a result, the very concept of class that emerges—as well as the political forms of organisation it enables—excludes certain subjects who should objectively be considered part of it. By starting from the perspective of these excluded subjects, it becomes possible to expose and contest the material processes that divide and mystify the class composition. In James's words: "Beginning with the *female* (caste) experience, we redefined class to include women."[79]

Racism and sexism affect the reproduction of women and black people as subjects of the social production by limiting their social identity through an ancestral and supposedly immutable reference to nature. Tasks such as plantation labour or changing nappies are thus seen as 'naturally' assigned to the identities of those performing them, completely "disconnected from our capitalist functions." This results in a racial and

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politica, no. 2 (2019): 267–84; Emmanuel Renault, 'Reproductive labor and exploitation: From Marx to feminist theories of social reproduction', *Actuel Marx* 70, no. 2 (2021): 45–61. On social reproduction theory, see Cinzia Arruzza, 'Functionalist, Determinist, Reductionist: Social Reproduction Feminism and Its Critics', *Science & Society* 80, no. 1 (2016): 9–30.

[77] Dalla Costa, 'Women and the Subversion of the Community', 28, 30, 35–36.

[78] Ibid., 36–37.

[79] Selma James, 'Sex, Race and Working Class Power', *Race Today* 6, no. 1 (1974): 12.

gendered stratification of labour power, structured by a process of social training and discipline aimed at fostering specific capacities while repressing others. This imposed limitation of identity, rather than expressing "the very substance of class," precludes access to that class position from which a power struggle over wages and against capital commands can be expressed. It also produces internal divisions within the class, giving rise to "social power relations of the sexes, races, nations and generations." In this way, the colonisation of the class is constituted, wherein capital mediates the exploitation of subordinated sections through the wage worker and those organisations "which claim to be of and for that class."[80]

> We are seeking to describe that complex interweaving of forces which is the working class; we are seeking to break down the power relations among us on which is based the hierarchical rule of international capital.[81]

Class is thus reconfigured as a multiplicity of power relations experienced not only in confrontation with what is structurally "non-labour,"[82] but also within the various segments of labour itself. It is precisely as autonomous sections that black workers first, and women later, asserted their autonomy and social power both inside and outside the factory.[83] James thus returns to these two movements to show their internality both to the capital relation and to the working class, insofar as they assert themselves as politically significant differences within and against capital.

Race Today Women take on from the specificity of the black working-class woman, arguing against a static idea of this woman and for looking "at what they have been and what they are in the process of becoming." They analyse postcolonial migration as a process of entry into a new labour relation (from receiving no wage, or at best an irregular one, in the colonies, to receiving one in the metropole) and highlight how this represented access to a form of social power previously denied.[84] This process of transformation and the formation of new social identities affected both Caribbean and Asian women, albeit differently. The former arrived in Britain as recruited workers, primarily in the service

[80] Ibid., 13–14.
[81] Ibid., 15.
[82] "Capital is capital only as non-labour, in this antithetical relation" (Karl Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1857–61* [n.d.]; in *Marx and Engels Collected Works* [Lawrence and Wishart-International Publishers, 1987], 28:218).
[83] Selma James, 'Sex, Race and Working Class Power', 15.
[84] Race Today Women, 'Black Women and the Wage', *Race Today* 7, no. 5 (1975): 99.

sector and particularly in the NHS, while the latter initially arrived as dependants of male workers and only gained access to manufacturing jobs in the early 1970s following the halt to male labour immigration.

> Today the vast majority of black women from this generation of immigrants, both West Indian and Asian, are engaged in some form of wage labour—either full time or part time. On the one hand they bring to the working class struggle here, different historical experiences and different energies, but on the other, they derive a common experience from the British shop floor—whether it be in the food factories of Southall and Hammersmith, or on the ward floors of hospitals.[85]

The increasing employment of women in direct production and service work seems, at first sight, to place RTC's hypothesis of refusal of work under tension. Yet even Darcus Howe, in analysing the 1974 miners' strike, acknowledged that any victories by the white working class risked falling upon those sections capital deems "the weakest … black workers and women."[86] In this too, women were called upon to reconstruct the working class in a capitalist sense—not only because of the halt to new migrations, but also in the wake of the strikes of the late 1960s. It is no coincidence that the British government implemented a series of socialisation programmes to give Asian women "a comprehensive preparation for the entry … into production." It is precisely here that the refusal of work becomes evident even among women who were entering it, as their non-passive response is recognised: these women "learnt only what was in their interest and disreagrded [*sic*] the rest."[87] In this sense, refusing to work meant more than just not going to the factory and not receiving a wage; it also involved adopting a specific attitude of defiance and confrontation within the wage relationship.

Nonetheless, the very experience of being waged was understood as reshaping their social existence. Returning to Dalla Costa and James's analyses, Race Today Women reflect on the impact of the wage both on their lives as wage workers in production and as housewives. Since receiving a wage "alters the power relations within the family itself" to the extent that "when one job is waged it provides an index with which to measure the value of that which is still unwaged," this meant asserting social power not only in relation to capital but also in relation to their husbands. For many, moreover, the experience of the

[85] Ibid.
[86] Darcus Howe, 'Bringing It All Back Home', *Race Today* 6, no. 3 (1974): 67.
[87] Race Today Women, 'Black Women and the Wage', 99.

nuclear family was as new as receiving a wage, as in the colonies they came from, they had a tradition of joint or extended families. In the metropolis, "the two experiences interact—one informs the other—and by receiving a wage for her labour outside the home, she is able to evaluate her labour in the home."[88]

Although in the editorial introducing this analysis, Race Today Women already claims real impacts on the domestic sexual division of labour, the interviews and reflections they carried out reveal that women continued to work twice as much as men, since they also worked at home as unwaged labourers. Rather than transforming the division of labour, domestic work was reorganised by employing other black women, especially for childcare,[89] or through flexible forms such as homework (light assembly work and sewing) in exchange for lower wages. In the strikes of ancillary workers and nurses during the 1970s, in which many black women participated,[90] the demand was not only for higher wages but also for achieving them by working less. Black women's struggles were thus challenging the fact that they were "forced to leave the health service to get a better deal for themselves around their domestic commitments as wives and as mothers."[91] According to Race Today Women, this proved that black working-class women were aware that their "total working day" comprised both the waged and the unwaged work they performed. Thus, their struggles were aimed at extracting from capital a share of wages that would also account for their domestic labour.[92] For the RTC, this aligns these striking women with the struggles of the black wageless in their demand

[88] Ibid.

[89] Childminding arrangements and foster care, as well as sharing houses with multiple families, were attempts to overcome the difficulties black working-class women faced in the absence of any support or state provision. This also had the effect of depicting black mothers as uncaring. See Bryan et al., *The Heart of the Race*, 28–33. Examples of this controversy can even be found within the black movement when BLF publishes an inflammatory article, to which black women respond in a subsequent edition of *Grassroots* (Black Liberation Front, 'Do Black Parents Care??', *Grassroots* 3, no. 4 [1974]: 4, GPI (NEW/9/11); BWG, '[Letter in Response to Do Black Parents Care??]', *Grassroots* 3, no. 5 [1974]: 4, GPI (NEW/9/12)). Recalling the story of Caribbean women's immigration in post-war Britain, Race Today Women themselves emphasise that: "the entire burden of servicing black labour rested with the women. In the absence of childcare facilities, the women had to create their own. Many West Indian mothers who were unable to work because they had young children undertook the burden of child-minding" (Race Today Women, 'Caribbean Women and the Black Community', *Race Today* 7, no. 5 [1975]: 111).

[90] This strike is featured in an issue of *Race Today* by BWG, 'Black Women and Nursing: A Job Like Any Other', *Race Today* 6, no. 8 (1974): 226–30. Also see Jack Saunders, 'Emotions, Social Practices and the Changing Composition of Class, Race and Gender in the National Health Service, 1970–79: "Lively Discussion Ensued"', *History Workshop Journal* 88 (October 2019): 204–28.

[91] Race Today Women, 'Caribbean Women and the Black Community', 112.

[92] Race Today Women, 'Black Women and the Wage', 99.

for a "social wage" against capital's command, even when they were split along generational lines in their forms of struggle.[93]

It is in light of this analysis of the position and struggles of black women—at home and at work—that Beese and Dhondy distance themselves from those analyses that "started and ended with an acknowledgement of the black woman's doubly exploited position—as black and as woman," reducing the struggle against sexism to a "morally reformist" campaign. Rather, by considering "the relation of *our* role to capital," they illuminate the power relations which position black women as a result of two distinct processes of subordination within the class. The overcoming of racism and sexism, therefore, lies in black women's possibility to "release [their] power." Against those who claimed black women were seeking divisions within the class, they reply that black women's existence "poses instead the potential for a linkage of its [class] power."[94]

2.2.3 On the black community

Together with 'people,' another keyword which shapes the relation of race and class—and troubles both the simple notion of class and their redefinition from a sexed position[95]—is that of community. The concept of community emerges at the intersection between the structural, objective operations of capital and cultural and political processes of subjectivation. Postcolonial migrants were united in communities by migration patterns, which located them in specific urban areas, and by the experiences of racial discrimination and the effects of institutional racism. They were constructed as a community for demographic or social policy reasons. On the other hand, the construction of ties, forms of organisation, and alternative welfare systems to those scarcely provided

[93] While the idea of social wage and the entire analysis of Race Today Women clearly echoes the theoretical elaboration and political demand of Wages for Housework, at the same time, this was not commonly accepted within the politicisation of black women in Britain, as it was perceived as "middle-class preoccupations" while black women were more occupied struggling on picket lines for higher wages outside houses (Bryan et al., *The Heart of the Race*, 149–50; also see BWG, 'Editorial', ed. Miller [Verso, 2023], 20). Despite the complex theoretical underpinnings linking production and reproduction, the slogan's literalness seemed to prevail. Nonetheless, Gerling Bean (involved in various black political experiences and, most importantly, a member of the BWG and OWAAD) recalls that it was Selma James who made her see the possibility of a feminism that paid attention to race, class, and anti-imperialism at the National Women's Liberation Conference in 1970 (A. S. Francis, *Gerlin Bean: Mother of the Movement* [Lawrence & Wishart, Limited, 2023], 109–10, 128–29).

[94] Beese and Dhondy, 'Introduction', 8.

[95] Despite their roles not being acknowledged in black organisations, the very possibility of constructing a black community in Britain "is traceable to the social activities of those black women who arrived here first." (Race Today Women, 'Caribbean Women and the Black Community', 110).

by the state gives rise to a community, understood as both a material and cultural network and a sense of identity.[96] Although each immigrant community is shaped by its distinct colonial history, country of origin, and localising neighbourhood (e.g. Brixton, the East End, Lewisham), often experiencing specific problems and forms of racial oppression, they coalesce into an imagined "black community" in the UK as a result of the common history of colonialism and migration. This, in turn, rewrites the character of the black community as an international one, as its members see themselves as part of a global oppressed black body, united by their shared experience of oppression.

Community is a complex political language, encompassing diverse histories and meanings—from British social-democratic politics to the politicisation of black migrants in the UK.[97] Where it involves social reproduction, welfare, or self-help within specific local contexts, it relates to what simultaneously lies outside production and enables such

[96] Max Weber defined the communal (*Vergemeinschaftung*) relationship as the "subjective feeling of the parties, whether affectual or traditional, that they belong together," distinguishing it from the associative relationship (*Vergesellschaftung*), which is characterised instead by the instrumental and rationally motivated nature of association in pursuit of an interest or end. A communal association is therefore grounded in "emotional values which transcend its utilitarian significance," even when individuals exploit the relationship for their own ends. His emphasis on feeling ultimately leads him to conclude that the mere presence of shared circumstances, behaviours, or common qualities—such as "the possession of a common biological inheritance by virtue of which persons are classified as belonging to the same 'race'"—does not immediately imply the existence of a communal social relationship. As Weber asserts: "It is only when this feeling leads to a mutual orientation of their behavior to each other that a social relationship arises between them rather than of each to the environment" (Max Weber, *Economy and Society. An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich [1922; University of California Press, 1978], 1:40–42). In his historical account of the emergence of the slave community on American plantations, George Rawick foregrounded slaves' agency in making a community—both in terms of a common structure of feelings and a range of practices aimed at an end—out of the dehumanising, brutal, and deadly conditions of their exploitation. He defined the slave community as "that network of communication systems whereby people were enabled to live" (*From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community* [Greenwood Publishing Company, 1972], xii). The dimension of communication and reproductive networks remains a fundamental feature in the definition of a black community in the UK as a consequence of post-war migration. In a political and social context historically attentive to granting broad scope for initiative and autonomy to local communities, the concept of community became, in the wake of post-colonial migration, "one of the principal code-words of race politics in Britain" (Stuart Hall, 'Foreword', in *The Struggle for 'community' in a British Multi-Ethnic Inner-City Area*, by Max Farrar [E. Mellen Press, 2002], xiii). Farrar's study is the most comprehensive examination of the political deployment of the concept of community in post-war Britain. It recalls the struggles for its making and unmaking, its contestation between local and central political powers and authorities, and its very slipperiness as a political term. More recently, Bettina Jansen has collected a range of narratives concerning black British communities, as conveyed through short stories, including a chapter on RTC member Farrukh Dhondy (Bettina Jansen, *Narratives of Community in the Black British Short Story* [Springer International Publishing, 2018]).

[97] Camilla Schofield and Ben Jones, '"Whatever Community Is, This Is Not It": Notting Hill and the Reconstruction of "Race" in Britain after 1958', *Journal of British Studies* 58, no. 1 (2019): 142–73.

conditions to exist. This nexus between production and reproduction—which RTC analyses drawing on Dalla Costa and James—aims at illuminating that

> The surplus value that is the life blood of a capitalist society and process is made not merely by those workers who are stopped and searched at the factory gates to ensure that they are not sneaking away with the goods they have assembled, but by mothers and teachers, service industry workers, by the institutions that man, train and reproduce the muscle and mind of the whole class.[98]

In the inner cities of metropoles, the term "community" captures both what is external to production and the link between the inside and the outside of the shop floor. It denotes the material infrastructure—social organisations, clubs, religious venues, restaurants, nightclubs, bookshops, recreational centres—through which people live their social lives. Here, the community not only supplies labour to particular sectors (service work, low-skilled industrial jobs) but also offers alternative responses to wage labour coercion. Such alternative social relations, which were often established on the border between legality and illegality, are precisely what Darcus Howe refers to in his recollection of the rebirth of a colonial society within the metropolis—a community within *the* society:

> If the labourer does not work, he has to do something else in order to acquire the necessities of life and beyond. It was in pursuit of these activities that an active West Indian community was born in Notting Hill. The institutions created by the unemployed and supported largely by them were not exclusive to themselves. The shebeen where alchohol [*sic*] was served for the full twenty four hours with the accompanying indigenous music was patronised also by West Indian workers in production. The gambling house where para-pinto (the Jamaican dice game) reigned supreme was an institution in which the wage of the worker circulated into and through the pockets of the unemployed.[99]

Against an external definition of community as a mere product of imposed conditions (from labour migration driven by capital, to workers' exploitation in factories, to poverty and difficulty in founding housing outside specific neighbourhoods), depicting a passive group in need of state support, black radicals propose a political concept of community that emerges primarily from cultural and social forms (such as calypso and steel bands characterising community events such as the Notting Hill Carnival) and,

[98] RTC, 'Sir Keith and the Class', *Race Today* 6, no. 12 (1974): 315.
[99] Howe, 'Fighting Back', 334.

crucially, from black struggles themselves.[100] In the community, they find ways and means to express their social power, broadening the scope of class to include sectors, subjects, and struggles that extend beyond production sites, such as schools, neighbourhoods, courts, and relations with the police. However, the community is not immediately a political subject; rather, it "turned into the vibrant and creative force that it is today" throughout its struggles.[101] As with class, the community is rather "in the making" than already made, and thus articulates relations to class which are not straightforward.

First, the community represents new material and political possibilities for the class. Striking factory workers who can rely on community support when challenging both capital and white labour organisations, with their racism and bureaucracy, can "change the shape of future working class struggle." In fact, in the community, "there can be no separation of 'leaders' from 'led'." Migrants' strikes, such as the one taking place at the Imperial Typewriters in the summer of 1974, are "led from the mass meeting and that is firmly where the power lies."[102] Similarly, resistance to police violence remains

> the most important area outside direct production in which the West Indian working class in Britain has made its first tentative steps towards testing itself as a class, feeling its way to new conceptions of its collective self and its relations with others.[103]

In March 1974, when three young men were arrested in Brockwell Park and sentenced to prison, "the West Indian community in South London" responded en masse, making the struggle with the police into an "open battle" that publicly showed to white people "the opposing forces within the British nation, and … the strength and power of the black community." Because of "State brutality", the three young men arrested in Brockwell Park "were representing the black community—against their will—at the West Court, Old Bailey, and, of the greatest importance, the black community felt represented

[100] Almost all radical groups recognise the importance of the Notting Hill Carnival in establishing a West Indian community in Britain. This applies to both its original shape and the events that took place during the second half of the 1970s, when it became increasingly politicised and a confrontational ground with the police. See Claudia Jones, 'The Caribbean Community in Britain', *Freedomways* 4, no. 3 (1964): 341–58; RTC, *The Road Make to Walk on Carnival Day. The Battle for the West Indian Carnival in Britain* (Race Today Publication, 1977); Cecil Gutzmore, 'Carnival, the State and the Black Masses in the United Kingdom', *The Black Liberator* 1, no. 1 (1978): 10–27.
[101] RTC, 'One Year Later', 3.
[102] RTC, 'Imperial Typewriters Strike: The Continuing Story', *Race Today* 6, no. 8 (1974): 223.
[103] Howe, 'Fighting Back', 333.

by them."[104] By changing the nature of the conflict from private to public, it acquired historical-political significance that transcended individual dimensions of the legal charges. RTC thus argued that the Brockwell 3, as they were called, were innocent because "the Brockwell Park incident was a collective response to the years of repression." This was not, then, a defence of their reputations—as their legal team tried to do—but an affirmation of the collective spirit of resistance arising from the community and represented by them three: "Good boys they may be, but that has never been a source of power with which to fight the state. That could only be drawn from the collective power that manifested itself at the fair." Defusing the link between the boys and the community meant defusing their power and consigning them to the mercy of the juridical, ignoring the political aspect represented by the mobilisation of the community.[105]

The state and the police maintained indeed a strategy of dividing the community by pitting old respectable immigrants against young rebellious 'muggers,' just as they fragmented the working class. Thus, the class and community sections move in tandem or interchange in RTC analyses. After all, policing the black youth meant policing "one of the unwaged sections of the society … this section of the class who stalk the city looking for the highest paid part-time job." When black youths aspired to "work less and live with a degree of autonomy," their stance resembled that of "any other section of the working class." However, by violently resisting the police, they embodied "the politics of the black community."[106]

> This political movement involves the entire community. Even so the struggles are centred around a particular section. It is clear that our unemployed youth and our school students are overwhelmingly represented in these confrontations with police officers. … The unemployed and the students are our wageless. They do not work, and consequently are paid no wages.[107]

Forms of resistance in reproduction also extend to housing struggles, where Asian and Afro-Caribbean communities find common ground. The first to squat were black homeless youths who rejected public hostels promoted by Community Relations Councils because they demanded "the very best or nothing," knowing they could rely on a

[104] Darcus Howe, 'Young Lions of Brixton', *Race Today* 6, no. 5 (1974): 131.
[105] RTC, 'Move as a Community', *Race Today* 6, no. 6 (1974): 172–73.
[106] RTC, 'No Jesterin'', *Race Today* 7, no. 8 (1975): 171.
[107] RTC, 'Up Against the Police', *Race Today* 8, no. 7/8 (1976): 149.

supportive community of young blacks in youth clubs and schools.[108] Asian workers, on the other hand, resort to squatting as a way of "to resist several forms of exploitation."[109]

> As a community they [the Bengali families of the East End] have the lowest wage in the country. The sweated workforce has no sweat to spare on the social contract. They have spent it instead on occupying the houses they need, to the crowbar rather than the crowing resolutions to accept or modify the governmental cuts. It is a form of self help which is at the same time an organised assault on the state, in that it is a requisitioning of state property.[110]

Their common housing struggle represented "the revolutionary thrust of the black international community localised and particularised in the issues and terms of the British political scene. It is the 'race question' in concrete form."[111] Eventually, the black community, as a common political subject built around the experience of race, comes out "in a whole series of small battles fought by [its] different sections."[112] IRR director Sivanandan reconstructed this emergence in his 1981 recollection of these battles, seeking to describe the emergence of what he would later call the "organic communities of resistance."[113] In the face of the racialism of the 1950s, which governed racial segregation in the workplace and restricted access to housing and migrants' social life in general, the initial responses of the black workforce (largely West Indians) were "more spontaneous than organised." Discrimination at work prompted individual response; housing discrimination prompted immediate community self-help via mutual aid and welfare groups.[114] These early anti-racist struggles connected to anti-colonial movements, creating broader solidarity among different migrant groups:

> anti-racialist and anti-colonial struggle … was beginning to break down island and ethnic affiliations and associations and to re-form them in terms of the immediate realities of social and racial relations, engendering in the process strong community bases for the shop floor battles to come.[115]

Sivanandan describes these first attempts at black political organisations in the UK as "a mosaic of unities," highlighting a multiplicity of ethnic communities within the

[108] RTC, 'No Longer Sleeping Rough', *Race Today* 6, no. 5 (1974): 141.
[109] RTC, 'East End Housing Hustle', *Race Today* 7, no. 8 (1975): 176."
[110] RTC, 'Blacks Pay Tax for Roofs with Cracks', *Race Today* 8, no. 5 (1976): 99.
[111] Ibid.
[112] RTC, 'Notting Hill and After', *Race Today* 8, no. 10 (1976): 194.
[113] Sivanandan, 'The Hokum of New Times', 52.
[114] Sivanandan, 'From Resistance to Rebellion', 5–6.
[115] Ibid., 8.

metropolis that formed the infrastructural base for later "more holistic, albeit shifting, pattern of black unity and black struggle." While black reactions to the Notting Hill race riots, such as the launching of the *West Indian Gazette* and the first Caribbean Carnival, "helped to cohere the island groups into a West Indian entity," legislative changes in immigration law reshaped migrants' social reality and political responses. As institutional racism was formalised as state policy, it not only brought along its guarantees in terms of social order and control, but also its contradictions. In other words, race "entered the arena of politics" becoming a proper way to affirm or challenge social and political power. It became "an area of contestation for power." In this context, Sivanandan documents innovative, militant anti-racist organisations, both inside social production ("shop floor") and reproduction ("community"), uniting Asians and Afro-Caribbeans against "the experience of a common racism" and resulting in "a common fight against the state."[116]

The impossibility of distinguishing between what happens inside and outside production was also evident in the manner in which state and capital offensives were carried out. For example, the Industrial Relations Act and the Immigration Act of 1971 affected the black working class in a particular way:

> As workers, they [black workers] were subject to the Industrial Relations Act's overall attack on the class … As blacks, they were subject to the Immigration Act's threat of deportation … As blacks and workers, they were subjected to the increasing racism of white workers and trade unions under siege.[117]

If these measures specifically impacted the black working class in its various determinations ("as workers," "as blacks," and "as blacks and workers"), the struggles against these conditions could only be unified and involve both their productive existence and their broader social and cultural condition: "because they were black, [their strikes] tied up with other struggles in the community, which in turn was involved in the battles on the factory floor." Earlier neighbourhood community struggles became "increasingly politicied [sic] in the Black Power movement" and "began to address themselves to the problems of black workers." Thus, "the struggles of the class and the struggles of the community, of race, became indistinguishable." Because race operated in both production and reproduction, it was impossible to separate the factory from society, the black

[116] Ibid., 8–9, 11, 18–19, 23.
[117] Ibid., 28.

working class from the black community. Black labour struggles not only asserted a new political force against racism and exploitation—named 'community'—but also generated "another community, a community of black class interests," which made visible conditions invisible to traditional labour organisations and redefined class boundaries. While black workers still utilised trade unions for their immediate interests, they had to fight "simultaneously as a people and as a class—as blacks and as workers—not by subsuming the race struggle to the class struggle but by deepening and broadening class struggle." Their fights inside the unions—against racist bosses and sections of the white working class—as well as their connection to anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles, reveal that "the struggle against racism was a struggle for the class."[118]

2.3 Defining race politically

2.3.1 The revolution of race

One of the first outcomes of the internal revolution within the IRR was the renaming of its quarterly magazine from *Race* to *Race & Class*. In explaining this choice, the editorial committee stressed the need to pay attention to "the oppression of black people in Britain, which necessarily involves the understanding of the place of black workers, and indeed of all migrant workers, within the entire working class." While this analysis was based on the British class structure, it could not be confined by the Channel nor the Atlantic; it also had to take into account the 'masses' of the Third World: "there emerges two explicit dimensions: the situation of black workers in Britain and the liberation struggle in the underdeveloped world—hence the new title."[119]

The Institute's change in political direction was reflected in an attempt to address a shortcoming that Sivanandan had already highlighted just over a year earlier. In an article for *Race Today*, he expressed strong criticism of black movements for their inability to produce "a concrete analysis of their concrete situation" within post-war capitalist society. This failure, he argued, resulted in a tendency to emphasise national identity and collective struggle "as a people," regardless of their class position. Such an approach mirrored—rather than disclosing it—the fact that "in white capitalist society," the

[118] Ibid., 28–29, 22, 34–35.
[119] Editorial Working Committee, 'Editorial', *Race & Class* 16, no. 3 (1975): 231.

exploitation of black workers "is veiled by racial oppression." Any analysis that prioritises one aspect over the other "without being able to fuse the two" is therefore inadequate to the goals of black liberation.[120]

Sivanandan then referred to the women's liberation movement—explicitly citing Dalla Costa and James as an example of original analytic, strategic, and organisational innovation, for how they were able to make creative use of Marxism by grounding it in their own specific, concrete conditions as working-class women. Similarly, the analysis of black workers must begin from the specificity of their lived experience, which does not arise from a simple addition of two separate conditions—being both "a people" and "a class"—but rather from the particular fusion of racial oppression and economic exploitation that structures their everyday lives. In the case of women, this fusion means that "her exploitation and her oppression are both direct and derivative, overt and concealed." To address this complex situation, she must "redefine class and the class struggle itself," confronting both the "totality of the struggle" and the particularity of her position. This applies equally to black workers: the condition produced by the fusion of racial and economic structures of oppression does not eliminate the relative autonomy of these processes. Each—racial oppression and capitalist exploitation—continues to generate distinct and violent effects that must be resisted in their own right. However, it is through a redefinition of class struggle—one that recognises and incorporates these particular configurations within a unified totality, rather than treating them as merely additive—that those specific experiences of oppression can move beyond the limits of those who suffer them.[121]

In contrast to capitalism's tendency to separate "the economic and cultural aspects of struggle," and to traditional revolutionary movements that allocate the economic to the working class and the cultural to subordinated "castes," Sivanandan thus reclaims the "totality of the struggle."[122] He offers a theoretical-political analysis that can explain racial oppression and capitalist exploitation, both individually and in combination. This involves considering race and class in relation to the processes that create these conditions

[120] A. Sivanandan, 'The Colony of the Colonised: Notes on Race, Class and Sex', in *A Different Hunger: Writings on Black Resistance* (*Race Today* 5, no. 6, 1973; repr., Pluto Press, 1982), 75.
[121] Ibid., 76–78.
[122] Ibid., 78.

of subordination, and examining how those subjected to them translate such experiences into political action aimed at subverting those processes. As early as 1969, Sivanandan had in fact defined the experience of race as inherently revolutionary.[123] Five years later, he further develops this idea in an essay in which he distinguishes between the coloured and the black intellectual. The former stands alienated—estranged from their culture of origin and marginalised within European culture—thus rendered a "creature of two worlds, and of none" at the same time. This condition, Sivanandan argues, arises from the fact that "his colour is the only reality allowed him; but a reality which, to survive, he must cope with."[124] For instance, he must come to terms with the fact that his marginality at the intersection of two worlds is not a condition of political possibilities[125] but rather a starting point that leads to predetermined paths in former colonialist societies. This is because his status as an intellectual does not correspond to any social function other than that determined by race. As a coloured intellectual, he is barred from leading roles in white society, and in fact he can only aspire to find a spot in the field of race relations.

> The universality allowed his scholarship is, in the divided world of a racist society, different to that of the white intellectual. It is a less universal universality, as it were, and subsumed to the universality of white scholarship. But it is precisely because it is a universality that is particulate to colour that it is already keened to the sense of oppression. … the 'coloured' intellectual, at the moment of grasping his contradictions, *becomes* the oppressed—is reconciled to himself and his people, or rather, to himself in his people.[126]

If his knowledge of the grammars, arts, and sciences of the white world had distanced him from the colonial world without bringing him closer to the metropolitan one, it is by experiencing this division that the coloured intellectual recognises racial oppression. This reveals not only his blackness ("delivered from his marginality," he now "stands revealed as neither 'coloured' nor 'intellectuals'—but BLACK"), but also reintroduces the issue of the relationship between race and class. Through the mediation of racial oppression, the black intellectual comes to share, if unevenly because of his status, the communal experience of black workers, who in turn may find themselves

[123] A. Sivanandan, 'Race - The Revolutionary Experience', *Race Today* 1, no. 8 (1969), https://asivanandan.com/the-revolutionary-experience-and-the-church/.
[124] Sivanandan, 'Black Intellectual', 82, 84.
[125] Cf. bell hooks, 'Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness', *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 36 (1989): 15–23; *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Routledge, 2015).
[126] Sivanandan, 'Black Intellectual', 85.

"closer to his bourgeois brother (by colour) than to his white comrade." Thus, racism inserts the black intellectual into the community of the oppressed. However, this experience is differentiated. For the black intellectual, racial oppression is a muted and dislocating condition, which prevents them from fully realising their social role; for the black worker, it stands as the peculiar redefinition of his exploitation.[127] In this sense, racial oppression may reinforce an interclass solidarity among black people, while simultaneously impeding communication between different sections of the same exploited class, such as black and white workers:

> The black workers constitute that section of the working class which is at the very bottom of society and is distinguished by its colour. Conversely, the attitude of racial superiority on the part of white workers relegates their black comrades to the bottom of society. In the event, they come to constitute a class apart, an under-class: the sub-proletariat. And the common denominator of capitalist oppression is not sufficient to bind them together in a common purpose.[128]

By analysing the effects of racism in fragmenting the working class and structuring it hierarchically, Sivanandan complicates any straightforward, immediate understanding of class as a political category. The "common purpose" that is supposed to unite the different sections of the working class does not arise automatically, nor merely from a shared economic experience of exploitation, here framed as "capitalist oppression." Just as racial oppression brought the coloured intellectual closer to the black masses—allowing for his transformation into a black intellectual through a political process that recognised the political nature of his condition—capitalist exploitation, too, does not translate immediately into a commonality of interests or a unified political subject. Rather, it is the outcome of political work that seeks to overcome such internal divisions by confronting the material and ideological force—racism—that generates and sustains them. In this light, the political struggles waged by the "black community and, more especially, the black section of the working class"[129] have demonstrated that class is not reducible to economic relations alone. It is equally shaped by extra-economic forces—social, cultural, and ideological—that make economic relations into structures of

[127] Ibid., 86, 93, 85.
[128] Ibid., 93.
[129] A. Sivanandan, 'Grunwick', in *A Different Hunger: Writings on Black Resistance* (Pluto Press, 1982; originally published as *Race, Class and the State (2): Grunwick* [first published in *Race & Class* 19, 1: 69-73, 1977]), 126.

domination and control. As such, the strikes led by black workers addressed both productive (economic) and reproductive (social and cultural) conditions simultaneously: "the black revolt, in other words, comprehends the social, cultural, economic and political dimensions all at once."[130]

The state's response to these developments was to attempt to fracture the black community by identifying its most militant elements as a threat and seeking to govern them through other, more compliant segments of the same community. This was not merely a matter of co-opting the class; rather, it was an attempt to fragment the community through class stratification. Roles such as community workers—who were not engaged in productive labour but held positions of local authority—were instrumental in this process. Thus, integration into British society took the form of an internal division of the black community, which, once homogeneously working-class, began to mirror the class structure of British society at large. Despite this, it remained structurally subordinated through race. A key moment in this process, Sivanandan argues, is the White Paper, which anticipated the 1976 Race Relations Act. At the heart of this policy document lies the political concern over the "increasing militancy of British-born blacks with nothing to lose and no place to go back to." The West Indian community was cast as a social problem—not only in its younger, second-generation segment, but in its entirety. While the report proposed forms of positive discrimination aimed at restoring "the balance of society, that is, the status quo so violently tipped by the black presence," its main recommendation was to place "more West Indians in positions of authority and responsibility over their community," in the attempt to detach them from grassroots systems of community self-help. Unlike Asian communities, which had already developed internal class hierarchies and created a "self-achieving society [through] their own businesses, shops, industries," the West Indian community was largely working-class and unstratified. For this reason, Sivanandan claims the report's political aim to be "the primordial task of creating a stratified society in the first place. How to break up a cohesive community into a class hierarchy as the prelude to integration."[131]

[130] Sivanandan, 'Race, Class and Power', 387.
[131] Sivanandan, 'West Indian Community', 74–75.

In contrast to this strategy, Sivanandan calls for a political response aimed at dismantling the system as a whole, starting from the race and class nexus. "The blacks must through the consciousness of their colour, through the consciousness, that is, of that in which they perceive their oppression, arrive at a consciousness of class."[132] Here, he returns to his foundational argument: that race and class are not distinct dimensions of black people's experience but mutually constitutive. Class consciousness is deeply embedded in the consciousness of colour: "He sees that racism is only one dimension of oppression in a whole system of exploitation and racial discrimination, the particular tool of a whole exploitative creed." This requires an analysis that goes beyond the economic, taking seriously the cultural and existential forms through which racism operates—even in contexts that appear purely economic. While class is indeed a social position, it could also be the name of a political subject who challenges the "whole system of exploitation and racial discrimination."[133] Once racism is recognised as an oppressive relation of power, it reveals itself wherever power is exercised—beginning with the workplace. "In the workplace and the community, Afro-Caribbean and Asian, we were a community and a class, we closed ranks and took up each other's struggles." This marks the moment of political organisation around the principle that "*black* was a political colour,"[134] transforming race from a subordinated condition into a revolutionary experience.

2.3.2 The black lumpen

Sivanandan emphasised the interdependence of race and class while also acknowledging the ever-present risk of them being made to operate independently of each other. He recognised that a political analysis asserting black as the colour of oppression could pit sections of the same class against each other, rather than acknowledging "that inside every black man there is a working-class man waiting to get out."[135] This is a romanticisation of the oppressed racial position. Instead of being determined by capital valorisation processes, race is detached from class, or it completely replaces the latter, as the BUFP also warned. Thus, class subordination was just one facet of broader societal oppression,

[132] Sivanandan, 'Black Intellectual', 96.
[133] Ibid.
[134] A. Sivanandan, 'Challenging Racism: Strategies for the '80s', in *Communities of Resistance: Writings on Black Struggles for Socialism* (1983, 2019), 66.
[135] Sivanandan, 'Black Intellectual', 96.

which passed through race and took on an almost entirely cultural form. Politically, this translates into the promotion of a sense of cultural identity based on blackness as "the only basis for unity" in the fight against racism.[136] The split in the British Black Panther Movement in the early 1970s was no coincidence. Groups formed that differed not only geographically (in London, the division also reflected their roots in specific neighbourhoods), but also in their articulation of the relationship between race and class, and their views on the causality and relative importance of race and class.[137]

While BUFP insisted that "blackness is not enough,"[138] BLF argued that black people in Britain were still "slaves" simply by virtue of being black. For BLF, racial slavery was maintained not by class exploitation, but by systemic racial oppression "to maintain white supremacy and the capitalist exploitation." Racial oppression is, in fact, the characteristic that structures white society and permeates all its aspects. It is therefore functional to the hierarchisation of the division of labour, which requires the Black people "to do the menial unskilled jobs that the post war white population is reluctant to touch."[139] Racial stratification of labour replicates inequality also in housing and education; black and white workers pay the same social price in worse living conditions despite differential pay. Racial oppression is thus even more visible outside of production, in their overall classification "as inferior—because we are Black."[140]

> Black people are economically exploited as a class because they constitute an underclass below white working class in the economic ladder (even though token exceptions have been allowed to reach the higher rungs). But principle form of oppression for Black people in this country is Race. … In common with other sections of white society, we are economically exploited by the ruling bourgeosie class but we are also racially oppressed by the entire white society.[141]

Under this framework, class becomes merely descriptive—a social ranking within the hierarchies of production. Instead, its political equivalent—the working class—becomes an attribute of the predicate 'white people,' meaning that "the most intense racist

[136] BUFP, 'The Basis for Unity', 5.
[137] Wild, 'Black Power in Britain', 84, 103–7.
[138] On their critique of a political-cultural project resting on blackness, see BUFP, 'The Basis for Unity'; 'Blackness Is Not Enough', *Black Voice* 6, no. 3 (1975): 3, UCL (ALTER PRESS/Box 32); 'Rasta or Revolution', *Black Voice*, 1976, 3, BCA (RC/PERIODICALS/59).
[139] '50 Questions', 1, 4.
[140] BLF, 'In Defense of Self Defense', *Grassroots* 1, no. 1 (1971): 4, GPI (NEW/9/1).
[141] '50 Questions', 8.

oppression comes from the working class."[142] In the analysis of the class structure of British society, race emerges as the primary principle of subordination. This is not determined in the sphere of production, but in the broader reproduction of society:

> Nobody can deny the economic origins of racism, nor that capitalism was responsible for slavery, hence caused racism. But it is completely wrong to dismiss racism merely as an economic phenomenon. Racism existed before capitalism (see Shakespeare's Othello for example). Today racism has become a psychological phenomenon, a mental illness that affects most white people and especially the Anglo Saxons. Racism is a part of culture and language. … Throughout the history of contact between white and non-white people, white supremacy has been the creed that has governed the actions of the white nations.[143]

It is this autonomous history of racism that underpins the subordinate status of black people as an underclass. Differentiation within the black community exists, for instance, on economic grounds. Thus, they need to clarify their rejection of "black capitalism" as yet another form of imperialism, since black capitalists act as agents of white capitalism in the former colonies. However, as they "face discrimination and police brutality not because of [their] class position but because [they] are Black,"[144] even those who find themselves in a slightly privileged position within the underclass, such as the black bourgeoisie or black intellectuals, can offer economic, intellectual and political support to the community to which they are bound by racial oppression.[145]

The theoretical roots of these analyses lie less in Marxism—which they claim is inadequate for grasping the black condition—and more in the theories of the Black Panther Party, especially those of Eldridge Cleaver.[146] Cleaver stated that "the Working Class Proletarians are the House Niggers of Capitalism," framing the development of capitalism not so much as a mode of production, but as the assertion of European bourgeois power over the rest of the world, including Europe itself. A defining feature of

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[142] BLF, *Revolutionary Black Nationalism*, 3.
[143] Ibid., 4.
[144] '50 Questions', 8.
[145] BLF, *Revolutionary Black Nationalism*, 4–6; also see '50 Questions', 8–9.
[146] "Orthodox Marxism is irrelevant to the Black struggle. Marxism was drawn exclusively from Western proletarian experience" (BLF, *Revolutionary Black Nationalism*, 7). BLF had a strict, direct relationship with the Black Panther Party, especially through two of its most prominent members, Ansel Wong and Tony Soares. On Soares's international biography, his correspondence and relations con Eldridge and Kathleen Cleaver (which is also documented in the pages of *Grassroots* 4, no. 1 (1975): 13), see Angelo, 'We All Became Black'. W. Chris Johnson recalls Soares's trip to Algiers in August 1971, during which he discussed Cleaver's recent essay on lumpen ideology with the author. BLF will republish the essay as a pamphlet after Soares's trip back to the UK. See Johnson, 'The Spirit of Bandung', 130.

this process is the concentration and centralisation of "wealth and technology." In Cleaver's view, technology—which roughly corresponds to the Marxian means of production, including scientific knowledge and raw materials—is socially produced yet expropriated and privatised, thus alienating people from nature and the means to transform it. Therefore, capitalism emerges through the process of dispossession and privatisation of technology. Rather than generating a general social dependence on wages and the production of labour-power as a commodity, as Marx said, the processes leading to capitalism primarily generate a condition of dependence and alienation from technology—that is, from nature and the ways of transforming it. Cleaver describes this condition in general terms as the 'Lumpen' condition.[147]

While this condition was in many respects universal, affecting the broad majority of the "dispossessed people," some managed to find in the search for a wage a way to escape it. Certain individuals were able to "organize themselves and legitimize their relationship to technology," thereby becoming working class: they established a more or less stable relationship with the means of production and engaged in political organisation to defend their interests. Others, however, remained irretrievably trapped in the condition of the lumpen, characterised by permanent unemployment and a fundamental disconnection from both production and technology.[148] Unlike those who read Marx's pages on the lumpenproletariat and the reserve army together as part of the same argument,[149] Cleaver sees the two groups as belonging to different spheres and responding to separate logics. Workers who are occasionally unemployed or who move in and out of employment are still part of the working class. It is those who are permanently unemployed and dispossessed who are lumpen.[150] This structural fixity, which entails new forms of dependence and servitude, is naturalised through "relationships of race."[151] Eventually, these different relationships to technology give rise to distinct political translations—different forms of struggle for the working class and for the lumpen. While

[147] Eldridge Cleaver, 'On Lumpen Ideology', *The Black Scholar* 4, no. 3 (1972): 4–5.
[148] Ibid., 6–7, 9.
[149] Paul Q. Hirst, 'Marx and Engels on Law, Crime and Morality', *Economy and Society* 1, no. 1 (1972): 28–56.
[150] A similar line of reasoning seems to characterise contemporary studies of racial capitalism, which not only discuss exploitation and oppression, but also emphasise the expulsion and exclusion of marginalised social groups and "edge populations" from the global working class. See Bhattacharyya, *Rethinking Racial Capitalism*.
[151] Cleaver, 'On Lumpen Ideology', 6.

the working class demands equality within the sphere of production, the lumpen demand participation in consumption without the mediation of production. In doing so, they assert their participation in the social history of technological production from which they have been excluded. For this reason, the lumpen is considered more advanced than the proletariat—his struggles actually subversive compared to the workers' reformist stance.

Cleaver offers a political rather than historical reading of the transition to capitalism, one that sacrifices the social differentiations he had previously highlighted in his analyses of the black colony in the United States.[152] Instead, he constructs a general theory of the development of the lumpen condition as a result of capitalist emergence, which, for its generality, BLF also apply to the British context. In their analysis and politics, one finds similar ideas, such as a description of the lumpen as "the most militant and potentially the most revolutionary section of the Black community." Likewise, the notion of the corruption and ultimate irrelevance of the white working class, which prevents black people from fulfilling the vanguard role they are arguably positioned to occupy, draws on the American Black Panthers' ideology. At the same time, BLF proposes a more nuanced understanding of British social structure, one that does not entirely displace the role of exploitation, as Cleaver's account tends to do. While it is true that black people in general suffer "the most vicious form of racist oppression," black workers in Britain are employed in key industrial sectors, placing them in a position of potential strength. If organised "on a racial basis," they could be capable of "exerting economic pressures on the government."[153] This is because:

> the overwhelming majority of Black people in Britain constitute a special underclass. They are either underemployed … or are unemployed. They are the most oppressed section of society. They face not only class oppression but very severe race oppression. From all the evidence we have to conclude that for Black people, the race oppression is the major contradiction.[154]

In this way, class oppression remains confined to the economic realm, where black people experience the same class-based discrimination as white workers, while racial

[152] Eldridge Cleaver, *On the Ideology of the Black Panther Party. Part I* (Black Panther Party, 1970). For a discussion of black community within the Black Panther Party, see Chris Booker, 'Lumpenization: A Critical Error of the Black Panther Party', in *The Black Panther Party [Reconsidered]*, ed. Charles E. Jones (Black Classic Press, 2005); Bruno Walter Renato Toscano, *Pantere nere, America bianca: storia e politica del Black Panther Party* (Ombre corte, 2023), 204–13.
[153] BLF, *Revolutionary Black Nationalism*, 5, 1–2.
[154] Ibid., 3.

oppression emerges as the contradiction that structures society more broadly, for "they are oppressed in every other fashion by the entire white society."[155] This dual positioning complicates the definition of the lumpen. At times, the term refers to an underclass defined by its peculiar relationship to labour—namely, underemployment or permanent unemployment. Yet elsewhere, it is the broader social racial oppression that seems to take precedence, insofar as it shapes that specific condition of dispossession and deprivation that characterises the everyday life of the "ordinary black person." Faced with multiple instances of racial oppression, "the deprived man, woman or youth has no choice but to find alternative means of providing for his basic needs." Recurring to crime is thus a response by those who "are victims of this racialist society."[156] Rather than being seen as a logical consequence of socio-economic conditions that disproportionately affect black youth, BLF interprets mugging as a "symptom" of racial oppression. It constitutes a subjective response by black youth to state indifference, which creates these socio-economic conditions and simultaneously lays the ground for overcoming them through the formation of community, whether via institutions of self-help or the emergence of a black cultural and political identity.[157]

> In this harsh environment a new youth sub-cult will dominate, based economically on petty crimes and hustling. The ideology will be elements co-opted from Black nationalism and Rastafarian concepts. The culture will give the answers to the basic questions asked by the oppressed lumpen youth. A deeper look will reveal not revolutionaries, but just young Black people engaged in a struggle to survive clinging desperately to vestiges of Blackness.[158]

With the revolutionary subject displaced to the colonies, those in the metropolis are left with the task of surviving—and of fighting for the survival of their communities.[159] Part of that survival involves recognising the political dimension of the lumpen condition.

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[155] Ibid. See also "We could never deny that white people are also exploited, but the fact is that, the Blackman is the most oppressed person on the face of the earth. Therefore Black Power, is the worldwide struggle for the possession of the economic, cultural, social and political power which he in common with all oppressed and exploited of the earth must have—in order to once again return to his natural state of a MAN" (BLF, 'What Is Black Power?', *Grassroots* 1, no. 4 [1971]: 6, GPI (NEW/9/3)).
[156] BLF, 'Blacks under State of Siege', *Grassroots* 4, no. 3 (1975): 3–4, GPI (NEW/9/15).
[157] BLF, 'Who's Mugging Who?', *Grassroots*, December 1976, 4, GPI (NEW/9/20).
[158] BLF, 'Black Youth: The Future?', *Grassroots*, March 1977, 3, GPI (NEW/9/22).
[159] "As a minority in Britain, we cannot fight to change the system. … We must therefore, fight for our own survival here and for socialism back home. … By itself, minority revolution by the Black community would be suicidal and certainly doomed to instant failure. But minority revolution or even a minority uprising in conjunction with revolutionary warfare simultaneously in our home countries is a course that might well have to be considered as an expedient for our survival" (BLF, *Revolutionary Black Nationalism*, 3).

While acknowledging that muggings do not contribute to community development—and in fact place the community at risk by targeting its own members— "it would be difficult to condemn those type of crime with without first condemning the society that can reduce people to that level of survival" anyway.[160] Tony Soares traces this specific social process and the emergence of a black cultural response, formalising it as a transition from one form of underclass to another—that is, from sub-proletariat to lumpenproletariat. Black workers entering Britain in the post-war period were classified as sub-proletariat, which meant their ghettoisation in both the sphere of production and that of reproduction. More than being the result of heightened exploitation, Soares identifies a series of racial disadvantages in employment, housing, services, promotions, and benefits which are not necessarily related to individual "direct discrimination," for their oppression is a societal one.[161]

In response to the economic crisis of the 1970s and the resulting endemic unemployment, part of the black working class began a transformation into a lumpenproletariat. Following Cleaver's initial definition of the lumpen,[162] Soares seeks to trace the signs of this transformation in the subcultures of West Indian youth born and raised in Britain. "It is in the lyrics and poetry of Raggae music that we see the militancy of the ghetto response to the lumpen condition." From a passive and imposed condition—being excluded from the labour market and dependent on state benefits—these subcultures began to politicise their condition, turning it into a critique of the entire capitalist system, including the complicity of the white working class. The lumpen ideology thus becomes not simply the absence of working-class consciousness, but its negation. It generates specific forms of struggle and resistance which, lacking access to workplace-based actions like strikes, find expression elsewhere: "they will take to the

[160] BLF, 'Who Are the Real Criminals?', *Grassroots*, August 1979, 4, LSE (Store Newspapers/N503).
[161] Tony Soares, 'The Emergence of the Black Urban Lumpen Proletariat in the Inner City Areas of Britain' (Middlesex Polytechnic, 1977), 11–12, BCA (SOARES/2).
[162] "The Lumpenproletariat are all those who have no secure relationship or vested interest in the means of production and the institutions of capitalist society. That part of the 'Industrial Reserve Army' held perpetually in reserve; who have never worked and never will; who can't find a job; who are unskilled and unfit; who have been displaced by machines, automation, and cybernation, and were never 'retained or invested with new skills'; all those on Welfare or receiving State Aid" (Cleaver, *Ideology of the Black Panther*, 7).

streets. If that is the case, then riots … seem to be the probable outcome for the early eighties in Britain, if not sooner."[163]

2.3.3 The politics of mugging

If the overall theoretical effort underpinning *Policing the Crisis* can be summarised as an investigation into British (white) society's reaction to the social phenomenon of 'mugging,' its final chapter—standing alone as the fourth and last part of the book—pursues a different line of inquiry. Here, the focus shifts away from the moral, cultural, and institutional responses of British society and instead turns towards the social subject deemed responsible for provoking a crisis within it. Only after having demonstrated in detail the ideological, yet politically powerful, construction of the 'mugger' as a social figure within post-war British political discourse do Hall and his collaborators turn to the social group associated with that figure: black youth, "understood as a class fraction" of the working class, and as a distinct section of "class of black wage-labourers."[164]

To analyse the second generation of black youth, the authors retrace the migratory experiences of their parents, the disciplining they underwent "on entry, by the wage," and the strategies of survival they adopted once settled in Britain. In doing so, Hall follows and expands upon the analyses of Sivanandan (and of Castles and Kosack) concerning the political economy of migration, while also sketching an interpretation of the consequences of this process for the making of the working class in Britain, with specific attention to the interaction of race and class. As already noted, the 1958 race riots constitute a turning point in this process. The ideal of black assimilation was definitely put aside, although its failure had already been evident for at least two related reasons. First, assimilation rested on the belief that the cultural identity of migrants could be dissolved into the culture and way of life of the white working class. This overlooked the fact that processes of intercultural contact give rise to dynamics more complex than simple erasure, even in conditions of structural inequality.[165] Second, black and white labourers "objectively … stood on very different terrain," meaning that economic and

[163] Soares, 'Black Urban Lumpen', 14–15.
[164] Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis*, 382.
[165] This was a crucial concern of the entire attempt to rethink culture at the CCCS, which found the most systematic expression in the collective work on youth subcultures, Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, eds, *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* (1975; Routledge, 2006).

social processes interacted to differentiate the working class and to position natives and migrants at distinct levels within it.[166]

Faced with this reality, some migrants accepted a form of "differentiated incorporation" into the white working class. This involved subordinating their own culture to that of the native, dominant group and, more significantly, accepting the position of "second-class citizen," as colonials, incorporated into a social location—the working class—that was itself already subordinated. This resulted in the "'informal segregation' within the culture of a subordinate class." Others instead emphasised the inherent separateness embedded in such an assimilation model, establishing the structures of a black community conceived as the "solid framework" and "material base" of a "*colonial society*." In the first case, class experience took precedence, even though racism imposed an additional layer of subordination. Forms of struggle were primarily work-related struggles, though not necessarily the struggles of *a* class—migrants were "struggling in their own ways, but alongside their white respectable counterparts, within the discipline of the wage." In the second case, racial commonality came to constitute—if not yet a political subjectivity—a stronger basis of recognition than class, even though most members of the community continued to survive under the command of the salary within and outside the community.[167]

In critical engagement with the analyses proposed by RTC and TBL, Hall and his co-authors examine the formation of the community and its alternative lifestyles as survival strategies for those who took "permanent residence inside the ghetto." According to them, this distinction among those who sought integration and those who reclaimed their separateness emerged largely along generational lines and, following TBL, was not so much an active refusal of work as an indication of the subproletarian status of black labour, with its youth constituting "the advance party of black labour's 'reserve army.'" Nevertheless, black youth sought autonomous subjectivation from these conditions precisely through a new racial identity shaped by their reclaim of some African roots and the influence of the US black liberation movement: "the second generation simply *is* a

[166] Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis*, 342–44.
[167] Ibid., 344. For a brief reconstruction of this alternative strategies of survival, also with reference to their institutional aspects, see Hesse, 'Introduction: Un/Settled Multiculturalisms', 5–10.

black generation, knows it is black and is not going to be anything else but black."[168] Being crystallised in race means that it is subjectively perceived as the main structural dimension in determining their condition and, consequently, the first around which an alternative and rebellious subjectivation can be built. Black youths

> are an excluded black group in a dominant white world. And their growing black consciousness has given them, however rudimentarily, a sort of awareness of the systematic nature of the forces driving them into certain pathways, and of the structuring principle of racism at work of which they are the victims.[169]

What at first may appear to be merely a mediation between the political reading of wagelessness as proposed by Howe and RTC, and the more structural-economic critique advanced by Cambridge and TBL, is in fact re-articulated by the authors of *Policing the Crisis* as a third perspective. This stance draws a crucial distinction "between the determinacy over black labour of the level of the *economic*, and the *political and ideological* practices of struggle."[170] The gap between the social determination of black labour and its unwaged sectors, and the political or ideological responses to it, lies in the fact that a situation shaped by intertwined structural mechanisms—class and race together—is interpreted as the result of a racial position alone, which subsumes class within itself. It is thus understood not as the outcome of the relation between capital and race, but as the product of racial oppression which already presupposes, within its logic, class subordination.

> Black youth, in each generation, does not begin as a set of isolated individuals who happen to be educated, to live and labour in certain ways, encountering racial discrimination on the path to adulthood. Black youth begins in each generation from a given class position, produced in an objective form, by processes which are determinate, not of their making; and that class position is, in the same moment, a racial or ethnic position.[171]

This reflects actual relations of force. At the same time, it means that the subjectivation of the young and unwaged section of the black proletariat becomes "a new form of 'negative consciousness'" in relation to what could enable the politicisation of the class as a whole—namely, exploitation as the organising principle of society—and a

[168] Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis*, 344, 346, 348.
[169] Ibid., 352.
[170] Ibid., 371.
[171] Ibid., 340.

simultaneous positive "*re*discovery" of their black identity within the ghetto, related to "previous modes of survival and resistance by that class, deriving, essentially, from its pre-metropolitan past." The specific history of black labour in Britain is, in fact, the product of two intertwined trajectories. Its *making* must be traced back to its colonial history as much as to its metropolitan one, both being determined and connected by the global social relation of capital. It is no coincidence that post-war migrations are described as a "dramatic and searing episode in the history of the 'remaking' of the Caribbean working class," rather than merely of the British one. Engaging with this historical process allows not only for an understanding of the structurally subproletarian position of the colonial proletariat—reproduced and solidified in the metropolis through the differentiations of capital and racism—but also for a broader analysis of the connections between colonial and postcolonial contexts in terms of the outlooks and struggles deployed by black labour.[172]

At the same time, they make visible certain transformations in global capitalism, from the increased dependence on migrant labour to the redefinition of the relationship between productive and unproductive labour in the valorisation of capital. Reflecting on the relation between the waged and unwaged sectors of the working class, the authors criticise a certain productivist reading of Marx, emphasising that in contemporary capitalism the line "between 'productive' and 'unproductive' labour has become increasingly difficult to draw," due to the emergence of service and 'unproductive' work as key tenets of capitalist accumulation. Furthermore, from the perspective of the colonial history of black labour—and its post-colonial present in former colonial countries—wagelessness was not an exceptional circumstance but a normalised condition well before the experience of structural unemployment in 1970s Britain. This demanded a rethinking of the relation to labour—not in terms of employment or unemployment, but in terms of "'formal' and 'informal' income opportunities." Because this shifting position consistently resonates with the different layers of the Marxian 'reserve army,' it "throws

[172] Ibid., 349, 371, 342.

a different light on how we assess the potential politics and trajectory of its more self-conscious strata."[173]

Having criticised and proved the untenability of identifying black labour with classical representations of the lumpenproletariat (in both its 'dangerous class' and 'demoralised and ragged' forms),[174] the authors of *Policing the Crisis* turn to various post-colonial adaptations of the concepts. Among these, the Fanonian interpretation stands out not only because of the relevance Fanon attached to the colonial lumpenproletariat in anticolonial struggles,[175] but more importantly because of its resonance in metropolitan contexts. Despite their apparent disorder and structural precarity, the shanty towns of colonial and postcolonial societies—where masses of landless peasants were drawn—were indeed highly organised and structured, offering a model to be replicated by those sections of the Third World entering the First and forming black communities within white society. Hall thus interprets the ideology and practice of the US Black Panther Party as a "transposition … from African to American circumstances" of Fanonism, specifically for what concerns the revolutionary potential of the lumpenproletariat. In this context, the

[173] Ibid., 360, 373–74. These passages on productive labour once again refer to the debate within the *New Left Review*. Hall and his collaborators argue that the Marxian definition of productive labour emerging from *Capital*, Volume I, must be read in light of the analysis, in the second volume of *Capital*, of circulation and reproduction, which reveals how relations not directly oriented towards the production of surplus value are nonetheless indispensable to the valorisation of capital. This re-reading of Marx explicitly draws on the work of Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, whose feminist contribution is presented as fundamental to understanding the condition of black labour. Without establishing immediate parallels between the situation of women and that of black workers, the authors of *Policing the Crisis* note the analytical and strategic problems that arise when attempting to relate these sectoral struggles to class struggle as a whole, due to the fact that both women and black labour "are related to capitalist exploitation through a 'double structure'" of sexual and racial divisions within class relations. This implies that both may or may not receive a wage ("a proportion of each is, at any time, in employment"), but that the crucial issue lies in "capital's control over the movement into and out of the *reserve army of labour*." They also identify affinities between this perspective and Italian *operaismo*, particularly with regard to the formulation of 'social capital' (ibid., 360–65, quotations 362).

[174] Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis*, 356–60; see also Hal Draper, 'The Concept of the "Lumpenproletariat" in Marx and Engels', *Economies et Sociétes* 15 (1972): 2285–312.

[175] Discussing the strengths and weaknesses of spontaneity, Fanon highlighted how colonial powers can make – and actually made – use of "the unorganized elements of the *lumpenproletariat*" to maintain their rule, but it also recognised that having no "bone to gnaw in the colonial system … it is within this mass of humanity, this people of the shanti towns, at the core of the *lumpenproletariat*, that the rebellion will find its urban spearhead. For the *lumpenproletariat*, that horde of starving men, uprooted from their tribe and from their clan, constitutes one of the most spontaneous and the most radically revolutionary forces of a colonized people" (Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 115, 129). For a discussion of Fanon's notion of the lumpenproletariat, see Peter Worsley, 'Frantz Fanon and the "Lumpenproletariat"', *Socialist Register* 9 (1972): 193–230.

Black Panthers offered a revolutionary strategy for a social subject largely excluded from production, placing renewed emphasis on the community as a political base.

> Racial oppression was *the* specific mediation through which this class experienced its material and cultural conditions of life, and hence race formed the central mode through which the self-consciousness of the class stratum could be constructed.[176]

This politicisation gave rise to what Hall and his collaborators define as "lumpen politics." Beyond its aesthetics and distinctive discipline, lumpen politics is characterised by resistance and survival within the ghetto, pursued through self-defence initiatives (including armed confrontation with police) and self-help programmes (such as community-based social infrastructure). While the leadership of the Black Panthers aimed to politicise the ghetto and transform the consciousness of its inhabitants, the ultimate outcome—both in the US and its UK counterpart, BLF politics—was a shift in focus: from transforming the ghetto into a revolutionary space, to identifying it as the actualisation of a black political truth. In this way, the political project betrayed its Fanonian origins, which saw the mobilisation of the colonial lumpenproletariat as a strategy for dismantling colonial structures—not for affirming them.[177] Thus, 'lumpen politics' resulted in being "oriented towards the maintenance of *identity*," rather than affirming its subject as a political *difference*.[178]

While there have been historical examples of victories achieved by the lumpenproletariat, it is difficult to turn these into a general rule that disregards the specific historical and social conditions in which such victories took place. Just as there is no historically invariant form of racism, there is likewise no single, unified articulation of race and class in the reproduction of the working class across different social formations. This is not to deny that subjects other than the classical industrial proletariat can be—and have historically been—decisive in the success or failure of revolutionary processes. Rather, it is to insist on starting from the actual conditions that, in postcolonial Britain, "are somewhat different … if only because the ways in which the class as a whole has been subsumed into the sway of capital its different here." From this perspective, Hall

[176] Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis*, 379–80.
[177] Ibid., 380–81.
[178] Nicholas Thoburn, 'Difference in Marx: The Lumpenproletariat and the Proletarian Unnamable', *Economy and Society* 31, no. 3 (2002): 436. On the notion of the working class as "the different subject," see Ricciardi, *The Provisional Power*.

and his co-authors recognise the emergence of the community in the metropolis as a necessary economic and cultural process, in which petty crime and hustling "became appropriate modes of survival."[179] Yet the attempted politicisation of the community through a lumpen politics was necessarily defensive, as much as

> the sectional struggles which continue to appear are the *necessary* defensive strategies of a class which is divided against itself, face to face with capital. They are, therefore, also the site of capital's continuing sway over it.[180]

Reframing the formation of the black proletariat as the result of two intersecting histories—its creation in the colonies as part of a global subproletariat, and its subordination as migrant labour in the metropolis—becomes a way of returning to the structures of reproduction of the working class as a whole, starting from one of its specific fractions. The critique of "sectional struggles" is thus directed both at the politicisation of race alone (sometimes even against class) and at the inability of traditional organisations of the British proletariat, especially the trade unions, to recognise the specificity of working-class reproduction (in its entirety—through the subordination of its black fraction) in contemporary postcolonial capitalism. This marks the distance from BUFP positions, which, by treating racial divisions as "mere imposition from above," ended up giving priority to class and subordinating racial specificity to it.[181] For Hall, the task is to recognise a class whose social complexity cannot be understood—or organised politically in a subversive way—if one ignores the mechanisms of its reproduction that structurally employ racism; the new mechanisms of capital accumulation that—through the structures of sex and race—extend exploitation beyond the factory and productive labour; and only finally, the political strategies that deliberately deploy racism as ideology (in its narrower sense) to divide and control the class.

> Racism … is the specific mechanism which 'reproduces' the black labour force, from one generation to another, in places and positions which are race-specific. The outcome of this complex process is that blacks are ascribed to a position within the class relations of contemporary capitalism which is, at one and the same time, roughly coterminous with the position of the white working class (of which black labour is a fraction), and yet segmentally differentiated from it.[182]

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[179] Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis*, 389, 383.
[180] Ibid., 387.
[181] Ibid.
[182] Ibid., 382.

The recognition of racism's centrality is therefore not simply a matter of acknowledging the empirically observable fact that black labour's experience of class is racially inflected. It is about recognising that the social existence of race, as a structure of subordination and a vehicle for political subjectivation, produces "consequences for the *whole class*, whose relation to their conditions of existence is now systematically transformed by race." Insofar as "capital reproduces the class as a whole, structured by race," any political representation of the complexly defined social subject which constitutes the working class into "class *as a whole*" should confront racism as a structuring force. As with the other theorisations around race and class, the last issue which arises is that of the political organisation of this subject. For Hall, this problem entails the ability to "represent" in social struggles "*against capitalism*, *against racism*"[183] the combination of race and class that structurally constitutes capital's mechanisms of exploitation and oppression.

[183] Ibid., 387.

3 Articulating organisation

Representation and combination are closely related to Stuart Hall's concept of articulation. This chapter begins by reconstructing the semantic field Hall employs to clarify both the theoretical and political dimensions of this fundamental, though stratified, concept. If the elaboration of a theory of articulation appears as a key interpretative framework for understanding capitalism in its historically determined interplay with racism, a politics of articulation raises the theoretical problem of political organisation adequate to the political subject defined through race and class. It is useful to start with Hall, arguably the least "committed" to party politics, precisely because it allows the question of political organisation to be posed while momentarily suspending the 'technical' issue of the appropriate organisational form, a problem that those engaged in grassroots politics inevitably had to confront.

The chapter thus proposes to approach articulation as a theoretical–practical concept which, through its claim to name both unity and difference simultaneously, describes a genuine organisational principle. Within the specific context of the British postcolonial experience, political blackness designated—and sought to represent—a multiplicity of conditions of exploitation and oppression. In light of the definition of political blackness as a politics of articulation, the chapter surveys a range of organisational forms and principles, more or less consistent with the logic of articulation thus defined, within the political experiences under consideration. Precisely because the organisational problem, as posed here, does not concern the specific form of the organisation itself but rather the problem of the constitution of an organised partiality, the chapter concludes with the analysis of two paradigmatic forms of struggle—the strike and the urban riot. In both, it is possible to discern not only the activity of one or more partial subjects in struggle, but also the possibilities—either opened or foreclosed—of their organisational articulation.

3.1 Organising the political subject

3.1.1 The theory of articulation

Policing the Crisis represents a crucial turning point towards Hall's formulation of the concept of articulation. Although the term itself does not yet appear in the book as a concept,[1] the theoretical and political questions that it designates are already expressed in the closing pages, through the analysis of the role of racism in the post-war conjuncture and in the restructuring of British and global capitalism in the wake of decolonisation; in the reproduction of the working class and its racialised component; and in their effects on class struggle. It is therefore unsurprising that these pages reappear, almost verbatim and with only a few significant variations, two years later in his essay *Race, Articulation and Society Structured in Dominance*.

The concept of articulation is formalised and discussed here for the first time in relation to its theoretical origins, certain critiques and limitations, and its analytical and political possibilities. As Hall himself acknowledges, the whole debate within the social sciences on the nature of capitalism "in racially structured social formation" was politically significant, because grasping the exact shape and mechanisms of capitalism was crucial in contexts where its development was entangled with relations of domination and subordination that complicated its character or its historical trajectory. This made it difficult to provide a linear account of its consolidation, while necessitating concrete analysis to formulate a political strategy of radical transformation. The immediate reference point for this debate was the "limit case" of South Africa, with discussion of the analyses of Harold Wolpe and John Rex, but Hall also referred to Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as to postcolonial metropoles such as 1970s Britain. With all these contexts in mind, the elaboration of a theory of articulation—and, more broadly, of theoretical work—"has direct or indirect practical consequences."[2]

[1] The term appears scattered throughout the book in its various inflections, as a noun and a verb. The closest the authors come to using it as a concept is in the introduction, describing the book's aim: "It tries to examine why and how the themes of *race*, *crime* and *youth*—condensed into the image of 'mugging' – come to serve as the articulator of the crisis, as its ideological conductor." (ibid., 1–2).

[2] Hall, 'Race, Articulation', 197–98. For a discussion of the concept of articulation in relation to the South African anti-apartheid debate, see Gillian Hart, 'Changing Concepts of Articulation: Political Stakes in South Africa Today', *Review of African Political Economy* 34, no. 111 (2007): 85–101. This same debate notably underpinned the early formulations of the concept of racial capitalism and was one of the sources consulted by Robinson during his time at the Institute of Race Relations in London (Robinson, *Black*

Hall's interest in articulation derives from its efficacy in designating the relation between parts combined within a single structure—one that is complex both because it is composed of heterogeneous elements, and because the relation that binds them together does not flatten them onto the same plane but accentuates their distinctions. "The unity formed by this combination or articulation, is always, necessarily, a 'complex structure': a structure in which things are related, as much through their differences as through their similarities." This dialectic between unity and difference is what Hall considered missing in contemporary debates on the relation between racism and capitalism, insofar as they lacked a principle or mechanism of articulation, resulting in two broad alternatives. The first, the "economic" approach, sought to trace ethnic and racial categories back to their economic lineage, locating the origin, nature, and significance of racial definitions within the economic structure and social processes—thus equating or reducing determination to a unitary explanation. The second, the "sociological" approach, aimed instead to treat race as a social category detached from economic relations, irreducible to any determination beyond its own history—thus pointing to an absolute difference. By contrast, Hall argues that the limitation of the former lies not in the relevance of economic structure to the incidence of racism in contemporary societies "but [in] how the two are theoretically connected." On the other hand, the latter relies on "a set of plural explanations" that, in abstracting the characteristics, functions, and modalities of race from concrete social formations, end up being "descriptive rather than analytic."[3]

Against such readings, Hall discerned the emergence of a "theory" or "thesis" of articulation, both in the work of the "'school' of structuralist Marxism" and, significantly, in its application within certain critiques of recent Marxist accounts of the transition to

Marxism; also see Zachary Levenson and Marcel Paret, 'The Three Dialectics of Racial Capitalism: From South Africa to the U.S. and Back Again', *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 20, no. 2 [2023]: 333–51). As the director of the IRR, Sivanandan himself developed part of his understanding of the relationship between racism and capitalism by examining (and criticising) Neville Alexander's *One Azania, One Nation* (Sivanandan, 'An Open Letter to No Sizwe'). The importance of the anti-apartheid movement cannot be explored in depth here, but to appreciate its significance, it suffices to note the frequency and coverage of South African events in the radical newspapers examined. As for Stuart Hall, he has been active in the anti-apartheid movement since his arrival in England, as recounted in his own words in 'The AAM and the Race-Ing of Britain', in *The Anti-Apartheid Movement: A 40-Year Perspective* (Anti-Apartheid Movement Archives Committee, 2000). For a reconstruction of the anti-apartheid movement in Britain, see Elizabeth Williams, *The Politics of Race in Britain and South Africa: Black British Solidarity and the Anti-Apartheid Struggle* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015).

[3] Hall, 'Race, Articulation', 220, 199.

capitalism in postcolonial formations—for example, Laclau's critique of Andre Gunder Frank's analysis of Latin America.[4] As Hall himself asserts, his references and testing grounds for the conceptualisation of articulation are thus multiple. Recently, critical literature has emphasised the "Global South root" of Hall's reflections, discussing the relevance of dependentist debates in Hall's definition of the concept as "concerned with capitalism's uneven development and … a theory of historical development and transition, sensitive to the historical and social context in which certain productive relations emerge."[5] However, by limiting the understanding of the concept of articulation to the historical development of postcolonial capitalism, which retains elements of past modes of production rather than transcending them, the author ends up restricting the meaning of a concept that, in Hall's work, appears to have as many facets as its multiple origins. The very idea of capitalist development—concerning both the spatial and temporal dimensions—finds an original, anti-historicist interpretation already in Louis Althusser's elaboration of the concept.

Retracing this legacy close to the Laclauian and Marxian influences, Gillian Hart has distinguished three further meanings of articulation beyond the already mentioned articulation of multiple modes of production: the first, Althusserian, referring to the articulation of the mode of production into and through its constitutive levels (economic, political, and ideological); a second linguistic-discursive conception, in the dual sense of "joining, linking to" and "giving expression to"; and finally, an understanding of articulation as a theoretical method, which Hart connects to Hall's specific reading of Marx's *Introduction* to the *Grundrisse*.[6] Although distinguishable, these three meanings are explicitly discussed and traced by Hall with reference to Althusser's work, and productively developed through a series of reciprocal cross-references rather than precise delimitations or distinctions.[7]

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[4] Ibid., 216, 217, 219; Ernesto Laclau, 'Feudalism and Capitalism in Latin America', *New Left Review*, no. I/67 (1971): 19–38. See also Aidan Foster-Carter, 'The Modes of Production Controversy', *New Left Review*, no. I/107 (February 1978): 47–77.

[5] Efthimios Karayiannides, 'Stuart Hall, Development Theory, and Thatcher's Britain', *Modern Intellectual History* 20, no. 4 (2023): 1279.

[6] Gillian Hart, 'Modalities of Conjunctural Analysis: "Seeing the Present Differently" through Global Lenses', *Antipode* 56, no. 1 (2024): 142–43.

[7] With respect to this point, Mellino rightly argues that Hall's successive "Gramscian moment" better works as a mediation through Althusser's reading rather than as a complete break or rejection. See Miguel Mellino,

Hall's interest in the French philosopher lay in the attempt to develop an analysis of what Althusser, in *For Marx*, had called "complex unity, structured in dominance," and which he further discussed in *Reading Capital* through a thorough analysis of Marx's concepts of *Verbindung* and *Gliederung*, translated respectively as "combination" and "articulation" (or "articulated-hierarchy"). For Althusser, this involved defining the relation between the social structure and its constituent levels, beginning with an analysis of the mode of production and its elements, the productive forces and the relations of production. In this way, he addressed simultaneously the questions of determination and historical change, emphasising that Marxist causality is neither mechanically determined nor expressive of a spiritual unity, as in Hegel. In Marx,

> the structure of the whole is articulated as the structure of an *organic hierarchized whole*. The co-existence of limbs and their relations in the whole is governed by the order of a dominant structure which introduces a specific order into the articulation (*Gliederung*) of the limbs and their relations.[8]

The "social whole" is a complex structure, the outcome of the hierarchical organisation of multiple elements. Yet, for Althusser, the very elements of the articulated structure coexist and are governed by the structure they themselves determine through their articulation. This appears as a temporal paradox: something which does not *yet* exist—the structure—conditions the relations of combination among heterogeneous elements that will ultimately determine its existence. Althusser clarifies this through a passage from Marx's *Capital*, Volume II:

> Whatever the social form of production, labourers and means of production always remain factors of it. But in a state of separation from each other either of these factors can be such only potentially. For production to go on at all they must unite [*müssen sie sich verbinden*; Althusser translates as "must combine"]. The specific manner in which this union [*diese Verbindung*; Althusser translates as "this combination"] is accomplished distinguishes the different economic epochs of the structure of society from one another.[9]

'Note sul metodo di Stuart Hall. Althusser, Gramsci e la questione della razza', *Décalages* 2, no. 1 (2016): 1–26.

[8] Louis Althusser, 'The Object of *Capital*', in *Reading Capital*, by Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar (François Maspero, 1968; repr., Verso Books, 2009), 108, 109.

[9] Karl Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Volume II* (1885); in Karl Marx, *Marx and Engels Collected Works* (Lawrence and Wishart-International Publishers, 1997), 36:42. Althusser's modified quotation in 'The Object of *Capital*', 193–94.

The elements of combination exist only within the relation that combines them, which alters their nature and situates them within an overarching social relation. It is therefore the *social* existence of labourers and means of production—and not their mere existence—that is determined by the relation of combination culminating in the structure (the mode of production). Yet "this operation inter-relating determinate pre-existing elements" is structurally constrained by the "very special specific nature of the relations brought into play." It therefore requires "*specific modes of combination* or '*Verbindungen*' which are only meaningful in the peculiar nature of the *result* of the combinatory."[10] Historical change in modes of production thus depends on variations in such combinations, while the social relation that combines different elements does not erase the specific and relatively autonomous histories of those elements. Each element has its own history, which continues to weigh upon the new combination, producing a stratification of temporalities: not a homogeneous and continuous time, but multiple temporalities to be understood, once again, as "many objective indices of the mode of articulation of the different elements or structures in the general structure of the whole." This principle, which Althusser discovers in Marxist epistemology, immediately discloses its political implications, both for the comprehension of historical development and present conjuncture—where different historical times "*co-exist* in the structure of the real historical present: the present of the *conjuncture*"[11]—and for the positions, roles, and constitutions of the subject as such in each social formation.[12]

The concept of "structural causality"—which Hall summarises as "this 'articulation of the structure' as the global effect of the structure itself"[13]—thus serves to describe both the complex relationship between structure and its "regions," and how they are articulated as relatively autonomous instances. If, for Althusser, a mode of production cannot be reduced to economic relations alone precisely because these require a political and juridical structure, as well as an ideological form that legitimates them and allows for their natural reproduction, then the political and ideological superstructures of society are

[10] Althusser, 'The Object of *Capital*', 194–95.
[11] Ibid., 118.
[12] Étienne Balibar, 'Structural Causality, Overdetermination, and Antagonism', in *Postmodern Materialism and the Future of Marxist Theory: Essays in the Althusserian Tradition*, ed. Antonio Callari and David F. Ruccio (1990; Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 114; also see Vittorio Morfino, 'The Concept of Structural Causality in Althusser', *Crisis & Critique* 2, no. 2 (2015): 86–108.
[13] Hall, 'Race, Articulation', 222.

already "implicit and present in a specific way" within the economic base. Althusser here refers not so much to their content as to the necessity of those superstructures which contribute to the overdetermination of concrete historical situations. The combination is thus consolidated in "a certain *political* configuration (*Gestaltung*) of society." Yet in these situations, "the *places* and *functions* occupied and adopted by the agents of production" are determined by the structure. For this reason, the antagonism that characterises it cannot be reduced to a personal or intersubjective relation, but is a structural and constitutive feature of the relations of production.[14]

Hall follows and reconstructs Althusser's reasoning, first tracing the application of the concept of articulation to the economic structure of the social formation, and then extending it to the formation as a whole, understood as an "articulated hierarchy." His main concern, however, is to underscore the non-identity of the various social instances in light of the principle of relative autonomy. While Althusser, through the concept of articulation, defines "the specific form of existence of the social totality under consideration" (its "historical time"),[15] Hall insists on identifying and demonstrating "the mechanisms which connect dissimilar features," as well as the relations of subordination and domination established among the parts that constitute the structure as an "articulated combination." Historical analysis may suggest specific "laws of tendency," but this must not translate into any automatism that hinders the possibility of "counteracting tendencies." In fact, Hall refutes the French philosopher's argument precisely on the point of the necessary determination of the superstructure, already "inscribed" in specific relations of production, and advocates the use of "additional concepts" in the study of political and ideological superstructures.[16] This is a principle that Hall had already identified in his reading of Marx's *1857 Introduction*:

> Both the specificities and the connections—the complex unities of structures—have to be demonstrated by concrete analysis of concrete relations and conjunctions. If relations are mutually articulated, but remain specified by their difference, this articulation, and the determinate conditions on which it rests, has to be demonstrated. It cannot be conjured out of thin air according to some essentialist dialectical law. Differentiated unities are also therefore, in the Marxian sense, *concrete*. The method

[14] Althusser, 'The Object of *Capital*', 195, 198; cfr. Étienne Balibar, 'On the Basic Concepts of Historical Materialism', in *Reading Capital*, by Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar (François Maspero, 1968; repr., Verso Books, 2009), 227–28.
[15] Althusser, 'The Object of *Capital*', 120.
[16] Hall, 'Race, Articulation', 220, 226–27.

> thus retains the concrete empirical reference as a privileged and undissolved "moment" within a theoretical analysis without thereby making it "empiricist"; the concrete analysis of concrete situations.[17]

While Hall shares with Althusser the view that a particular political configuration and ideological representation of the social formation is required for the mode of production to establish itself as dominant, he rejects any notion of correspondence in the last instance. Instead, he stresses the possibility that "the disorderly thrust of political events disturbs the symmetry of political analysis"—as he had written in a much earlier political commentary.[18] Looking to "deviant" social formations, those divergent from the paradigmatic European case, Hall reveals a far wider range of possible combinations, in which political form, juridical relations, and ideologies do not directly correspond to any necessity stemming from the economic base:

> The "articulation" of "free" and "forced" labour, the combination of "equal" and "restricted" franchises, the position of the chiefs and the Bantustan "internal colonies," and the different legal statuses of "white" and "black" citizens, in the South African social formation, perfectly represent the elements of such a "variant" case—one which is in no sense "noncapitalist"; provided, that is, we read Marx's "laws of development and motion" as laws of tendency (and countertendency) rather than as a priori laws of necessity.[19]

In this respect, the study of racism demonstrates the historicity of both the capitalist mode of production and racism itself—not as a historical invariant but as the result of a shifting articulation that determines its specific function. While racism is not reducible to an economic result, it appears fundamentally intertwined with capitalism, both historically and in the critique of the present. It thus requires a new formulation of the problem, grounded in new concepts and analytical tools. It is at this point in the argument that Gramsci enters the scene. The concept of hegemony enables Hall to root Althusser's structural analysis at the level of the "state of play in the class struggle" and its continual transformation—that is, at the conjuncture—through the analysis of "those specific mechanisms … through which such a normative relationship between structure and superstructures comes to be forged." Despite his reception as "par exellence, the Marxist theorist of 'Western capitalism'," Gramsci's relevance for the study of postcolonial

[17] Hall, 'Reading Marx's Introduction', 36.
[18] Stuart Hall, 'The New Conservatism and the Old', in *Selected Political Writings*, by Stuart Hall, ed. Sally Davison, David Featherstone, Michael Rustin and Bill Schwarz (1957; Duke University Press, 2017), 18.
[19] Hall, 'Race, Articulation', 227.

capitalism lies precisely in his capacity to pose the structure–superstructure relation in its full complexity, and in his insistence on historical specificity—on the different ways in which structural antagonism is expressed "according to the rhythm and punctuation of the class struggle."[20]

With Gramsci, articulation thus begins to reveal its meaning not merely as a heuristic device for the scientific analysis of the configuration, modalities, and historical development of a social formation, but also as the practices proper to specific instances of a social formation. The specificity of the political, through the concept of hegemony, as well as that of the ideological, through the concept of interpellation, are to be understood as outcomes of practices of articulation. At this point, Althusser once again becomes relevant—both in the way he reads Gramsci and in the way he is reinterpreted by Laclau.

For Althusser, the materiality of ideology lies in the material basis of representations and in the practices and apparatuses through which ideology is embodied and fulfils its primary and necessary function: the reproduction of society, securing the political, legal, and technical conditions for capitalist valorisation.[21] As such, it constitutes a specific site of struggle, "where leadership is secured or contested" through those processes of meaning-making, through categories and representations "through which men come to 'live' …, in an imaginary way, their relation to real, material conditions of existence." Its task is therefore specified by the structure of the social formation, which constrains (without necessarily predetermining) its effects. If, for Althusser, "sometimes … all ideology is, by definition, operative within the horizon of the 'dominance ideas' of the ruling class," Hall insists, with Gramsci, on the possibility that reproduction might be interrupted or disturbed by class struggle, and that ideologies are indeed "sites and stakes in the class struggle."[22] The emphasis on ideological practices—that is, on "the 'materiality' of apparatuses, practices, rituals, actions" through which ideological representations are produced and reworked—reintroduces both the dimension of class

[20] Ibid., 228–30. Hall develops on these points in Stuart Hall, 'Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity', in *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*, by Stuart Hall, ed. Paul Gilroy and Ruth Wilson Gilmore (1986; Duke University Press, 2021).
[21] Althusser, 'Ideological State Apparatuses'.
[22] Hall, 'Race, Articulation', 231.

struggle and the subjective dimension through practices of interpellation, which are understood as examples of ideological articulation.

Here, Hall explicitly addresses the question of practices of signification, elaborating on the meaning of articulation as representation. If, as we noted by returning to Hart's interpretation, this sense of articulation is influenced by Laclau's *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*, particularly with regard to the way ideologies function in their relation to class struggle, in articulating a "peculiar 'unity' of their own,"[23] at the same time ideologies as articulated representations must always be read within the framework of the dual interpretation of articulation highlighted with reference to Althusser: as practices of a specific instance of the social formation and as constitutive of the social formation as a whole. At this dual level, the French philosopher, in fact, conceives the issue of the relation between ideology and the production of subjectivity. In an essay published the year before the one on articulation, Hall explains that Althusser is "arguing that it is ideology which is constitutive of 'the subject'." The social existence of the subject is thus framed as a result, or effect, of ideological practices, which are eventually practices of articulation. As Hall makes clear, in fact, Althusser is referring not to "concrete individuals" but to interpellated subjects—social bearers (*Träger*) of relations.[24]

This brings us back to Althusser's conceptualisation of articulation and allows us to add one last, fundamental characterisation, indispensable for fully grasping its political implications. In discussing "Marx's immense theoretical revolution," Althusser isolates a Marxian concept whose importance for Hall we have already noted, namely that of *Darstellung*, or representation, "whose object is precisely to designate the mode of *presence* of the structure in its *effects*, and therefore to designate structural causality itself." This is what Althusser defined as "the effectivity of the structure."[25] Reading these

[23] Ibid., 232.
[24] Stuart Hall, 'Some Problems with the Ideology/Subject Couplet', *Ideology and Consciousness* 3 (1979): 116, 118. Cf. "The category of the subject is constitutive of all ideology, but at the same time and immediately I add that *the category of the subject is only constitutive of all ideology insofar as all ideology has the function (which defines it) of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects*. In the interaction of this double constitution exists the functioning of all ideology, ideology being nothing but its functioning in the material forms of existence of that functioning" (Althusser, 'Ideological State Apparatuses', 171).
[25] Althusser, 'The Object of *Capital*', 208. In Althusser's original formulation, revised for the official edition of *Reading Capital*, there was written that "'*Darstellung'* is the concept of the presence of the structure in its effects, of the modification of the effects through the *efficacy of an absence*" (Althusser, 'Variantes de la première edition', quoted in Morfino, 'Structural Causality', 97).

Althusserian pages in the light of the problem of reproduction, which characterises his study of ideology and ideological apparatuses, 'effectivity' appears to translate into the seamless reproduction of the social formation in which—though it cannot be presupposed—the correspondence between the various levels is achieved through the representation of the economic structure at every level of the social instance, at the moment in which every actor in the capitalist drama plays their part and thus renders invisible the presence of the structure itself.

The insistence with which Hall affirms that the non-concrete character of the ideological subject is what defines Althusser's theory of interpellation must be related to the presence of the structure in its effects—that is, to the structural character of the relation binding individuals in their social existences. While Althusser's formulations tend to consolidate this relation into a rigid and at times inescapable structure, the Gramscian mediation instead allows Hall to keep open the question of the efficacy of the structure: both at the level of the entire social formation (through the concept of hegemony) and at the political-ideological level. Here, Hall clarifies that social groups are constituted as political subjects through processes of political representations—either when they stick to those representations or when they contest them, advancing new ones. From this perspective, the theory of articulation paves the way for a politics of articulation, within which the issue of organisation must be addressed.

3.1.2 The politics of articulation

The engagement with critical literature on post-colonial capitalist societies, reconsidered through the lens of articulation, ultimately leads Hall to revisit the question of race and class in Britain, in continuity with the analysis developed in *Policing the Crisis*. In that volume, the analysis of the crisis had led him and his co-authors to anticipate the social ascent of a new radical right, which threatened to disarticulate the post-war consensus by capitalising on the organic crisis of British society. The election of Thatcher in 1979 and the early months of her government confirmed the analysis advanced by Hall and his co-authors, institutionalising both the form and the management of that crisis. The recognition of the centrality of race and racism was expressed in terms of the various senses of articulation: in examining how the crisis was justified and explained, as well as

the solutions that were projected, Hall concluded that "race is the prism,"[26] the organising principle around which practices of articulation could be constructed to hold together the political (the state and its authoritarian closure), the ideological (law-and-order morality), and the social or economic restructuring of society. This also translated, on a subjective level, into the reorganisation of social subjects and their political representations, through the delegitimisation of traditional forms of organisation—such as trade unions—and, in fact, of collective action itself.

By analysing "the concrete historical 'work' which racism accomplishes under specific historical conditions—as a set of economic, political and ideological practices, of a distinctive kind, concretely articulated with other practices in a social formation,"[27] *Policing the Crisis* offered an account of how racism gives rise to distinct modes of political representation and the cultural forms through which different social interests and divisions are expressed and experienced. Hall acknowledges a possible contradiction between the articulation of "collective and individual 'subjects' of emergent ideologies," highlighting the tension between subjective interpellation—which calls on individuals to recognise themselves in a broader ideological discourse—and the work of representation necessary to constitute those subjects of ideology as collective political subjects. In both cases, there remains the possibility of resisting, mediating, or rejecting interpellation and political representation—and thus the specific social positions they seek to secure. It is at this juncture that 'articulation' explicitly becomes the name of a contested, and contesting, politics. If capitalist relations of production "can be thought of as articulating classes in distinct ways at each of the levels or instances of the social formation," then the class structure itself "acquires effectivity" at each of the levels only via "its own 'means of representation.'"[28]

While race is inscribed in economic processes by determining the social position of black labour, it also fundamentally redefines the very space of possibility that constitutes class struggle at every level of the social formation. Race thus enables different reconstitutions of the various sociologies of black labour previously analysed "as political

[26] Hall, 'Race and Moral Panics', 65; also see Paul Gilroy, 'Introduction: Race Is the Prism', in *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*, by Stuart Hall, ed. Paul Gilroy and Ruth Wilson Gilmore (Duke University Press, 2021).
[27] Hall, 'Race, Articulation', 236.
[28] Ibid., 239.

forces in the 'theatre of politics'," through the diverse interpellations by which labour "is articulated as the collective and individual 'subjects' of emergent ideologies."[29] The shift from the sociological to the political, therefore, concerns articulation as a practice of representation: a process that allows both the unification (or separation) of heterogeneous elements into a single political subject, and the political, ideological, and social expression of that subject. This yields two important consequences, which Hall significantly outlined once again with reference to the concept of 'class':

> What classes are in fact is what they *become*, through the effects upon them as homogeneous categories of the practices which produce them: and these depend in turn on the political and ideological as well as the economic practices of the class struggle. Their effect, as classes, depends on the manner in which they are articulated and represented, in political and ideological practice, that is through the practices and institutions which have this specific function of *representation* in relation to them. Far from passively reflecting and expressing class policies and ideologies, in forms given by their economic position, *everything* depends on the means and apparatuses through which they are articulated and represented as class forces in the political and ideological theatres of struggle. … Classes are complexly fractured and/or unified (it is an active *process*) through their practices.[30]

What emerges, first and foremost, is a dynamic conception of class—one that cannot be defined as the outcome of a static topology, nor reduced to a single instance of the social formation, namely the economic. This immediately underscores the indispensability of mediation if class is to exert effects across the entire structure as such. This mediation—representation and articulation—is performed by specific "means and apparatuses" which unify or fracture, only to rearticulate class itself as a "complex formation."[31] Hall's overall analysis of Thatcherism—from his inception to his last writings—illuminated this very process of mediation (that is, ideological and political articulation). By the turn of the decade, this meant acknowledging the centrality of race as "the modality in which class is 'lived,' the medium through which class relations are experienced, the form in which it is appropriated and 'fought through.'"[32]

Both the vocabulary and the style—the word 'apparatuses' and the way '"lived"' is written in inverted commas—suggest the Althusserian underpinning of Hall's continual

[29] Ibid.
[30] Stuart Hall, 'Newspapers, Parties and Classes', in *The British Press: A Manifesto*, ed. Curran Jamesq (Macmillan, 1978), 48.
[31] Ibid., 47.
[32] Hall, 'Race, Articulation', 239.

development of his reasoning on articulation and representation.[33] The apparatuses include the media, functioning as an "*organising* structure" for hegemony through a specific "work of articulating, resolving and exploring the real contradictions of interest, direction and tendency … within the various fractions of capital, and within the political bloc,"[34] but also parties, trade unions, community organisations and individual campaigns, which operate as "means of political representation." At the same time, race enables the differential interpellation of those who (sociologically) compose the class, not "as a mere racist conspiration from above," but as the concrete political practice through which "to disarticulate some of the existing syntaxes of class struggle … and to rearticulate class experience through the condensed interpellations of a racist ideological syntax." Whereas *Policing the Crisis* subjected the relation of race and class to critical scrutiny—particularly through the analysis of black politics—in search of "the correct grasping of its principle of articulation" for organising black labour within the class, Thatcher's great moving right show required a more detailed account of the "ideological class struggle, pursued, precisely, through harnessing the dominated classes to capital by means of the articulation of the internal contradictions of class experience with racism."[35]

This was evident not only in the observation that "in Britain, this process has recently attained a rare and general pitch,"[36] but also in the further point that processes of articulation as representation operate by disarticulating pre-existing articulations.[37] In his analysis of the reorganisation of "common sense" into a coherent philosophy, Gramsci[38] offers the sharpest description of this process, on which Hall builds to prove that, as such, representation is never neutral; it is hegemonically oriented, either sustaining or

[33] Hall, 'Ideology/Subject Couplet'.
[34] Hall, 'Newspapers, Parties and Classes', 48–49.
[35] Hall, 'Race, Articulation', 239, 221, 239–40.
[36] Ibid., 240.
[37] In fact, the passage just read features with an emphasis on articulation (rather than disarticulation), in *Policing the Crisis*: "Those who seek to articulate working-class consciousness into the syntax of a racist ideology are, of course, key agents in the struggle at the ideological level: they have pertinent effects" (Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis*, 387).
[38] Yet even in this passage, one can find Althusserian echoes. Hall will make them clear later on, in the quite famous essay in which he offers a detailed study of Althusser's ideological state apparatuses. He writes: "the given conditions of existence, the structure of determinations in any situation—can also be understood, from another point of view, as simply the result of previous practices. We may say that a structure is what previously structured practices have produced as a result. These then constitute the 'given conditions,' the necessary starting point, for new generations of practice. … Practice is how a structure is actively reproduced" (Hall, 'Signification, Representation', 95–96).

contesting the efficacy of a given social formation, with its subjects and its articulations. By articulating a specific "class tendency," representational practices organise—gather, clarify, and confer coherence upon—different class forces in a particular conjuncture. Representation is functional because it foregrounds certain elements while subordinating others, enabling identification with specific subject positions and, in so doing, confirming and fixing those positions to the detriment of others.[39]

> Representation here has to be understood as an active and formative relationship. It organises the class, constituting it as a political force of a particular kind … in the same moment as it is constituted. Everything depends on the means—the practices, the apparatuses and the 'philosophies'—by which the often dispersed and contradictory interests of a class are welded together into a coherent position which can be articulated and represented in the political and ideological theatres of struggle.[40]

Even in the political articulation of class through organisation, the elements which constitute the articulated combination are hierarchically arranged and acquire their specific character only in the light of that very combination.[41] Within the Labour Party's project, therefore, class became social-democratic because it was combined in a particular

[39] Describing the role of the media in Thatcher's struggle for hegemony, Hall writes: "they actively produce representations of the class in which class members can 'recognise' themselves as the bloody-minded 'Us' of the *Mirror*, the bingo-and-bare-breasted subject of the *Sun*, the respectable, law-and-order militant of the *Mail*. They also actively do not produce representations which allow class members to recognise themselves as working people" ('Newspapers, Parties and Classes', 50–51).

[40] Stuart Hall, 'The Great Moving Right Show', in *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (1979; Verso, 1988), 45.

[41] Michael Hardt adopts Hall's concept of articulation to understand the practices of various social movements during the "subversive Seventies." In a way partly similar to the argument developed in this chapter, Hardt maintains that articulation is a "double concept" through which theorising both the "articulation among the structures of power" and "among the struggles for liberation." In Hall's work, he says, the first meaning of articulation requires "that the different structures are granted equal importance" at a general level, while specifying their relations of domination and subordination (the fact that these are "structured in dominance") "at the micro level and in specific historical conjunctures" (Hardt, *The Subversive Seventies*, 150, 154–55). Hardt argues that the conjunctural relation of dominance among structural forces does not undermine their general relation of equivalence. However, the struggles waged against them, as well as the organisational structures that seek to intervene in them, can only emerge from the "structured-in-dominance" conjuncture, in which some of its partialities acquire certain precedence over others. As the conjuncture holds together the general principle of articulation of a social formation and its historically determined form, articulation as representation aims to identify the concrete, political form of that general, abstract principle. The twofold inflexion of articulation (as "giving expression" and "joining together") therefore requires looking for the societal articulation in specific social processes as much as it urges for its political representation and critique as the form of a connection among differences, allowing them to be conceived as equally significant parts of a multiple subject—to go back to Hardt's words. What is certain, as Hardt himself recognises, is that the passage from the theoretical to the political is far from linear or self-evident, since "the analytical recognition that multiple structures of domination are interwoven is an important basis; it does not lead automatically to the articulation of struggles" (ibid., 255).

manner, through certain practices and specific social-democratic relations. Likewise, Thatcher's "people" acquired its national and conservative character within Thatcherism's authoritarian populism.[42] Yet this outcome is not predetermined. An organised subject does not *express* a pre-existing entity; it *represents* it in the moment of articulation. It is a politically consequential fiction. Before the organisational mediation through representation, classes exist in the plural and in the multiplicity of their social existence and fragments. It is organisation-as-articulation that transforms them into *the* class: "representation is an active and formative relation between 'parties' and 'classes': they form and constitute 'the class' politically and ideologically by representing it." This also clarifies that—contrary to those who maintain the necessary non-correspondence (Hirst) or that everything is discursively articulable with everything (Laclau)—for articulation-as-representation to occur, there must be something to represent, "even if it is altered and transformed in the process." The process of organisation as articulation re-signifies its elements, acting upon a concreteness that simultaneously contributes to shaping, both politically and ideologically.[43] Hall thereby recognised both the active role of the party—conceived in a Gramscian way, as organiser and educator[44]—in the political constitution of the class, and its simultaneous potential to discipline and demobilise: "the indissoluble link between party and class serves both to advance and to discipline the class and the organisations it represents."[45]

The necessities and contradictions of the party are made explicit in Hall's critique of Labour's choice against Thatcherism. Here, he not only foregrounds the Gramscian legacy of his argument, but also clarifies, in theoretical terms, the nexus between

[42] Stuart Hall, 'Popular-Democratic vs Authoritarian Populism: Two Ways of "Taking Democracy Seriously"', in *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (1980; Verso, 1988).
[43] Ibid., n. 36, p. 148.
[44] Against the assumption that "a collective will, already in existence, has become nerveless and dispersed, … and that it is necessary to reconcentrate and reinforce it" that Gramsci finds in Sorel, he argues for the active political work of creation and direction of a "'collective will' … towards goals which are concrete and rational, but whose concreteness and rationality have not yet been put into critical test by … experience" (Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith [Lawrence & Wishart, 1971], 130 (Q8 §21)). The moral reform that the party is required to accomplish entails the active creation and direction of that collective will into a political will, which passes through the development of the party "into a conception of the world, i.e. into a total and molecular (individual) transformation of ways of thinking and acting" which not just crystallise into a collective political unity, but rather react upon it "compelling [it] to reorganise continually and confronting [it] with new and original problems to solve" (ibid., 267 (Q17 §51)).
[45] Hall, 'The Great Moving Right Show', 46.

organisation, representation and articulation. Faced with a working class "powerfully divided and stratified internally," the question of the party concerns less the mere existence of a formal structure than the development of a practice of organising capable of addressing those differences directly—not *mirroring* them, but *representing* them within a specific political project.[46] Hence, the return of the dialectic of unity and difference already highlighted in the theory of articulation, as well as the Marxian insight that unity is not the expression of a given whole but the outcome of a practice which confers a determinate form upon that whole. In this sense, organisation as articulation rejects the vocabulary and the problem of identity precisely because it begins from the necessity of relating heterogeneous elements and conditions. Articulation does not resolve the problem of unity by positing identity; rather, it organises multiplicity in a complex subject.[47]

Hall develops this point against the backdrop of the "larger political crisis: the crisis of political organisation," which he links both to the crisis of actually existing communism after 1956 and to the explosion of social movements that, while advancing particular demands largely ignored by the traditional left, also contested its bureaucratic and corporatist drift. In fact, by representing the British working class as the living form of a tradition, the organisations of the institutional left, in Hall's view, reproduced a representation of class as an identity, at the expense of an understanding of class as a dynamic and composite social condition. Therefore, an erroneous understanding of the social reality led to a mistaken political representation, compressing a complex and differentiated subject into a simple political identity. This not only betrayed a structural understanding of exploitation as a social antagonism ("otherwise—Hall remarks sarcastically—why would one need the Marxist concept of 'exploitation' at all?"), but also reproduced an excluding 'us'/'them' dynamic that eventually mirrors Thatcherite

[46] Stuart Hall, 'The Battles of Socialist Ideas in the 1980s', in *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (1982; Verso, 1988), 179–80.

[47] As seen, one of the first definitions of articulation for Hall is "the unity which they [different things articulated] form is thus not that of an identity" ('Race, Articulation', 219–20). In this regard, it is fundamental the role of a theoretical practice that can relate those differences: "The aim of a theoretically-informed political practice must surely be to bring about or construct the articulation between social or economic forces and those forms of politics and ideology which might lead them in practice to intervene in history in a progressive way—an articulation which has to be *constructed* through practice precisely because it is not guaranteed by how those forces are constituted in the first place" (Hall, 'Signification, Representation', 95).

politics.[48] By contrast, a politics of articulation must begin by recognising exploitation as the social relation that generates a primary, general condition of subordination for a set of individuals, but which, in its historicisation, presents itself as a complex formation rather than an undifferentiated condition.

> The lived experience of class exploitation … is not the only variant of exploitation which socialism must address, though it may be the modal one, the one which all the other social contradictions are articulated, the paradigm one. Therefore, other types of social experiences will have to be drawn on and built into socialism if it is to become a politics capable of condensing the variety of social struggles into a single, differentiated one.[49]

The political–organisational representation of class therefore moves beyond an economistic–corporatist plane. It first recognises the action of the ideological and political levels in fragmenting that primary level and complicating any straightforward connection across differences. It then acknowledges the relative autonomy of those differences, which operate beyond the economic level, shape a whole, overarching image of the world, and persist in the common sense upon which individuals draw to make sense of their social experiences. This is, for instance, "why and where racism and sexism lurk." A politics of articulation that aims "not to defend but to *lead*" must therefore contest the common sense of the class it seeks to represent—and hence organise—so as to make practicable a connection that enables the class to emerge from subordination and become a "*leading* element in society."[50]

> By developing practices which articulate differences into a collective will, or by generating discourses which condense a range of different connotations, the dispersed conditions of practice of different social groups *can* be effectively drawn together in ways which make those social forces not simply a class "in itself," positioned by some other relations over which it has no control, *but also* capable of intervening as a historical force, a class "for itself," capable of establishing new collective projects.[51]

The organisation of the class is thus a crucial site of the struggle for hegemony, given real contradictions that preclude the pre-existence of a politically recognisable class. The strength of Thatcherism, through "the specific forms which racism assumes in its ideological functioning," lies precisely in intervening upon contradictions "within and

[48] Hall, 'Socialist Ideas', 182.
[49] Ibid., 181.
[50] Ibid., 194, 182.
[51] Hall, 'Signification, Representation', 96.

inside the class, working on real effects of the structure," in order to cement them as divisions and to displace possible connections, by naturalising them. In this way, it insinuates itself into and reorganises "the whole ideological field," interpellating not only the subjects central to Thatcherite representation but also to its adversaries.[52] By translating the artificiality and historicity of social relations "into the timeless language of nature", racism allows for:

> Decomposing classes into individuals and recomposing those disaggregated individuals into the reconstructed unities, the great coherences, of new ideological "subjects": it translates "classes" into "blacks" and "whites," economic groups into "peoples," solid forces into "races." This is the process of constituting new "historical subjects" for ideological discourses—the mechanism we encountered earlier, of forming new interpellative structures.[53]

The articulation of "historical subjects" through ideological (interpellative) and political (organisational) representation should not be understood as a mere battle of opinion with purely discursive effects. As a specific practice, representation legitimates or delegitimates other social practices; it provides shared, and thus given-for-granted, interpretations of social facts; and it activates or deactivates particular social actors, politicising or depoliticising them. The specific racist discourse advanced by Thatcher, for example, "produces, as the natural and given 'authors' of a spontaneous form of racial perception, the naturalised 'racist subject'" and, on the other hand, represents "the dominated subjects … in and through the imaginary representations of a racist interpellation." The struggle, therefore, does not take place "in discourse" alone, even if it has discursive or ideological effects. At the same time, precisely because it is an ideological *struggle*—and because ideology is indispensable to the reproduction of the social formation as a whole—it "has real consequences and effects on how the whole social formation reproduces itself, ideologically. … Ideology also *sets limits* to the degree to which a society-in-dominance can easily, smoothly and functionally reproduce itself."[54]

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[52] Hall, 'Race, Articulation', 240–41. As an example of racism's pervasiveness even outside Thatcherism itself, Hall writes: "it articulates securely with the us/them structure of corporate class consciousness" (ibid., 241).
[53] Hall, 'Race, Articulation', 241.
[54] Hall, 'Signification, Representation', 113.

Autonomous ideological and political representation, finally, makes it possible to contest dominant interpellation and (de)politicisation, initiating a struggle on the terrain of representations themselves. In fact, racist interpellations have become "the sites and stake in the ideological struggle … through the symbolic inversion of 'black power.'"[55] It is within this ideological struggle that the precise meaning of 'black' must be framed with respect to the political philosophy and organisational practices of black Britain.

3.1.3 Political blackness

Hall's conclusion on 'Black Power' may appear decidedly belated by the dawn of the 1980s. The black liberation struggle was still far from over, yet both the ideology and the politics organised under that watchword had long been in crisis. In this respect, the multiplication of black political organisations in Britain during the early 1970s was itself symptomatic of the fragmentation of a unitary notion and the related politics of Black Power.[56] However, while the *slogan* "Black Power" had partly fallen out of use, the *banner* itself had not, as it encapsulated the political and social aspirations of the global black liberation movement.[57]

As early as 1971, Sivanandan engaged with this significance, pointing to both analogies and differences between the meanings of 'black' on either side of the Atlantic. The common historical experience of slavery brought the Afro-Caribbean community in Britain closer to African Americans, even though their present circumstances diverged: the latter constituted an internal colony without a homeland to which they might return, whereas the former could, at least in principle, make the journey back to the Caribbean islands—although such a choice was hardly reassuring, since, "in view of the massive

[55] Hall, 'Race, Articulation', 241.
[56] Wild, 'Black Power in Britain'.
[57] I am referring here to the distinction proposed by C.L.R. James: "Now, Black Power. A political slogan and yet not a political slogan: rather a banner. … In fact, it is not a slogan at all. Rather, it is a banner for people with certain political aims, needs and attitudes, a banner around which they can rally, a banner which I believe many millions already today see and in the not too distant future will see, as the symbol of a tremendous change in life and society as they have known it." By reconstructing its genealogy (from Garvey to Du Bois, from Padmore to Fanon) and equating its claim to Rousseau's natural freedom and Jefferson's self-evidence of human equality, James emphasises black power as a general claim irrespectively of its particular historical form ('Black Power: Its Past, Today and the Way Ahead, a Speech Delivered by C.L.R. James, London, August 1967', London, 1968, 3–4, LRA/01/0429/02, GPI, https://www.marxists.org/archive/james-clr/works/1967/black-power.htm). On the globalisation of Black Power, Nico Slate, ed., *Black Power beyond Borders: The Global Dimensions of the Black Power Movement* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

and ongoing exploitation of his own country, his choice is between psychological servitude here and economic servitude back home."[58] This perspective renders visible not only the recent past of slavery—ended barely a century earlier, indeed—but also the continuing present of colonialism. Insofar as radical blacks in Britain considered "both problems as dynamics of the one continuum" and engaged in a struggle both against "injustice and discrimination" in Britain, as well as against "the neocolonial setup" in their countries of origin, they stand as

> the common denominator in the struggles of Afro-America and the Third World alike. [They are] the link that connects the enslaved peoples and the colonised, the blacks of America and the peoples of Afro-Asia. It is this link which, in Britain, accounts for the unity, however temporal and ad hoc, between the Asian and West Indian groups.[59]

From the early 1960s onwards, the rise of various coordinating bodies—such as the Coordinating Committee Against Racial Discrimination (CCARD), led by the Indian Workers' Association, and the Conference of Afro-Asian-Caribbean Organisations, initiated by Claudia Jones's West Indian Gazette—along with joint campaigns among Asian and West Indian organisations, demonstrated the global nature of racism, both in shaping living and working conditions in Britain and in its imperialist dimension abroad.[60] These were closely and doubly articulated within the genealogy of Black Power in Britain, as this had to address the reconfiguration of the post-imperial outlook of the state and capital in the wake of decolonisation that Black Power was actively contributing to realise. The presence of political organisations active in the colonies' independence movements,[61] as well as the interest groups and the establishment of the first Asian and Caribbean associations in response to shifting laws and attitudes towards the post-colonial

[58] A. Sivanandan, 'Black Power: The Politics of Existence', in *A Different Hunger: Writings on Black Resistance* (*Politics & Society* 1, no. 2, 1971; repr., Pluto Press, 1982), 62.
[59] Ibid., 62–63.
[60] Shukra, *Black Politics in Britain*, 9–25.
[61] Kennetta Hammond Perry, *London Is the Place for Me. Black Britons, Citizenship, and the Politics of Race* (Oxford University Press, 2015); James G. Cantres, *Blackening Britain: Caribbean Radicalism from Windrush to Decolonization* (Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2020), 115–68; for grounding post-war radicalism to the interwar period and anti-colonial intellectual circuits and activities Marc Matera, *Black London: The Imperial Metropolis and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century* (University of California Press, 2015); also Theo Williams, *Making the Revolution Global. Black Radicalism and the British Socialist Movement before Decolonisation* (Verso Books, 2022).

presence in Britain, was thus crucial to the development of Black Power in Britain as much as the influence of the American civil rights and Black liberation movements.[62]

While the specific meaning of British Black Power was to be sought in this genealogy and in the present context of a decolonising Britain, its significance was oriented towards the future. For Sivanandan, it lay in the second generation, who, unfamiliar with the experience of 'home' and as endogenous, autochthonous products of British society, "will take what British society owes them." This, according to Sivanandan, applied as much to Caribbeans as to Asians, for whom black "is no less the colour of oppression than to the West Indian—and black power is no less the answer to [their] ills."[63] The transformation of oppression into a position of power, then, was available to Asians as much as to Afro-Caribbeans. Yet Sivanandan harboured no illusions as to the immediate practicability of this connection, insofar as he recognised significant differences. Asians, he argued, "are already a people, a group, in their own right" defined by a culture distinctly separate from that of white Britain. By contrast, the West Indian "is only now beginning to discover that he is not British after all." Confronted with British racism, they discover their own blackness and from that "squeezes out an identity which is sheerly [their] own."[64]

What Sivanandan was describing, in translating African American Black Power into Britain, was what would subsequently be termed 'political blackness.' This would become

[62] It has been noted that each visit by an important figure in the African American civil rights movement coincided with the emergence of a new Black British political entity (Sivanandan, 'From Resistance to Rebellion', 11–23). A few months later Martin Luther King's visit to London in December 1964, the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination was formed; however, Claudia Jones's CAACO had already organised a march in support of the African-American freedom movement in August 1963. Other significant events included Malcolm X's intervention in Smethwick (the constituency of the radical racist Conservative Peter Griffiths) in 1965, which resulted in the formation of the Racial Action Adjustment Society. Finally, shortly before Carmichael's intervention at the Dialectics of Liberation conference in June 1967, the Nigerian playwright Obi Egbuna founded the United Coloured Peoples' Association. On these events, see Angelo, 'The Black Panthers in London, 1967-1972'; Bunce and Field, 'Egbuna, James and the Birth of Black Power'; Kennetta Hammond Perry, '"U.S. Negroes, Your Fight Is Our Fight": Black Britons and the 1963 March on Washington', in *The Other Special Relationship: Race, Rights, and Riots in Britain and the United States*, ed. R.D.G. Kelley and S. Tuck (Palgrave, 2015).

[63] Sivanandan, 'Black Power', 63. This specific meaning was already present in CLR James's speech on Black Power, and probably echoed Stokely Carmichael's words at the Dialectics of Liberation Congress, which James himself quotes in his speech: "We speak with you, comrades, because we wish to make clear that we understand that our destinies are intertwined. Our world can only be the third world; our only struggle for the third world; our only vision, of the third world" (James, 'Black Power', 14).

[64] Sivanandan, 'Black Power', 63–64. For a significant appropriation of that aesthetics, concepts, and ideology beyond the Afro-Caribbeans, see Anandi Ramamurthy, *Black Star: Britain's Asian Youth Movements* (Pluto Press, 2013); Waters, *Thinking Black*, 70–81.

the specific form of British Black Power, directly involving the second generation of post-colonial communities settled in Britain during the 1970s. This very early definition is particularly significant, as it encapsulates in a few lines both the potential and the limitation of what has more recently been described as a "forgotten politics."[65] Even in this brief intervention, Sivanandan highlighted both the polemical force and the contestability of 'black,' insofar as it denoted a position of strength despite an asymmetrical power relation (black people vs. white society). By summoning both African and Asian descendants' past and present at once, it aimed to represent a history that was at once shared (the legacy of coerced and unfree labour, displacement, imperial domination, and colonialism) and differentiated (slavery and indenture; plantation colonialism in the West Indies vs the "civilising" endeavour in the Asian and African colonies). It also denoted a present condition common to the second generation (second-class citizenship in Britain), yet distinct according to each community of origin. Precisely in light of this last factor, while the banner of Black Power represented a common claim to subvert British society in the name of what was owed but would not otherwise be granted, the slogan applied more specifically to those who could claim "black pride, black culture, black self-determination, black capitalism." Despite these ambiguities, "the 'contagion' of black consciousness grows much faster than white recompense, the auguries for a truly multi-racial society in this country are bleak indeed."[66]

Although Sivanandan has been identified as one of the "architects of political blackness,"[67] the precise formula is absent from his writings, as well as from those—academic and radical alike—produced in the 1970s, which are the focus of this study. For this reason, critics have described 'political blackness' as an external concept, through

[65] John Narayan, 'The Forgotten Politics of Political Blackness', *Race Today* Special Issue (2023).
[66] Sivanandan, 'Black Power', 64.
[67] Kwame Anthony Appiah, 'What We Can Learn From the Rise and Fall of "Political Blackness"', *The New York Times*, 7 October 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/07/opinion/political-blackness-race.html. Sivanandan's closest use of the phrase is his well-known passage: "my experience in the black, anti-racist struggles of the '60s and '70s—when we made black the colour of our politics and not the colour of our skins—when we fought on the factory floor and in the community, as a people and a class, and as a people for a class" (A. Sivanandan, 'Introduction: Unity of Struggle', in *Catching History on the Wind. Race, Culture and Globalisation* [Pluto Press, 2008; originally published as *Racism, Liberty and the War on Terror* (2006)], xviii). Appiah also refers to Stuart Hall's 1990s works on the 'black' as a signifier rather than a static identity, see Stuart Hall, 'Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities', in *Essential Essays 2: Identity and Diaspora*, by Stuart Hall, ed. David Morley (1991; Duke University Press, 2019); Stuart Hall, 'What Is This "Black" in Black Popular Culture?', in *Essential Essays 2: Identity and Diaspora*, by Stuart Hall, ed. David Morley (1992; Duke University Press, 2019).

which scholars (mainly historians and sociologists) and political actors *represented* a mode of action and sentiment deemed politically relevant to Britain's post-colonial migrant communities, thereby articulating a black subject out of the irreducible experiences of many different ethnicities.

Since the late 1980s, Tariq Modood has stressed the non-neutrality of the use of black with reference to non-white minorities. While it purports to designate a common political identity, for Asians it represents only "a limited aspect of their being." Whereas the signifier black is capable of encompassing culture, history, and politics for Africans and their descendants, for Asians and other non-white minorities, it names only a partial dimension of their existence, subordinating the fullness of their identities—especially from a cultural perspective. In this way, the specific problems and needs of Asian minorities were obscured.[68] While Modood referred to this as "a false essentialism," more recently, Kehinde Andrews has defined political blackness as "a non-strategic essentialism" for two reasons. First, because those who are phenotypically non-white but not black may not recognise themselves in it; and second, those who do embrace it do so reactively, that is, in response to national policies designed to regulate race relations. In this sense, political blackness sacrifices, on the one hand, concrete processes of collective identification and, on the other, any global understanding of racism to a political identity constrained within the boundaries of national sovereignty.[69]

By advancing an idea of blackness as identity, these critiques reduce its politics to that, in order to counter it through the affirmation of other particular identities. The critics of political blackness thus highlight the problem—or impossibility—of an anti-racist political project capable of naming conditions so different and so specific that each demands its own distinct attention.[70] Furthermore, while requesting some ethnographic proof of political blackness acceptance among diverse communities, they overlook the context in which it has been framed and politically practised. This alone should be

[68] Tariq Modood, 'Political Blackness and British Asians', *Sociology* 28, no. 4 (1994): 859–76.
[69] Kehinde Andrews, 'The Problem of Political Blackness: Lessons from the Black Supplementary School Movement', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 39, no. 11 (2016): 2060–78.
[70] "The recommendation of both Modood and Andrews is that the politically black collective subject and its anti-racist politics be disarticulated and reconstituted around ethnic communities (e.g. Black, Asian, Muslim) and the racisms (e.g. anti-Blackness, Islamophobia, xeno-racism) they specifically suffer nationally and transnationally" (Narayan, 'British Black Power', 959); also see Abbas, 'The Promise of Political Blackness?'

sufficient for showing the global root of political blackness, rather than its provincial definition, for indeed, what it aimed to capture was the specifically global constitution of the British post-colonial situation. The effects of postcolonial migrations, a new configuration of imperialism, and a specific understanding of race and class were simultaneously articulated in political blackness as a peculiar variation on Black Power. And as these understandings actually varied among black organisations, its specific meaning and organisational possibilities it envisaged eventually differed.

In this sense, by ultimately conflating political blackness with identity politics, these critiques miss the plurality of thematisations characterising 1970s British black politics,[71] and completely overlook the meaning of political blackness as a politics of articulation. If 'articulation' names the political and organisational necessity "of thinking unity and difference; difference in complex unity, without this becoming a hostage to the privileging of difference as such,"[72] political blackness was a powerful theoretical-political example, because it was able to represent a shared condition of oppression and exploitation through a comprehensive analysis of British capitalism in the restructuring of the post-colonial world market, out of a plurality of particularities that specified that shared oppression. Racism, in fact, did not operate as a unitary block, but through multiple diapositives—legislative, cultural, economic—and in articulation with other forces, thus producing fragmented subjectivities. In the light of this analysis, a plural political subject could be named and mobilised, capable of contesting the complex racist organisation of British society. The articulation of a political black subject confronted not a single "enemy," but a plurality of forces operating across different fronts, from migration policies to urban segregation, from workplace discrimination to the racialised imaginary of the media.

As the articulation of a politically black subject was also an ideological struggle, it necessarily passed through culture. And this could have led—indeed, it did—to narrower

[71] Most of the critical literature has indeed based its analysis on scholars' successive writings on political blackness, rather than looking for its definition in the actual sources where it was first elaborated during the late Sixties and throughout the Seventies. With this regard, apart from Narayan's aforementioned and groundbreaking article (Narayan, 'British Black Power'), see the reconstruction of "the formation of a multiethnic anti-racist network" pursued in Stephen Ashe et al., 'Striking Back against Racist Violence in the East End of London, 1968–1970', *Race & Class* 58, no. 1 (2017): 42; also see Virdee, *Racism, Class and the Racialized Outsider*.

[72] Hall, 'Signification, Representation', 93.

restriction of the inclusiveness of 'black.' However, cultural rediscovery and identity pride must be once again framed in the specific historical context, as part of the overturning of racist oppressive definitions. These rested not just on recoveries from the past but on original present re-elaborations aimed at answering to the peculiar conditions of black minority lives in a country which had not expected any black in its flag.[73]

In its organisational aim, therefore, political blackness was not meant to erase differences, but to contextualise them within a global scenario, both geographically and socially. This was possible precisely because racism was understood as a structural force. The consciousness to which Sivanandan referred was therefore primarily that of a social position from which the entire organisation of society could be critiqued, insofar as it revealed the articulation of multiple levels—economic, ideological, political—through the structure of race. Without concealing its cultural dimension, Sivanandan underlined how 'black' or 'blackness' functioned as a political signifier enabling collective action against racism and exploitation in Britain, while also situating itself within a global liberation struggle resonant with anti-colonial and anti-imperialist movements. Defined in both theoretical-political interventions and social struggles, the signifier increasingly came to designate a politics.[74]

Similarly, sociologist and activist of the black feminist group Southall Black Sisters, Avtar Brah, defines political blackness as "a signifier of the entangled racialised colonial histories of 'black' settlers of African, Asian and Caribbean descent, affirming a politics of solidarity against a racism centred around colour."[75] In this way, blackness was deployed as a means of forging unity out of oppression, whose effectiveness, nonetheless, is better measured in organisational terms rather than in ethnographic ones. Divergent understandings of race, racism, and class thus generated particular constructions of blackness, which shaped organisational practices. Different articulations of blackness—what Waters has described as the "multidirectionality" of the term[76]—sought to represent specific problems and mobilised around various organisational principles. Political

[73] Gilroy, *There Ain't*.
[74] Universal Coloured Peoples Association, 'Black Power in Britain: A Special Statement', London, 1967, SOARES/1, BCA; also see Wild, 'Black Power in Britain', 86–93; Narayan, 'British Black Power', 949.
[75] Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (Routledge, 1996), 13.
[76] Waters, *Thinking Black*, 78.

blackness, therefore, emerged differently within diverse formations, refracted through shifting emphases and contexts.

3.2 Organising the organisation

3.2.1 Revolutionary black nationalism

From the early 1970s, organisations engaged in the struggle for black liberation in Britain and committed to a politics of articulation in the context of class struggle were compelled to acknowledge that "the cultural nationalist tendency is prevalent, in strength, in the British movement." As TBL observed, this tendency expressed a refusal of passivity and resignation in the face of "national, racial, oppression and class exploitation." Yet, the persistence of cultural nationalism also raised significant doubts for those who conceived of themselves as organisers of a revolutionary black proletariat. Cultural nationalism was understood as distancing the conditions for a socialist revolution, grounding black politics in a romanticised past—through the image of a classless and humanist Africa—rather than in the actual struggles of the black working masses. Recalling Fanon's critique of *Négritude*, TBL called for an understanding of blackness as rooted in present material conditions, rather than as a cultural essence, so that the black working class could emerge as the leading force in the struggle for black liberation, rather than deferring leadership to the black bourgeoisie.[77]

In discussing the origins of black nationalism (and its particular Pan-Africanist orientation), Alrick Cambridge located its roots at the turn of the twentieth century, in the context of the European partition of Africa, and contrasted it with the Soviet Revolution, which had demonstrated a non-nationalist solution to the "national question." The fierce resistance of African peoples against European imperialism—such as the Asante against the British and the Zulu against the Boers—provided the basis for a popular and radical black nationalism conceived as an "anti-colonialist movement." Yet once formalised into an ideology and organised movement in the US, whether along the lines of W.E.B. Du Bois or Marcus Garvey, it acquired all the facets of a nationalist ideology: "Pan-Africanism is a liberal democratic nationalist response to African colonisation and racial

[77] Terry Walker, 'On Cultural Nationalism', *The Black Liberator* 1, nos 2 & 3 (1972): 64–65, GPI (JOU/3/2). On Fanon's critique, see the chapter on national culture in *The Wretched of the Earth*, 206–48.

oppression. Later on, of course, it would be transformed into a vision of African liberation and unification—but it has remained objectively what it is: a prisoner to its liberal origin." As a liberal product of Western imperialism, "*Black Nationalism can instigate national (formal/juridical) independence, never social liberation.*"[78]

Unable to articulate the struggle against racial oppression with a critique of capitalist exploitation, black nationalism thus loses its revolutionary character—rooted in the active role of those subjects both oppressed and exploited—and reveals itself as a limited, if not reactionary, political strategy. By contrast, TBL argued, to the extent that exploitation was further specified through the operations of racism that defined the social position of the black proletariat as the super-exploited part of the working class, it was from that position that an ideological and organisational principle needed to be developed—one capable of articulating both a political subject and a coherent strategy of struggle. It is in this light that the unfinished debate on the definition of 'black people' must be understood—simultaneously a biological reality, a historical-cultural entity, or even a political ontology—which shows how not all definitions of blackness corresponded to a politics of articulation in the sense that political blackness aspired to achieve.

Divergent conceptions of blackness as the articulation of race and class—from which followed different political priorities and organisational strategies—were among the reasons for the fragmentation of the British Black Panther Movement.[79] Although the BLF emerged as the cultural-nationalist wing from this split with more explicitly Marxist positions, it inherited this field of tension rather than resolving it in a definitive nationalist sense. Instead, it took the form of a continuous negotiation between a culturally or historically constrained understanding of blackness and one more attentive to the lived

[78] Cambridge, 'Marxism and Black Nationalism', 39. On the evolutions of black nationalism, see Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, 'Black Nationalism', in *Routledge Handbook of Pan-Africanism*, ed. Reiland Rabaka (Routledge, 2020), 89–100. On WEB Du Bois's involvement in the Pan-Africanist movement, see Reiland Rabaka, 'W.E.B. Du Bois: From Pioneering Pan-Negroism to revolutionary Pan-Africanism', in *Routledge Handbook of Pan-Africanism*, ed. Reiland Rabaka (Routledge, 2020), 187–215; Emanuele Nidi, *Du Bois e il Secondo congresso panafricano. Nazionalismo nero e anticolonialismo nel primo dopoguerra* (Carocci, 2025).

[79] Wild, 'Black Power in Britain', 146.

reality of post-colonial migrants in Britain and to the anti-imperialist struggles of the Third World.[80]

This tension is particularly evident in the ideological and organisational principle intended to secure an autonomous representation, freed from white definitions: revolutionary black nationalism. As per the analysis of the lumpenproletariat subject, the major influence here was the Black Panther Party. In his 1970 speech at Boston College, the Party's founder and leader, Huey P. Newton, described revolutionary black nationalism as "nationalism plus socialism," which allowed the expansion and radicalisation of calls for political, economic, and cultural self-determination in a global scenario characterised by American imperialism, and re-signified internationalism as a theoretical and political revolutionary practice. In Newton's idea of intercommunalism, there was an attempt to bridge the conditions of the black community in the US with those of oppressed communities worldwide, considering that, within the American empire, "*nations have been transformed into communities of the world*."[81]

Although the BLF never employed the concept of intercommunalism, their elaboration reveals a similar attention (and simultaneously a difficulty) in relating the national condition that characterised the black community in Britain to a global vision of

[80] In giving print to his personal revision of the ideological line of the BLF in 1977, Ali Bey Hassan admitted that the question of who should be considered part of the black people remained disputed and unresolved within the organisation's discussions, revealing that "once again we were prepared to be trapped by the white man's definitions and our psychological reluctance to define for ourselves our own liberation" (*Revolutionary Black Nationalism. Unity and Struggle Against Domination* [Blacklash Publications, 1977], 1, BCA (SOARES/1)). It is not clear what role Bey Hassan played in the BFL, nor who he actually was. Considering BLF's attention to anonymity and attempt to avoid Britain's secret services, this was most likely a pseudonym (Wild, 'Black Power in Britain', 157). It could have been inspired by the homonymous American Black Panther, who was part of the New York Panther 21, see Matt Meyer and déqui kioni-sadiki, eds, *Look for Me in the Whirlwind: From the Panther 21 to 21st-Century Revolutions* (PM Press, 2017). By contrast, and in fact as a further proof of this unfinished conversation, Zainab Abbas, one of the people responsible for the BLF's international activities, explicitly recalled her getting involved in the BLF because of its expansive conception of blackness, inspired by the Pan-African movement as much as by the Vietnamese war of independence and the Palestinian struggle (Zainab Abbas et al., '"Black Footprints": A Trio of Experiences', in *Many Struggles: New Histories of African and Caribbean People in Britain*, ed. Hakim Adi [Pluto Press, 2023]).

[81] Huey P. Newton, 'Speech Delivered at Boston College, November 18, 1970', in *The Huey P. Newton Reader*, by Huey P. Newton, ed. David Hilliard and Donald Weise (Seven Stories Press, 2002), 169–70; also see Jessica C. Harris, 'Revolutionary Black Nationalism: The Black Panther Party', *The Journal of Negro History* 86, no. 3 (2001): 409–21; John Narayan, 'Huey P. Newton's Intercommunalism: An Unacknowledged Theory of Empire', *Theory, Culture & Society* 36, no. 3 (2019): 57–85; Andrea Ruben Pomella, 'Intercomunitarismo e ordine mondiale: il marxismo di Huey P. Newton', in *Marx nei margini: dal marxismo nero al femminismo postcoloniale*, ed. Miguel Mellino and Andrea Ruben Pomella (Alegre, 2020).

racial oppression as the primary structuring principle of the world's cultural, political, and social order. This tension is reflected both in the perceived limits and instrumental uses of Marxism as an interpretive and organisational framework for black liberation, and in the impossibility of conclusively defining the political meanings of black and blackness. On the one hand, the social conditions of black communities in Britain—together with the Caribbean provenance of many members, where multiple gradations of blackness already structured different social positions—facilitated the further development of a quasi-intercommunal inflection of revolutionary black nationalism, by constructing a politically black subject as the unity of different non-white peoples under a common project of liberation from a shared oppressor. On the other hand, central features of black nationalism—such as cultural rediscovery, identity pride, and an emphasis on community self-determination—continued to orient narrower interpretations of blackness.[82]

In the first edition of the *Revolutionary Black Nationalism* pamphlet, the BLF asserted that black people comprised of "all non-white peoples of African, Asian, Caribbean and Latin American origin who share the common enemy, and common oppressor,"[83] explicitly echoing the definition put forward by the Universal Coloured Peoples' Association: "What we have in common is a common oppressor."[84] In an internal document aimed at specifying the organisation's ideology, ends, and strategy, black people were defined more restrictively as "all non-white peoples of African and Asiatic origin. Who are visibly identifiable as Black people and who have historically or presently been dominated and oppressed for racial reasons."[85] While the omission of Latin America may indicate an interest in defining black people in relation to the ethnic minorities most

[82] On black nationalism, see the classic study by Alphonso Pinkney, *Red Black and Green: Black Nationalism in the United States* (Cambridge University Press, 1976). In addition to distinguishing between the various meanings of black nationalist ideology and reconstructing its history, Pinkney summarises the three fundamental and interconnected elements that characterise all black nationalist ideologies: the proclamation of unity among black people, and thus the political objective of achieving this unity; pride in cultural heritage and a shared history of oppression and resistance, which should foster a sense of black consciousness; and different ideas about autonomy and self-determination, ranging from community control to black separatism.

[83] BLF, *Revolutionary Black Nationalism*, 1.

[84] Universal Coloured People Association, *Black Power in Britain. A Special Statement* (London, 1967), 13, BCA (SOARES/1).

[85] '50 Questions', 1. The same definition is also in Hassan, *Revolutionary Black Nationalism. Unity and Struggle Against Domination*, 1.

prevalent in Britain,[86] the emphasis on a "visible" difference and the implicit inclusion of West Indians under the category of 'Africans' suggest a growing concern with a global definition of blackness linked to colour and to what that sign passed on in the present. Although blackness was not limited to skin tone, for it was crucially characterised as "a state of mind," still, "you have to be both black to know what it is like to be Black."[87]

Such vacillation reverberated across the pages of *Grassroots*. While party membership was declared to be open to "all black people of African or Asiatic origin,"[88] blackness appeared increasingly defined as a claim to a national, pan-African identity, as 'black' was considered to denote the race of the African people, encompassing a series of biological features ("dark skin, woolly hair, broad nose, well-formed lips") as well as "cultural heritage," culminating in the definition of "the form of a people: A NATION". Even when nature seemed to guarantee the definition of blackness, however, it was ultimately the political project which reclaimed it that determined its political meaning. Against "black" describing a condition of dispossession, a political redefinition aimed at expressing its intrinsic transformative power:

> BLACK describes a person who must overturn whole structures if he is to serve on this planet, change the whole world and create a socialist society which will ensure and secure the survival and happiness of our people. … TO LOOK BLACK IS ONE THING BUT TO BE BLACK IS EVERYTHING.[89]

Survival and liberation were, in fact, the two main aims of revolutionary black nationalism, towards which black organisations should concentrate their efforts. The spectre of "genocide" in the form of ordinary and structural violence experienced by black people from individual racists and institutions alike, threatened their survival and thus required an ideology and political organisation based on complete "self-reliance." Against this backdrop, Marxism-Leninism was interpreted as a useful economic theory for wealth redistribution and plans for "speed development" in newly independent states in the Third

[86] Analysing British government censuses from 1951 to 2021, Duranti shows the evolution of the foreign-born population residing in England and Wales, and its breakdown into the top ten most populous national groups each year. In none of these censuses is one of these groups composed of Latin Americans (Duranti, *Dis-union Jack*, 28). Migrations from Latin America (both to Europe and to the UK in particular) received a major boost following the economic and political crises of the 1980s, see Patria Román-Velázquez and Jessica Retis, 'Latin American Immigration to Europe: The Case of London', in *Narratives of Migration, Relocation and Belonging* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).
[87] '50 Questions', 19.
[88] BLF, 'What Is the BLF', *Grassroots* 4, no. 3 (1975): 3, GPI (NEW/9/15).
[89] BLF, 'Black Is...', *Grassroots* 3, no. 3 (1974): 7, GPI (NEW/9/10).

World. By contrast, in white-majority Western society, it was neither an adequate political theory nor a useful organisational ideology. Their minority state, in fact, required more practical principles responding to the needs of "survival," and to organise around the community as both subject and institution of that survival. Unlike both black capitalists and black Marxist-Leninists, who did not organise around the "most immediate problems" of the community, thus "drifting away from" it, BLF's idea of organisation had to be structured in relation to the provision of immediate welfare (housing, education, legal support, prison welfare), while also exercising leadership and representation through a disciplined cadre of militants devoted to the cause. Alongside community-based welfare and social institutions, therefore, the BLF envisaged both economic and military initiatives of self-defence, and the ideological preparation of the black community for the necessity of such defensive violence: it was not only about "crippling the enemy but also educating the people."[90]

The relationship between organisation and community was thus twofold. On the one hand, the BLF could claim cultural nationalism as a tendency emerging from the community itself in response to racial oppression, taking the form of a cultural rediscovery, black artistic and religious expressions and practices of consumption. On this basis, the organisation positioned itself as the "vehicle" through which the black community would "define and decide the road to our liberation from oppression," and thus required the participation of this community of dispossessed in the organisation's institutions and activities. Still, a group of militants and cadres was responsible for the organisation's active, "educational/agitational" character. The mere presence of racial oppression as a structuring principle of capitalist society was insufficient to define the community politically and subjectively, for the community—especially as an outcome of racism—often appeared as "a collection of individuals and nationalities, loosely identified as Black." The organisation had the task of raising consciousness so that black people identified themselves "as black and oppressed in a racist class society," clarifying the very nature of their "everyday oppression. Whether police brutality at the carnival or working conditions at Fords."[91]

[90] BLF, *Revolutionary Black Nationalism*, 7, 10–11.
[91] 'The Role of a Black Organisation in Britain', 3 January 1977, 2–3, SOARES/2, BCA.

The fundamental characteristic that defines the community—racial oppression—was thus simultaneously universal and differentiated, multiplied along several axes; this further complicated its self-representation. The revolutionary organisation is therefore called upon to multiply its forms of intervention, from trade union activity in the workplace to tenants' associations in the neighbourhoods or legal assistance to prisoners, in order to "be able to create the preconditions for a struggle."[92] Even the provision of autonomous black social institutions—such as supplementary schools, housing programmes, black newspapers, and economic institutions—should be understood as part of the development of "an ideological base for all peoples of African descent" in Britain, attentive to the international context.[93]

The development of a black consciousness, therefore, operated as a proper critical stance vis-à-vis the British and global situation, and led to an autonomous critique of capitalism. From this "Black perspective," exploitation appeared both as the specific form of racial oppression inaugurated by slavery and the general outcome of that economic and political practice of racial subjugation, which required the inheritors of that oppression to struggle against its presently "various forms." Raising black consciousness also meant creating the conditions under which the black community could appear as a unified subject, envisaging itself "as a people." In this way, black consciousness constituted a present claim over black future based on a "historical perspective" through the realisation of belonging to a common "oppressed race" of "African people and their descendants in the Third World."[94]

> Blackness must, and is, intrinsically related to an awareness of Africa and its culture, its richness and beauty. Such an awareness, will naturally lead us indignantly to approach the manner in which the people of Africa have been exploited and used, in the name of Capitalist order.[95]

Although its effects were felt in the present, its authority and legitimacy were thus derived more from the past than from the current conditions of exploitation and

[92] Ibid., 4.
[93] BLF, 'Stripping the Myth from the Black Liberation Front - Programme for Black Survival and Liberation', *Grassroots* 4, no. 5 (1976): 14, GPI (NEW/9/17).
[94] Michael McCallan, 'The Divided Class: Open Letter to Revolutionary White Left', *Grassroots*, March 1977, 7, GPI (NEW/9/22).
[95] Ibid.

oppression. Without awareness of the past, black consciousness could not exist.[96] Starting from the knowledge of that past, it is then possible to articulate a political epistemology for the present. One consequence of the system of oppression and division represented by "Slavery, Imperialism, Colonialism, Capitalism" was that it made black people "see and interpret the world through their eyes."[97] Therefore, black consciousness allowed for a reconfiguration of the history of capitalism as a history of racialised dispossession, which made evident serious social differences in the present, compelling precise organisational choices for African descendants and other racial minorities in Britain.

If the community was defined with reference to culture and race, and to historical operations that continued to exert effects in the present, then exploitation itself was defined internally (that is, derivatively) in relation to those conditions. The specificity of the lumpen condition and of the community rendered vain any attempt to articulate different conditions, for they had to respond to that specific history. Their relation with white workers and the organisation is shaped by this history. Not joining (white) workers' pickets and demonstrations and, more generally, refusing to cooperate with white organisations, was thus a first organisational consequence. Indeed, the initial attempt of early migrants to rely on existing organisational structures, largely white—such as trade unions and the Labour Party—was frustrated and ran up against the racism intrinsic to those institutions. Then, while the colour line made it possible to claim a certain anti-racist pride and to challenge everyday acts of institutional racism (such as the colour bar in pubs), the fact that this colour and this people were fragmented into different nationalities because of slavery and imperialism meant that the differences of "belonging to one island or another or being an African" were "too deep" to be ignored once coming to political organisation. In other words, "400 years of slavery could not be removed by five to six thousand miles of travel to Britain."[98]

By the end of the 1970s, the Black perspective envisaged by the BLF had crystallised into an Afrocentric mentality,[99] evident in their critique of "Anglo-Saxonised

[96] BLF, 'Black Liberation. What We Have to Do Now', *Grassroots*, August 1979, 10, LSE (Store Newspapers/N503).
[97] BLF, 'Reasoning on Unity', *Grassroots*, June 1980, 12, BCA (LIBFRONT).
[98] Ibid.
[99] According to historian Rosalind Wild, this was one of the reasons leading Tony Soares to leave the organisation ('Black Power in Britain', 148). On BLF's Pan-Africanism and their involvement in the Sixth

Blacks and some Black Radicals" who despised or devalued the significance of cultural and identity rediscovery and failed to grasp why "many youths from the grassroots are gravitating to Rasta as a solution."[100] Nonetheless, the peculiar political and social conditions within Thatcher's Britain required continuous clarification. The same terms and practices that characterise black nationalist or Pan-Africanist ideologies should have been tested against the concrete social and historical realities in which they operated. In the face of Thatcher's anti-migration policies, "repatriation"—which, as a convinced Pan-Africanist reader of *Grassroots* contended, had always been part of a "black philosophy," particularly a nationalist one—seemed a demand not practicable anymore. When Thatcher's media spoke of black people's supposed desire to "return home," they did so to bolster anti-migration campaigns and deportation plans, not out of any Pan-Africanist spirit or concern for the well-being of black people.[101]

Even while reaffirming the idea that all black people in the West were Africans, the BLF concluded by acknowledging that they had modified "our understanding of the nature of our problem" over the years, in order to be able to struggle more effectively for the day when "African people all over the world [are] free from exploitation, cultural subjugation and inferiority complexes." Part of this revision concerned the relationship of race and class: since the overwhelming majority of black people in Britain were there to work and as workers, it no longer made sense to claim that they were not part of the working class, both in Britain and in Africa and the Caribbean.

> So Black people are not only fighting against racism and cultural domination, we are also fighting economic exploitation, against low wages, long hours and bad working conditions. Our struggle is not only on one front, but on two fronts and if we want to advance the Black liberation struggle we must fight on both fronts.[102]

The question of who precisely constituted Black people thus remained unresolved and with no easy solutions. Even while leaning decisively towards Pan-Africanism and

Pan-African Congress in Dar es Salaam (Tanzania) in 1974, see Johnson, 'The Spirit of Bandung'. On Pan-Africanism, see Reiland Rabaka, ed, *Routledge Handbook of Pan-Africanism* (Routledge, 2020).

[100] BLF, 'Reasoning on Unity', 15. Historian Hakim Adi defined Rastafarianism as "perhaps the most important Pan-African cultural movement to emerge on a global scale during the period of the Cold War" (*Pan-Africanism: A History* [Bloomsbury Academic, 2018], 202).

[101] BLF, 'Repatriation', *Grassroots*, November 1982, 6–7, BCA (LIBFRONT).

[102] Ibid., 7.

addressing a Black Atlantic audience,[103] in 1984, the BLF still maintained that "Black people in Britain are African or Asian people," though each with its "own distinct cultures and identity."[104] Such a cultural identity appeal was meant to carry broader anti-capitalist aims, beyond the merely national question. However, it did not, as such, aspire to produce sustained political unity across differences—unity that could, at most, emerge partially and provisionally around specific causes. By contrast, the unity envisaged by cultural-nationalist currents was understood as already given, supposedly guaranteed by the naturalness of a race or by the conception of an oppressed people dispersed and fragmented by a racist history—whether in marginalised communities on the inner cities of Western metropolises or in post-colonial contexts across the Third World—in response to the primary force of racial oppression structuring contemporary global capitalism.

3.2.2 Black Marxism

By replacing an economic determination with a political one—racial oppression—the BLF renounced a theory of articulation, thereby undermining its attempt to still practice it as part of its politics. While not giving up on trying to articulate a broader subject, the specificity of African oppression exerted a decisive influence on the definition of blackness. By contrast, Black Marxist organisations emphasised that the complex structuring of society—where the effects of racism must be grasped alongside and in relation to other material forces—undermined the idea of a self-evident community, ready to be organised. By stressing how the racial oppression of the black proletariat was functional to the exploitation of both black and white workers, the BUFP thus offered a closer approximation of what we have termed a politics of articulation.

As the BUFP contended, the contradictions of a class society also permeated the black community, differentiating "people's class position and background, their class aspirations, their consciousness of their situation and their methods to resolve the problems." It is therefore unsurprising that multiple black organisations emerged in competition with one another. Within such a context, critique was constitutive of a

[103] During the 1980s, BLF developed a collaboration with the African Peoples' Socialist Party (USA), cfr. BLF, 'A.P.S.P. Tours Europe', *Grassroots*, June 1983, 4, BCA (LIBFRONT); BLF, 'Fulfilling Nkrumah's Dream', *Grassroots*, September 1984, 4, GPI (NEW/9/34) where they also mention BUFP as participating to the meeting.
[104] BLF, 'The Black Liberation Front. What We Believe', *Grassroots*, June 1984, 15, GPI (NEW/9/33).

revolutionary political practice, insofar as it exposed "black organisations who we clearly see to be reactionary and backward,"[105] thereby clarifying the stakes of organisation and refining strategic analysis. That critique pointed simultaneously to the "correct" interpretation of black social conditions and to the political strategy required for subverting them.

Analysing the development of black politics in Britain, the BUFP introduced a series of distinctions. The first was between a "black movement" and "black organisations." 'Movement' denoted, on the one hand, the aggregate of associations, groups, and individuals subjectively or politically engaged with "the Black question"; on the other hand, throughout the 1960s it also referred to a politics "with no definite policies or political determinants" which, precisely by virtue of such indeterminacy, claimed to represent "all the aspirations of the overall movement." In this second sense belonged the UCPA and the BPM, from which both the BUFP and the BLF distanced themselves, seeking to transform black liberation from movement into organisation. Whereas the movement represented an indeterminate political force, "organised force" offers a structure with "the ability to reproduce," that is, to ensure continuity within a long-term revolutionary project (hence the distinction between short-term demands and long-term aims in the BUFP's political programme) and to maintain the methods adequate to that project (in terms of discipline, rules, internal structuring). The passage from movement (UCPA) to organisation (BUFP) did not imply that "the movement as a whole is dead," since the real mobilisation of those engaged with the black cause remained the very condition of revolutionary organisation, "but that the movement has now a head and a specific direction."[106]

A further distinction was drawn between 'bourgeois' and 'working-class' organisations. While all black organisations fought racism, many were rendered ineffective by their inability to identify the underlying causes or the mechanisms through which racism was reproduced. By failing to grasp racism as an articulated force in relation to exploitation, the BLF was thus considered a bourgeois organisation—even if militant—akin, in strategic and analytical terms, to liberal or conservative groups aligned with state

[105] BUFP, 'The Choice Is Yours. Not All Black Organisations Are the Same', *Black Voice*, 1976, 1, BCA (RC/PERIODICALS/59).
[106] L. and L., 'What Is the B.U.F.P.?', 3.

apparatuses.[107] Their interpretive failure in fact enabled such organisations to play a role "within the established order of things," thereby taking part—even unwittingly—in the reproduction of racism. By contrast, as the BUFP insisted, "one cannot fight against racism effectively unless you are prepared to fight against the system and the class which plants the seeds of hate in an attempt to maintain the exploitation of man by man."[108]

The critical analysis of black political organisations, and the further typology distinguishing between "self-help organisations" and "widely political organisations," clarified the precise function of organisation: "*to relate* their particular question to the wider questions that those were part of."[109] The centrality of organisation lay precisely in this capacity to connect, both analytically and practically, different yet materially linked conditions, regardless of the mutable forms those links may take (including, paradoxically, forms of racial or capitalist fragmentation such as the racialised division of labour that link by dividing). The starting point was therefore the identification of material axes along which connections could be established, which in turn provided the basis for a political strategy. From this perspective, faced with "the system which exploits and oppresses us [Black people] as a race and as a class,"[110] "the B.U.F.P. sees itself as instrumental in two struggles—the Black struggle and the class war, and sees the two struggles as being related to each other."[111]

The overall complexity of the societal relation that the BUFP designated as an antagonistic contradiction was revealed precisely in the nexus between exploitation and racial oppression. This first requires a proper theoretical analysis. According to BUFP, a pivotal step was the adoption of Marxism–Leninism as a revolutionary theory. Following Mao's advice,[112] this was not to be treated as a dogma but required the organisation to

[107] BUFP, 'The Choice Is Yours', 3.
[108] Ibid., 2.
[109] L. and L., 'What Is the B.U.F.P.?', 27, (emphasis mine).
[110] BUFP, 'Organisation: Of Paramount Necessity', *Black Voice* 5, no. 3 (1974): 1, UCL (ALTER PRESS/Box 32).
[111] BUFP, 'The Choice Is Yours', 2.
[112] "Where our dogmatists err on this question is that, on the one hand, they do not understand that we have to study the particularity of contradiction and know the particular essence of individual things before we can adequately know the universality of contradiction and the common essence of things, and that, on the other hand, they do not understand that after knowing the common essence of things, we must go further and study the concrete things that have not yet been thoroughly studied or have only just emerged. Our dogmatists are lazy-bones. They refuse to undertake any painstaking study of concrete things, they regard general truths as emerging out of the void, they turn them into purely abstract unfathomable formulas, and

particularise that theory in order to address the concrete situation in which it operated: "The only way the revolutionary party can be formed is on the basis of the particularisation of M/L theory to compose its base." This task, the BUFP argued, fell to any revolutionary organisation, black or white, since the relation between general and particular was not merely an analytical principle but an organisational one. Just as black organisations existed in relation to the black movement, so too did the organisation of diverse segments of the working class exist in relation to the broader class struggle they helped to advance. By taking into account the particularities on which individual organisations were formed, *the* revolutionary party as such could emerge.[113] For this reason, the BUFP did not regard blackness as the basis for unity but as a specific component of the working class to be organised as both particularity and generality.

> We take as our starting point, the black working people. Our foundation is the black working class in the first place and other progressive elements in the second place. We sink or float with the mass of black working people.[114]

That is, the starting point is a particular condition and struggle, but one recognised in its universal dimension. Organisation therefore entailed a twofold effort. On the one hand, to develop the particularity in a co-constitutive relation with the movement it sought to represent. So long as individuals respond to "discrimination, oppression and exploitation" merely as individuals, they remain on the side of passivity, that is, on a defensive struggle. Without individual acts of resistance, there could be no "Black struggle," but without organisations individuals cannot relate themselves to the wider struggle that allows them to transform those resistances into a proper attack. Organisation thus provided a collective, politically constructed representation, rather than one given in advance, that allows "the whole Black movement … [to] personify itself through some level of organisation."[115] The development of particularity required, moreover, a capillarity capable of capturing these reactions and individualities, wherever they emerged:

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thereby completely deny and reverse the normal sequence by which man comes to know truth. Nor do they understand the interconnection of the two processes in cognition—from the particular to the general and then from the general to the particular. They understand nothing of the Marxist theory of knowledge." (Mao, 'On Contradiction', 37–38).

[113] L. and L., 'What Is the B.U.F.P.?', 20–21.

[114] BUFP, 'The Masses Are the Real Heroes', *Black Voice* 4, no. 1 (1973): 2, GPI (NEW/14/11).

[115] BUFP, 'Organisation', 5.

> We should organise as Black groups within the trade unions we belong to; organise parents' committees to wage a struggle against the miseducation of our children; action groups to defend our people and Black defence committees to struggle against police and judicial brutality.[116]

Just as class contradictions do not spare black communities, racial contradictions permeate every sphere of society. Therefore, in all these contexts, it is necessary to organise a particular subject, which, on the other hand, needs to be related (i.e. articulated) to the general class struggle. The organisation of the subject, therefore, entails taking fully charge of the contradictions, demonstrating, for instance, that those who appear to be its immediate adversaries (e.g. the white working class) are, in reality, part of the same struggle against the state and capital. Providing the correct interpretation of the contradictions is part of the organisation's pedagogical inclination, which develops in two different—though not unproblematic—directions. While criticism of other organisations was aimed at refining both analysis and strategies, with regard to the working class as a whole, the task was rather to educate workers and dispel their misconceptions, which stem from BUFP's understanding of racism as a distortion of real social relations: "all our propaganda must be geared to envelop a two-way educational approach that will not exasperate the differences between white workers and Black workers, but to lessen them, so as to forward understanding."[117] In this way, it was possible to correct the spontaneity or "mere emotionalism" in the face of racism and exposing "its roots … within the social order of society." This not only kept open the possibility of articulating the relationship between black and white workers,[118] but also the definition of the black political subject.

> It is a well known and accepted fact that Black people in Britain were recruited from their countries to subsidise the labour demands in Britain after the war. What is not such a well known fact is exactly from what strata of society did Black workers come from in the West Indies, Africa and India and Pakistan, and what impact it has on the way Black workers relate to the present situation in Britain, if any.[119]

Blackness for workers in Britain was determined by a shared colonial origin and by the migratory experience which, from diverse social formations subordinated to British colonial power, positioned them within a specific class structure. This does not mean

[116] Ibid., 5, 8.
[117] L. and L., 'What Is the B.U.F.P.?', 15.
[118] Ibid., 20.
[119] Ibid., 4; also see Goulbourne, 'Africa and the Caribbean', 87.

overlooking the long colonial and imperial history that shaped the social structure of both colonies and the metropole, and which underpinned the material forces driving postcolonial migration. Rather, it entailed rewriting "the history of Black people in this country" from the acknowledgement that they had been "brought here as cheap labour." This applied equally to African and Asian descendants, whose struggles were therefore both significant in the recent history and present reality of black people in Britain.[120]

In redefining blackness from a class standpoint, the ex-colonised peoples of the world appear now as the "Black working class people in Britain." Consequently, blackness defined solely by African descent cannot function as a principle of political articulation in Britain; rather, black referred to a broader, heterogeneous race-and-class condition.[121] From analysing the class position of black people in Britain (and in their countries of origin), it emerged that the majority of black people were in fact part of the working class: "Therefore, the only organisation that can in fact represent the majority of Black people in Britain must be a proletariat oriented one. The specifics of racism at this particular time deems it to be Black."[122] Although blackness cannot be the basis for unity, the BUFP still represented black people as black proletarians within a broader revolutionary project. While race was secondary to class, it became the contradiction around which to organise, once grasped as internally related to class. Organising as black people within white social and political structures and contexts, such as trade unions, made it possible to develop initiatives

> in partnership with progressive white workers—who are also at variance with the union bosses over their betrayal of the workers—seize the initiative to spearhead the defence of workers against the profit-hungry, soul-destroying, exploitative companies. We must wage a relentless battle against racism, which is part and parcel of the capitalists' strategy to divide workers.[123]

This organisational strategy was not unchallenged. According to TBL, it represented a "Labourist" approach, arguing that joining unions and forming caucuses—then coordinating them via a mass organisation—separated production-based (caucus) from community-based (black revolutionary organisation) struggles, thereby pursuing

[120] BUFP, 'Black Workers Demand Basics', *Black Voice* 5, no. 1 (1974): 8, BCA (WONG/7/64).
[121] BUFP, 'The Basis for Unity', 5.
[122] L. and L., 'What Is the B.U.F.P.?', 35.
[123] BUFP, 'Editorial', 1973, 2.

improvements within the system rather than its overthrow. This critique rested on TBL's rigid division between exploitation (production) and oppression (reproduction), concluding that "the *non*-revolutionary character of the struggles of the British working class" was measurable in this clear disjunction as in the absence of a "political-ideological-military levels for meeting the responses of the British ruling class."[124]

The economistic character, therefore, did not pertain to struggle as such but to the way in which it was conducted. To be revolutionary, class struggle requires being militarised in a "People's war," Cambridge and Gutzmore maintained. By contrast, black workers' industrial actions and the interventions of black organisations has been limited to seek solutions in terms of fairness—expanded access to goods and consumption; defence of jobs against offshoring or the arbitrary closure of factories; or framing struggle not against exploitation but against the "ideologically derived inequities in the Labour Market" represented by racism and sexism as "alterations in the conditions of exploitation and the levels of subsistence of the workers involved."[125] In this sense, black politics had been reformist rather than revolutionary. Instead of viewing production and reproduction as neatly separate moments, the BUFP's black caucus proposal aimed to articulate different moments in the reproduction of the existence of black workers as such:

> It is important for all us Black workers to understand the importance of setting up Black caucuses within the trade union movement at the places of work to wage a struggle against racism and exploitation, and by so doing, *relate the two issues*, whether it occurs on the shopfloor or not. But imperative and necessary to that development is that these caucuses *must be related to a revolutionary organisation* like the Black Unity and Freedom Party so that all these activities of various caucuses in various areas may be co-ordinated and posed in the most revolutionary form for maximum effect.[126]

In this respect, the organisation did not pursue a separatist strategy; rather, it highlighted and intensified a specific contradiction that was itself the result of a structural articulation. The struggle against racism could not be dismissed as a liberal egalitarian whim aimed at rectifying a market imperfection precisely because it was the structural combination of racism and exploitation which determined the social position of black workers. By combating racism, these workers also confronted exploitation, not merely as

[124] Cambridge and Gutzmore, 'Industrial Action', 207.
[125] Ibid., 275.
[126] BUFP, 'Time to Analyse the Leicester Strike', *Black Voice* 5, no. 3 (1974): 8, UCL (ALTER PRESS/Box 32), (emphases mine).

an economic practice, but as a social relationship defined in its practices by racism. In this sense, caucuses were not an end in themselves but a strategic vantage point from which to organise and wage particular struggles which nevertheless had always to be mediated and interrelated with the general struggle, as not to lapse into sectionalism. In this respect, the merit of the revolutionary current within the black movement was "*in relating blackness with the class question*."[127]

This did not entail abandoning community organisation;[128] rather, it meant recognising that the community is an outcome of broader social reproduction, crossed and determined by several articulated—though, for the BUFP, clearly and solidly hierarchised—contradictions. The problem with self-help approaches that eschewed revolutionary organisation was that, although nominally anti-state, they were not "anti the ideology of the state," and by reimagining "the state on its Black outlook," they actually prepared their own incorporation into state institutions.[129] Withdrawal into the community, moreover, prevented the practice of relating beyond it. The BUFP conceived of itself as a vanguard organisation guiding the black community through a hegemonic struggle within the community—vis-à-vis other organisations—and, more broadly, within British society. The need for a Black Marxist organisation—i.e., the organisation of the black proletariat—was precisely to respond to "the division within the working class on the question of race" so as "to lessen the contradiction between Black and white workers by first of all organising Black workers on a class basis around its short term and long term aims"[130]

[127] L. and L., 'What Is the B.U.F.P.?', 29, (emphasis mine).
[128] As Goulbourne remembers, despite their effort in detailing their ideological differences and showing the broader revolutionary potential of the black working class, the social effects of racism were so impelling and pervasive that they could not be postponed after the revolution. Therefore, the BUFP organised and participated in similar community self-help projects, similar to those developed by the BLF, though stressing the importance of always relating these projects to the revolutionary cause (Goulbourne, 'Africa and the Caribbean', 97 ff). Shukra argues that this community action-oriented work ended up prevailing over the radical black Marxists' proposal, and that this inevitably meant creating a radical facade but acting in a reformist manner which, as noted by the BUFP's own critics, laid the foundations for the movement's transformation from radical to institutional during the 1980s (Shukra, *Black Politics in Britain*, 39).
[129] L. and L., 'What Is the B.U.F.P.?', 30. Even sharper was TBL's critique in this regard: the division between community and point of production obscures the latter and risks turning the former into a substitute state apparatus—foreclosing the question of seizing state power. The self-help group, thereby, risks becoming either a surrogate government or an institutionalised arm of the existing one (Cambridge and Gutzmore, 'Industrial Action', 198).
[130] L. and L., 'What Is the B.U.F.P.?', 38–39.

While "the organisation of Black people … brought to the attention of all that there was indeed a contradiction amongst the working class on racial grounds," the recognition of that contradiction did not necessarily translate into its being taken up by all organisations within the labour movement. Equally, the emphasis on the racial question sometimes led black organisations to lose sight of the class dimension. For the BUFP, there was an awareness of both the necessity and the difficulty of bridging the struggles. The task was not to merge organisations into a single body but to work towards the unification of black and white workers through their particular processes of organising, thus articulating them. "This will not be an event but is a process that has already begun and in some instances such as strikes for better wages and for better housing, there is a oneness in that struggle only to the point where both are obviously necessary in achieving the objective." Finally, it is in specific forms of social struggle that processes of partial organisation can be articulated. Returning to the Maoist, the point was to organise around and within both the primary and secondary contradictions, that is, as black people within the labour movement (parties, unions) and as a black workers' party—not as an autonomous entity, but as a formation internal to proletarian organisation, seeking to "relate the specifics of the Black struggle to that particular struggle and to the overall struggle."[131]

Attempts to separate these terrains were themselves products of struggle. In the 1980s, efforts intensified to split the black community along class lines—against its militant, proletarian section and in favour of integrationist, aspiring middle-class interests.[132] The politicisation of blackness meant that this fragmentation occurred through a reinterpretation of the concept as identity, stripped of its class connotations. In response, the BUFP insisted that the community was not external to society but traversed by the same divisions; appeals to colour alone could not guarantee a unity of interests or futures for black people in Britain. Commenting on Kwame Ture's visit to Britain, BUFP maintains that ideas are not inherently linked to an alleged "Black or African" meaning. Both a bourgeois and a Pan-Africanist understanding of blackness eventually lead to this, resulting in different forms of apathy and depoliticisation among black people, while

[131] Ibid., 43–44, 46.
[132] BUFP, 'The False Root', *Black Voice* 11, no. 1 (1980): 4, GPI (NEW/14/18).

claiming to represent either the black proletariat or the Third World masses. As for Pan-Africanism, it can "be seen to concede the struggle for Revolution in the west and seek instead to make demands on the capitalist system." This is because it places "the Race struggle above the Class struggle," highlighting the revolutionary character of events in Africa while simultaneously suggesting that black people in the West are incapacitated from acting politically where they are, except in some form of solidarity with what is happening elsewhere.[133]

According to the BUFP, such activation can become detrimental if not part of a broader project of social revolution. By giving "precedence to the struggle wherever they happen to find themselves," the BUFP's position was therefore not a denial of race but an insistence on its continual articulation with class, so that episodic solidarities crystallise into a lasting revolutionary capacity. In this context, the effort to articulate differences had to be achieved through a continuous particularisation of revolutionary theory, capable of analytically grasping the evolution of the relationship between contradictions and translating it politically into a radical articulation.[134]

3.2.3 Black socialist feminism

From the early days of the BUFP, the need to analyse contradictions in their relation—between the primary and the secondary, or between the universal and the particular—concerned not only the connection between racism and exploitation but also the oppression of women within the capital-race nexus. This was a shared concern across the political organisations under consideration, although it was not immediately translated into proper caucuses to advance women's struggles. Initially, black women became politically active within those very organisations in which they were, often occupying leading roles, though rarely recognised as such.[135] Simultaneously with the foundation of

[133] BUFP, 'Black Power in the 80s. From Stokely Carmichael to Kwame Ture', *Black Voice* 14, no. 3 (1983): 12, GPI (NEW/14/23).
[134] BUFP, 'Editorial', *Black Voice* 15, no. 3 (1984): 2.
[135] Bryan et al., *The Heart of the Race*, 143. The notoriety of some black women (such as Althea Jones-LeCointe, leader of the BPM) did not correspond to full equal recognition in the struggle, as demonstrated by an internal memo "to all party members" reiterating that the role of women in the party was not as "kitchen soldiers" or secretaries, but in their "full participation in the political and decision making activities of the party" ('Mandatory Statement by the C.C. to All Party Members. The Role of Women in the Party', n.d., DADZIE/2/1/7, BCA). It is unclear which party was referred to, but we can assume that it was the BUFP from the very insistence on the name "party", the clear bureaucratic structure it suggests, and the presence of other documents concerning the BUFP in the same archive.

BUFP, a group of black women "speak out" from within the party under the name of Black Women's Action Committee, releasing a series of interventions later collected in the pamphlet *Black Women Speak Out* in 1971.[136]

More than a genuine organisational proposal, the pamphlet exhorted black women to participate in the broader liberation struggle by confronting the "three forms of oppression" represented by "the ruling class, the racist system and by our men." In fact, black women were already involved in workers' strikes against exploitation; black people's fights against institutional and individual racism; and they were confronting male chauvinism within and outside their households and political structures. However, there was a lack of opportunities for black women "to get together to talk about their special problems and ways of solving them." In other words, a proper analysis was still lacking to address the unique challenges they faced as black women, who suffered "all the shit from whitemen, whitewomen [*sic*] and Black men" for being "the oppressed of the oppressed." Nonetheless, this analysis should have accounted for "a unified struggle waged by all sections of the oppressed and exploited [against] capitalism and its evils," while raising "demands which will speak directly to the problem of black women."[137] The attempt to delineate analytically and politically the position of Black women in British and global society, the specificity of women's liberation struggles, and their relation to Black liberation, thus generated an important theoretical debate on political blackness understood as articulation. The demand for autonomous spaces for theoretical elaboration was thus not opposed to the general struggle but emerged as a necessary condition for articulating a broader unity that took into account a more complete experience of oppression. This principle would soon take organisational form.

It is allegedly with the foundation of BWG in 1973 that "the necessity for a means through which we can express our ideas and political understandings around the issues which affect black women in Britain today" became fully thematised.[138] BWG was the first autonomous black women's organisation based in London, though similar

[136] Black Women's Action Committee, *Black Women Speak Out* (Black Unity and Freedom Party, 1971), BCA (WONG/6/39); further evidence of this internal group is scattered in *Black Voice*, for instance Black Women's Action Committee, 'They Dehumanise Our Men', *Black Voice* 5, no. 3 (1974): 1, 8, UCL (ALTER PRESS/Box 32). The only known member of the group was Gerlin Bean, who nonetheless left the BUFP in 1971, while the Committee outlasted her (Francis, *Gerlin Bean*, 90–96).
[137] Black Women's Action Committee, *Black Women Speak Out*, 1, 9–10.
[138] BWG, 'Editorial', ed. Miller (Verso, 2023), 17.

experiences sprang up throughout Britain almost simultaneously.[139] Formed by women activists already involved in black struggles, the BWG participated in the same struggles already mentioned—self-help projects, workers' pickets and strikes, supplementary education, protests against immigration restrictions and police violence—while deliberately developing that missing Black women's perspective. Indeed, the BWG began largely as a study group devoted to particularising Black Power and Marxist ideology. They delved deeper into issues and theories relating to the so-called women's question,[140] while providing a more specific analysis of topics affecting black people in general from their unique perspective. Therefore, immigration laws and welfare cuts were criticised for their differential impact, for how they reinforced patriarchal norms such as motherhood and the ideology of the family, and for their divisive effect on both black families and the emerging political unity between black communities.[141]

Part of the oppression of black people in Britain was indeed linked to their reconfiguration from settlers to migrants. Revisions to immigration laws affected different generations of migrants differently, and these generations largely corresponded to distinct ethnic communities. Thatcher's proposal to reduce further the numbers of so-called "secondary immigrants," that is, dependents, disproportionately affected "Asians [who] came to Britain after West Indians," subjecting Asian women in particular to "racist and sexist immigration controls."[142] From this perspective, the politics of BWG were politics of articulation. On the one hand, the standpoint of black women enabled a sharper critique of racial oppression by showing both its systemic and its differential character.

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[139] Tracy Fisher, *What's Left of Blackness: Feminisms, Transracial Solidarities, and the Politics of Belonging in Britain* (Springer, 2012), 71; A. S. Francis, 'A Luta Continua: The Political Journey of Manchester's Black Women Activists, 1945–80', in *Many Struggles: New Histories of African and Caribbean People in Britain*, ed. Hakim Adi (Pluto Press, 2023).

[140] This practice was widespread in various black women's organisations, as recalled in 'Afterword. Group Members in Conversation with Jade Bentil', in *Speak Out!: The Brixton Black Women's Group*, by BWG (Verso Books, 2023). This is confirmed by various archival materials, such as study programmes, seminar series and discussion notes collected in DADZIE/1/10 (BCA), *Black Women's Study Group*. As well as topics specifically related to black feminism (black women in history, in Britain; racism; slavery; neo-colonialism; the family; women and psychology), the study of Marxism is also covered, particularly in relation to historical materialism (i.e. the Marxist theory of development), Mao's *On Contradictions*, Lenin's *State and Revolution* and Engels's *The Origin of the Family*. There is also a study of the effects of slavery on the nuclear family, domestic labour and wages for housework, two roles (women/wife), wife/child battering and women under socialism (Kollontai), as well as a study of the condition of women in China, Cuba, the USSR, Albania, Mozambique, Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Eastern Europe.

[141] BWG, 'The All-Party Select Committee on Immigration'; BWG, 'The Child Benefit Act'.

[142] BWG, 'The All-Party', 81.

On the other hand, it demonstrated the practical viability of the principle of interethnic unity—that is, political blackness. While not originating this principle, BWG reaffirmed and enacted it polemically, especially within the national network of black women's organisations that culminated in OWAAD.

Founded in 1978, the OWAAD acronym changed within a few months from the Organisation of Women of Africa and African Descent to the Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent. Already in the pamphlet presenting the organisation, it was noted that the original name derived from the composition of the founding group, "a small group of African and Afro-Caribbean sisters … had been involved in the work of of [*sic*] the African Students' Union (UK)," but that the comprehension of the specific oppression of Black women necessarily called into question the impact of imperialist power dynamics common to "women in Africa, the Caribbean and other Third World countries."[143] Moreover, the cases of South Asian refugees expelled from East Africa after decolonisation complicated immediate recognition of Asians as simply or dichotomously Asian or African. The active involvement of the Asian Women's Movement within the organisation led to the revision of the name by the time of the first national conference in March 1979.[144] The theme of Afro-Asian unity, both as an ideological-organisational principle and as a political practice, became the crucial testing ground for a theory and politics of articulation.

From this standpoint, the political definition of 'black' allowed activists to bridge together different women experiencing the same racist oppression derived both from a history of exploitation and imperial domination and from the structural causes governing their postcolonial migrations and settlement, with their working and living conditions in Britain. As claimed in the introductory talk to the national conference,

> Despite the obvious ethnic and cultural differences between these groups, we do not distinguish between them unless it is necessary to refer *specifically* to one or other of the groups, as it will be occassionally [*sic*]. This is because our joint experience, as second-class citizens in a racist society, have created firm bonds between us, which are far more significant, to us, than any other differences which may exist.[145]

[143] OWAAD, 'Organisation of Women of Africa and African Descent Constitution', 1979, 3–4, 1, DADZIE/1/1/3, BCA.
[144] Ibid., 9; OWAAD, 'Editorial', *FOOWAD!*, no. 1 (July 1979): 2–3, BCA (DADZIE/1/1/3).
[145] OWAAD, 'Introductory Talk: Black Women in Britain', 18 March 1979, 1, DADZIE/1/1/14, BCA.

To divide politically along ethnic or cultural lines was seen as a weakening, since it favoured the racist strategy of divide-and-rule, despite the British government's attempts "to keep ALL of us out, to keep Britain predominantly white at all costs."[146] Racism in Britain thus had the double effect of homogenising all black people as immigrants "swamping" British society, while simultaneously contaminating migrant communities with rival identitarian identifications, distinguishing themselves by shades of black and brown, for "racism has imposed a hierarchy based on skin colour … to divide people who suffer a common oppression" by putting them in competition. As they noted, "this most recent function of racism is somewhat ironic. Originally conceived of and systematically used to justify the brutal exploitation of Black people by Colonialism, racism now serves to divide these same exploited Black people from each other."[147]

Focusing on the present conditions of black working people in Britain instead allowed these women to render visible their common position, the effects of racism, and those acts of institutional racism that did not differentiate but treated Black people uniformly, such as "racist immigration laws." Their common social position, their struggles at the workplace and over housing and education, and their shared neo-colonial exploitation meant, in short, that "OUR COMMON STRUGGLE DEMANDS THAT WE ORGANISE JOINTLY" regardless of minor cultural divisions.[148] By anchoring their political definition of "black" within previous theorisation of the relationship between race and class emerging from the British Black Power movement, OWAAD's argument seems to undermine the specificity of sexual difference, while still struggling to emphasise the need for women's autonomous organisation. The very non-sexed point of departure was meant to emphasise Afro-Caribbean and South Asian women shared oppression of racism and exploitation, and to stress the need to organise together. However, against men who had downplayed their role in this global struggle, they stressed the particular experiences of black women, which was not just a passive participation but made visible that "the very nature of our oppression … is racial *and* sexual *and* economic."[149]

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[146] Ibid.
[147] OWAAD, 'Afro-Asian Unity - Rhetoric or Reality?', n.d., 1, 2, DADZIE/1/1/32, BCA.
[148] Ibid., 3, 4.
[149] OWAAD, 'Black Women in Britain', 7.

While political blackness made it possible to theoretically articulate racial exploitation and oppression even before this could be done practically, this approach risked limiting the impact of sexual difference to an empirical understanding of it. This risked trapping the elaborations on black women in the several instances of sexist oppression, and their multiple relations with racism and exploitation, without being generalised into a theoretical position of its own, thus giving rise to internal disputes. It is no coincidence that OWAAD experiences its deepest divisions precisely on these two points: the difficulty of translating the Afro-Asian unity affirmed by political blackness into coherent practice; and agreeing on a general theoretical perspective on sexual oppression, as framed with their unhappy marriage with a proper feminist perspective.[150]

Responding to the theme of black unity, the Afro-Asian collective Southall Black Sisters (SBS) underlined the practical difficulties encountered in attempts to enact Afro-Asian unity, while nonetheless recognising its theoretical and organisational relevance. Precisely because of the cultural differences shaping distinct communities, "the specific nature of that oppression takes different forms." For example, Asian women were often prevented from participating actively in organisational life by community surveillance, unlike their Afro-Caribbean counterparts; at the same time, institutional racism affected groups differently, from virginity tests imposed on Asian women to Sus laws disproportionately targeting Afro-Caribbeans.[151] A theory of Afro-Asian unity—or political blackness understood as a politics of articulation—had therefore to account for these differences in practice. As an example, they recall their participation in the strike of Asia women workers at the Slough Chix confectionery factory in 1980. Practicing a politics of articulation there meant allowing Asian women to be vocal, while also ensuring Afro-Caribbean presence on the picket line, thus countering the racist narrative that they were strike-breakers. "In this way AAU [Afro-Asian Unity] can be taken into the communities."[152] Other initiatives, such as the creation of refuges for young Black women, demonstrated that "putting Afro-Asian Unity into practice at the local level is not an easy task" and required continuous debate and specification, with strategies ranging

[150] Claudette Williams, 'We Are a Natural Part of Many Different Struggles: Black Women Organizing', in *Inside Babylon: The Caribbean Diaspora in Britain*, ed. Winston James and Clive Harris (Verso, 1993).
[151] Southall Black Sisters, 'Afro-Asian Unity - The Principle and Practise', 14 February 1981, 1, 2, DADZIE/1/1/32, BCA.
[152] Ibid., 2.

from separate local organisations coming together nationally, to autonomous caucuses on specific issues, to integrated collectives committed to ongoing discussion and self-critique.[153]

The emphasis on practice evident in SBS's debates highlighted both the political challenges they faced daily and the theoretical implications of a politics of articulation. Each proposed model sacrificed some dimension of combination (to use Althusser/Hall's words) or the relating practice (to frame it as the BUFP) in favour of an allegedly more effective organisational solution. Only the third option, based on the theoretical practice of self-criticism and continuous dialogue, preserved the principle of articulation, though always at the risk of marginalising particular women whose struggles might appear momentarily secondary. This in fact is related to OWAAD's (and black women's organisation) complex relation to feminism. For groups such as the BWG, the challenge was to redefine feminism in specifically black terms. Rather than rejecting feminism outright, they recognised it as one possible link in the wider struggle for liberation. For others, "feminism" was unequivocally seen as synonymous with "white" and thus irrelevant or even harmful for black women's liberation, which should have been articulated (or properly subordinated) to black women's efforts in the black cause as such. What this discussion eventually reveals is a wider division between a black feminism understood as a theory and politics of articulation and a black politics attempting to define and struggles against women's subordination with its proper terms.[154]

According to the BWG, "feminism is the theory underlying the struggle against the systematic oppression of women based on sex." This oppression, they explained, takes ideological-cultural, economic, and political forms. The first operates through the socialisation of women into specific gender roles within the family, producing a consciousness prone to "subordination and oppression." The second is economic, as women participate in the labour market in subordinate positions, while also undertaking unpaid domestic labour, which capitalism did not create but "solidified [as such] within the wage labour system." The third is political, as the state enacts patriarchal laws that confirm women's financial dependence upon husbands, and more broadly creates

[153] Ibid., 3.
[154] More widely, it reveals the polemical character of the very concept of 'woman' and its political representation, cfr. Paola Rudan, *Woman. History and Critique of a Polemical Concept* (2020; Brill, 2024).

conditions "within which racism and sexism are reinforced and legitimised." The combined effect of these forms of oppression is the legitimisation of male violence, experienced by Black women both in its "private" form (from husbands and fathers) and in the public, racist form of police violence. This analysis highlights the dual positioning of Black women. On the one hand, their condition brings them close to white women, insofar as they share systemic patriarchal oppression regardless of race or class. On the other hand, it connects them to Black men, insofar as they share the experience of racist violence, regardless of sex. Yet, Black men are themselves "sexist oppressors of black women." The feminist perspective, in thematising the systematic character of women's oppression and its pervasiveness across race and class, allows not simply the identification of who commits violence, but the articulation of "a struggle against the system which has allowed men to see and treat us as mindless objects because of the fact that we are women."[155]

The feminist perspective is thus what allows for both an analysis and a politics of articulation, as it identifies a system that "necessitates an understanding of these forces" and how they operate in relation to one another. Still, the identification of black women as "the *most* victimised by this situation" rather presents a social figure resulting from "the intersection of all forms of subjugation in society—racial oppression, sexual oppression and economic exploitation."[156] Without presuming any genealogy from BWG to the later formalisation of intersectionality, this passage seems to prefigure some of the contradictions and mutual critiques between Marxism and intersectionality.[157] Importantly, however, the term "intersection" is not deployed here as a claim to identity but as a rejoinder to the accusation that black women's specific politicisation fragmented the liberation struggle. Intersectionality as articulation demonstrates instead the paradoxical uniqueness of a struggle that is irreducible to any one dimension precisely because it is constituted at its crossroads. As BWG contends, "this means that we are a natural part of many different struggles—both as black people and as women."[158]

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[155] BWG, 'Black Feminism', in *Speak Out! A Brixton Black Women's Group Reader*, by BWG, ed. Milo Miller (first published in *Speak Out!* 4: 1-5, 1982; repr., Verso, 2023), 209–10, 212, 214–16.
[156] Ibid., 216, 218.
[157] Bohrer, *Marxism and Intersectionality*; also see Mezzadra, 'Intersectionality, Identity, and the Riddle of Class'.
[158] BWG, 'Black Feminism', 218.

For this reason, the autonomy of Black women's struggles was not separatism but a strategy to "expand the whole political struggle," since their particular struggles "form part of the total struggle for liberation." Their conclusion was to distinguish themselves from radical feminism, which saw women's oppression as "the major and primary oppression in all societies," defining instead their position as socialist feminism.[159] This allowed them

> to examine and analyse the interrelations and connections between the various factors which form the basis of women's subjugation. … These areas have to be examined not in isolation, but in relation to the whole oppressive capitalist system. … It is in this context of an understanding of our oppression based on sex, race and class, and of the recognition of our struggle being part and parcel of the greater black struggle for liberation of all our people from all forms of oppression, that black feminism is defined for us.[160]

Politically, this translated into the double orientation of autonomous but not separate organisations, specificity within totality, and the black feminist perspective as a means to articulate the different contradictions of race, class, and sex into a broader "black socialist politics."[161]

3.3 Organising the struggle, or, struggling to organise

3.3.1 Autonomous self-activity

In their particular ways, revolutionary black nationalism, black Marxism, and black feminism all attempted to address the issue of organising a black political subject by theorising a specific understanding of the articulation of the social structure and by outlining the consequential political strategy through which its most oppressed and simultaneously most powerful subject could express its revolutionary potential. In doing so, these ideological and organisational proposals still had to deal with the independent actions of unexpected subjects, which repeatedly displaced both their representations and, more importantly, the British government's plans for the ordered reproduction of society. More than organisational solutions as such, these movements were at the core of RTC's interest in, and depiction of, the black working class as a multifaceted social force.

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[159] Ibid., 218–19.
[160] Ibid., 219–20.
[161] BWG, 'On Black Women Organising', in *Speak Out! A Brixton Black Women's Group Reader*, by BWG, ed. Milo Miller (first published in *Speak Out!* 5: 2-7, 1983; repr., Verso, 2023), 267.

> Over the last two years, Race Today has sought to clarify and bring a new political perspective to the self-organised activity of a black community, which 'did not come alive in Britain.' Central to our perspective is the belief that the black working class, with its total view of society from below, is capable of and in the process of building new and revolutionary organisations. The factors of black struggle speak for themselves. … These are struggles directed towards their own material emancipations, an emancipation which confronts the question of power at every stage.[162]

Both on the industrial front and within the community, the black working class has been engaging "a formidable challenge to the status quo" independently (and often in opposition to) their formal organisational structure. Yet, as RTC highlighted, this was not a refusal of organisation per se, but the advancement of a new political possibility rooted in the growing rebelliousness of the black working class in its various sections. The point of departure, then, is neither a sociological taxonomy nor a party line, but a historically specific vantage standpoint through which RTC, by tracing and analysing the activities and struggles of the black working class, was in fact able to read the whole articulation of British post-colonial society "from below," and the ongoing struggle for power set by the black working class. The task of political collectives, therefore, was not to dictate any strategy to a political subject that had "proved time and again their determination."[163] Rather, as Darcus Howe wrote, describing the political line of the new *Race Today* in 1974,

> Our task is to record and recognise the struggles of the emerging forces as manifestations of the revolutionary potential of the black population. We recognise too the release of intellectual energy from within the black community, which always comes to the fore when the masses of the oppressed by their actions create a new social reality. *Race Today* opens its pages to the tendency which seeks to give theoretical clarification to independent grass roots self-activity with a view to furthering its development.[164]

Organisation was therefore conceptualised on two distinct but related planes. On the one hand, there was self-organisation, grounded in autonomous self-activity and opposed to a bureaucratic conception of organisation incapable of keeping pace with the "independent movement of black people." In other words, "the idea of workers' organisation is not at stake. But it is clear that the black workers are against trade unionism

[162] RTC, 'Self-Organisation vs "Self-Help"', *Race Today* 8, no. 3 (1976): 51.
[163] Ibid.
[164] Darcus Howe, 'From Victim to Protagonist – The Changing Social Reality', *Race Today* 6, no. 1 (1974): 3.

because it constantly destroys whatever initiatives it takes against capital."[165] On the other hand, RTC did not renounce the necessity of an explicitly political organisational form not immediately related to a place of production, to be developed alongside workers' self-organisation. This was envisaged as a Marxist organisation capable of recognising, fostering, and connecting partial struggles that expressed the potential of the black working class. Precisely because of this role of theoretical clarification and mediation across differences, the organisation's paper became a central feature of RTC's practice.

The concepts of autonomous self-activity and self-organisation, as well as the centrality of a party's paper for a Marxist organisation, all bear the mark of CLR James's political reflections. James defined autonomous self-activity as the ability of workers to organise production processes and, indeed, social life itself, without external mediation. This made their initiative the driving force of social transformation. James elaborates on this concept of autonomy in his writings for the political experiences Correspondence and Facing Reality. The critique of American capitalism highlighted that the complete and final disciplining of labour was impossible, as every rationalisation of production was met with strikes and struggles that demonstrated an autonomous and original capacity to thwart capital's plans. The 1956 uprisings in Hungary further confirmed this interpretation by extending the meaning of autonomy beyond the factory, with workers' councils simultaneously managing production and political organisation. Indeed, even in his American elaborations, the definition of working-class self-activity encompassed a class that could not be confined to production alone, being subjectively diverse and comprising black workers, women, and youths, who were particularly visible and vocal in their struggles.[166]

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[165] RTC, 'Campaign Meeting Erupts', *Race Today* 7, no. 3 (1975): 53.

[166] See, among James's various interventions, his discussion of spontaneity and organisation in C. L. R. James, *Notes on Dialectics. Hegel, Marx, Lenin* (Lawrence Hill & Co., 1980), 115–19 and passim; on Hungary, C. L. R. James and Grace Lee Boggs, *Facing Reality*, with Castoriadis (1958; Bewick Editions, 1974); more generally on political organisation, C. L. R. James, *Marxism for Our Times: C. L. R. James on Revolutionary Organization*, ed. Martin Glaberman (University Press of Mississippi, 1999). Also see Harry Cleaver, *Reading Capital Politically* (AK Press, 2000), 59–62; Matthew Quest, '"Every Cook Can Govern": Direct Democracy, Workers' Self Management & the Creative Foundations of C.L.R. James' Political Thought', *The CLR James Journal* 19, no. 1/2 (2013): 374–91; on James's *American Civilization*, see Matteo Battistini, 'Only Connect: The Political Manifesto of C.L.R. James for the US and the World', *Race & Class*, 2025, 1–20, https://doi.org/10.1177/03063968251355144. On James's influence on the politics of RTC, and specifically on Darcus Howe, see Max Farrar, '"You Don' Have to Have Read James to Be a Jamesian." Preliminary Notes on the Relationship between the Work of CLR James and Some of

In this context, the organisation's paper played a key role in making these different struggles visible in terms of autonomy, while also creating possibilities for material connection. The paper was thus a practical means of communication across diverse sections of the working class, documenting their activities and self-organisation while remaining "closest to these events" to recognise and highlight that "the new society exists."[167] RTC took on this organisational approach, applying James's remarks to the British post-colonial situation. Through practices of enquiry, reporting, and analysis; by sustaining workers' strikes; and by contributing to community campaigns over housing, education, and against racist violence, RTC participated in a class struggle that was presently manifesting as a collection of "unconnected struggles." Only by being inside these was it possible to draw generalisations useful to both the class struggle in general and the black struggle in particular. In this sense, RTC understood its organisational work as to "socialise the information of each particularity for the enrichment of the whole."[168]

Accordingly, what they thought was lacking in the strategies of both the organised labour movement (trade unionist and social democratic) and the black movement (Leninist and nationalist alike) was an accurate understanding of the forms of class struggle pursued by the different sections of the class. This analytical and political misjudgement ultimately reproduces and works in favour of capital by neutralising the innovation and originality of the class struggle. Commenting on the walk-out of twenty-seven Asian women and twelve Asian men—which triggered the three-month strike of over five hundred workers (largely South Asian refugees from East Africa) at Imperial Typewriters in Leicester in 1974—RTC highlighted how this struggle against racism in a factory actually ended up shaking the deadlock between labour and capital, a deadlock primarily sustained by the very unions' role, procedures and attitudes. Against these, the workers "have posed constant and creative self-activity as an alternative to the stifling procedure of the 'correct way of doing things,'" as they refused to comply with institutional and legal forms of striking. By rejecting the normalisation of class conflict

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the Radical Black, Anti-Racist and Left Movements in the UK, 1970s-1990s', paper presented at CLR James at 100: Global Capitalism, Culture and the Politics of World Revolution, St Augustine, Trinidad, The University of the West Indies, 23 September 2001; Field and Bunce, *Darcus Howe*, 44–49; Bunce and Tatchell, '"Race Today Cannot Fail"', 194–97.

[167] James and Boggs, *Facing Reality*, 166.

[168] RTC, 'One Year Later', 3.

carried out by both political parties and the unions, Asian workers revitalised a working class "accustomed by years of imperialism" to view them as docile labour destined to occupy the lowest rungs of the hierarchy. RTC endorsed these attempts at self-organisation and grounded its political project in the conviction that "the independent self-activity of any section of the class is itself a tendency," thus aligning itself with and becoming part of the strike.[169]

What the "creative best" of the class in fact demonstrated was that capital's "capacity to negate and absorb is not infinite," and that "through its vibrancy and unity" particular sections of the class can spur and sustain a whole mass movement.[170] This sort of avant-garde role was thus played not by an organisation, but rather by the black working class itself. This is the function that the black working class fulfils both on the shop floor and through the black wageless and youth who refuse incorporation into waged work and prosecute the struggle against capital's command in social reproduction. The same dynamic appears in "the open defiance to our rulers and their representatives, which young blacks displayed on the streets of Notting Hill," after the police confrontation in 1976. The value of RTC's analysis lies not only in connecting different manifestations of this militancy—among black youth not only in London but also in similar events, protests, and confrontations with the police in Birmingham, as well as in industrial disputes across the country—but, above all, in the indication that the RTC draws from this connection—that the black community is actually putting forward "a general strike of our workers."[171]

Strike thus becomes not the end-point of organisation but the very form of a process that enables the articulation of different sections of the class: factory workers, of whom many are black, against "the discipline of the management and the wage freeze imposed on them;" the Bengali workers struggling for better housing conditions in the East End of London; black youth rejecting police brutality.[172] By linking the shop floor with the

[169] RTC, 'Watch, Learn and Support', *Race Today* 6, no. 8 (1974): 219. On the Imperial Typewriters dispute, see Ron Ramdin, *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain* (Gower, 1987), 217–80; for a thorough analysis of RTC's recollection of and participation to the strike, see Saskia Papadakis, 'Black Struggles, Black Workers? Race Today and the 1974 Imperial Typewriters Strike', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2025, 1–17.
[170] RTC, 'Watch, Learn and Support', 219.
[171] RTC, 'Notting Hill and After', 194. From this point of view, they critique sections of the black movement for their inability to follow, particularly those who, like TBL, "from a lofty intellectual position proclaim the need for 'peoples war.'"
[172] Ibid.

community, the strike enables black workers to lead the process and to exercise power in the directions they deem most necessary. The strike may begin as a dispute over working conditions, bonus payments, and racism in the factory, but it tends towards the structural conditions of black working-class presence, exemplifying the impossibility of separating race and class.[173] The expansion of the strike's horizons opens new opportunities for organisation, beginning with a critique of the already-existing organisations. Hence the need to continue to "clear away" those who fail to recognise that these different battles form part of a wider struggle "to use our power, formidably organised, to win what we want."[174]

The power invoked here is that black political power affirmed "on the streets of Notting Hill, in the Asian ghettoes of London, on the shop floors of factories, in the industrial centres of Babylon," which even right-wing figures such as Enoch Powell are now compelled to acknowledge and against which they deploy racism and white nationalism as antidotes.[175] Faced with organised and institutional violence—by the state and by far-right organisations—the response is once again self-organisation: the most striking example being the Asian self-defence movement[176] or the battle for the West Indian Carnival in Britain,[177] answering the attempt to focus "the entire nation … so mercilessly and murderously on blacks." The disjuncture between black communities and black organisations, and the need to continue to pursue an autonomous response, was further underscored by Thatcher's rise. This was read not only as "another stage in the implementation of a system of economic exploitation over blacks,"[178] but precisely as a response to the emergence of a black, working-class politics that refused such systemic exploitation and oppression. Thatcher's ascent thus amounted to a declaration of war on the black community:

> She is against a community that is no longer willing to live in the room, traipse after the police, no longer willing to do their bidding so that they could create the wealth.

[173] RTC, 'Imperial Typewriters Strike', 224–25.
[174] RTC, 'Notting Hill and After', 194.
[175] RTC, 'What's to Be Done with Powell', *Race Today* 9, no. 1 (1977): 3.
[176] RTC, 'Charting the Asian Self-Defence Movement', *Race Today* 10, no. 6 (1978): 128–31.
[177] RTC, *The Road Make to Walk on Carnival Day*.
[178] Darcus Howe, 'Enter Mrs Thatcher. A Race Today Statement for Our Times', *Race Today* 10, no. 3 (1978): 58–59.

> We are no longer that defeated, demoralised working class. That is what she wants to attack.[179]

Accordingly, Howe concludes that the necessary way to struggle against Thatcher is not to discipline the black community into a political organisation that repeats the errors of the past—namely, external leadership by "professionals," either black or white—but to ensure that "the black working class … will always be in charge."[180] By the late 1970s, RTC indeed held that "there is no force within the portals of governmental economic and social power which can be called upon to campaign, to crusade, to rally other forces for a policy which would rid the black community of the oppression we face." On one side stood the media, reflecting the government's view and intent on representing black people either as muggers or as exemplars of integration, as they became businessmen or black police inspectors. On the other stood the police, intervening by force when required, in inner cities or in factories, to discipline a recalcitrant and rebellious black labour force. No organised force is thus there to take on the struggles of the black working classes that had marked the previous two decades, nor to answer the demands they raised.[181]

Once again, this is not to dismiss organised or institutional politics as necessarily ineffective, but to evaluate conjuncturally their possibilities and limits. In this way, the RTC register that Thatcher's election profoundly altered the political terrain, not only by rejecting the consensual institutional management of the social pact, but also, by extension, limiting the political possibilities for an autonomous movement to exert any pressure over it. If, in the post-war decades, the autonomous initiative of the working class—and of certain of its specific sections, such as colonial subjects—had partly dictated the governments' agenda through their struggles and demands, pressing them towards decolonisation and towards the recognition of social rights for the working class, the long-term response to that initiative was a progressive restriction of the scope for working-class action, which became explicit and brutal with Thatcher's rise. Black people were the first to suffer the consequences, but "it will become progressively bare for white workers as well." Against this backdrop, "we, black and whites" must organise to express

[179] Ibid., 62.
[180] Ibid.
[181] RTC, 'The Political Pantry Is Bare', *Race Today* 11, no. 5 (1979): 99.

the "working class potential power" not simply to defend existing rights, but to question the entire social and political organisation of society.[182]

3.3.2 The politics of the strike

Organisation must be conceived in relation to the social, political, and ideological context within which it operates. While the post-war consensus legitimised and enabled trade unions' institutional role in managing industrial relations, it did not concede to the working class the right to act as a self-representing subject. The 1960s witnessed a wave of so-called "unofficial," or wildcat, strikes conducted beyond—and often against—the official mechanisms of union–management negotiation, with industrial disputes peaking in the following decade.[183] The reorientation of conflict from institutional arenas to the workplace reflected an emergent militancy among workers who, when confronted with governmental attempts to replace industrial strife with consensus, or questioning who truly had the power to govern, proved willing to strike—and to strike politically.[184] This was especially true for black strikes that, according to Ron Ramdin, challenged both "the unrealistic containment of conflict in certain industries" and "racism at all levels of the industrial structure."[185]

For the BUFP, the Imperial Typewriters dispute exemplified what they meant by a political strike insofar as it allowed the black working class to pursue multiple struggles through a single action. The strike forced the union apparatus beyond its present form and advanced a specific organisational demand—the creation of black caucuses. It also remained the most effective weapon available to the working class to counter exploitation, and a characteristic instrument of the black struggle itself;[186] precisely because it was a

[182] Ibid., 99.

[183] Jack Saunders, *Assembling Cultures: Workplace Activism, Labour Militancy and Cultural Change in Britain's Car Factories, 1945-82* (Manchester University Press, 2019), 25–53.

[184] Virdee, *Racism, Class and the Racialized Outsider*, 125. I am referring to Wilson's government White Paper on industrial relations, titled *In Place of Strife*, and to Heath's political campaign (explicitly focused on undermining the power of trade unions and workers) in 1974, around the question "who runs the country?" (Duranti, *Dis-union Jack*, 151–55).

[185] Ramdin, *Black Working Class*, 269. Ramdin's book recounts in depth the most important disputes involving black workers and the reactions of employers, white workers, and trade unions in 1960s-1970s Britain (ibid., 256–369). For a more concise yet analytical take, see Duranti, *Dis-union Jack*, 158–76.

[186] It is well-known that WEB Du Bois redefined as a "general strike" the collective actions of black slaves during the American Civil War, consisting of the sabotage of production, withdrawal of labour, and flight from the plantations. It was precisely this general strike—namely, the subjective political action of black people—that transformed the Civil War into a war for the abolition of slavery and thus determined their

common form, it opened possibilities for unified action (even if participation at that strike was overwhelmingly black: about 400 workers, "most of which Indians, a few West Indians and supported by 20 white progressive workers").[187] Yet strikes are "limited weapons" when they "are kept in the confines of mere economic struggle." The Imperial Typewriter was, finally, a political strike in that it articulated specific economic demands with political ingredients, such as "anti-racism, equality for women and democracy on the shop floor."[188]

As the BUFP had already observed in relation to the previous year's dispute at the Standard Telephone Company (New Southgate, London), factory labour was organised along both economic and racial lines; accordingly, workers struck for "the right to be trained as skilled setters, as white workers are."[189] In both instances, an irresolute managerial response, together with the constant presence of police on the picket line (as well as that of National Front activists), served to intimidate "the Black masses to discourage them from any progressive action to defend their class interest," and deployed racism "to disunite the working class."[190] The political character of the strike was thus fundamental in recognising and opposing capital's political as well as economic strategy. In the Standard Telephone's case, the adversary was a multinational ready either to recruit

own emancipation (William E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880* [1935; Simon and Schuster, 1998], ch. 4; Sandro Mezzadra, 'Introduzione', in *Sulla linea del colore: razza e democrazia negli Stati Uniti e nel mondo*, by William E. B. Du Bois, ed. Sandro Mezzadra [Il Mulino, 2010], 67–73; Ferruccio Gambino, 'Reading *Black Reconstruction* on the Eve of 1968', *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112, no. 3 [2013]: 529–35; Guy Emerson Mount, 'When Slaves Go on Strike: W.E.B. Du Bois's Black Reconstruction 80 Years Later', *Black Perspectives - African American Intellectual History Society*, 28 December 2015, https://www.aaihs.org/when-slaves-go-on-strike/). Such a political reading of the social figure and actions of the black slave, grounded in an understanding of slavery as the political institution that inscribed black people within capitalism, was fundamental for a political organisation intent on affirming that, as the BUFP writes in an aforementioned article, 'Black People Are Part of the Working Class'. Although not explicitly referred to in this context, the BUFP honours Du Bois as one of "our true heroes," dedicating to him the inaugural article of the homonymous column in *Black Voice*, see BUFP, 'Dubois: A Man of the People', *Black Voice* 6, no. 3 (1975): 10, UCL (ALTER PRESS/Box 32). In his analysis of the making of the black radical tradition, Robinson revisits these pages from *Black Reconstruction* as an instance of a critique of Marxism's identification of the proletariat exclusively with the industrial working class (Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 199–240). For an alternative interpretation, drawing on Marx's own writings on the American Civil War—which situate the struggle for black emancipation within the social movement of the world market, world history, and therefore the class struggle—see Matteo Battistini, 'Between Slavery and Free Labour: Marx, the American Civil War and Emancipation as a Global Issue', in *Global Marx. History and Critique of the Social Movement in the World Market*, ed. Matteo Battistini et al. (Meltemi, 2020; repr., Brill, 2022).

[187] BUFP, 'Struggle Continues', *Black Voice* 5, no. 2 (1974): 1, GPI (NEW/14/14).

[188] BUFP, 'Time to Analyse the Leicester Strike', 8.

[189] BUFP, 'Three Hundred Black Workers Say No', *Black Voice* 4, no. 5 (1973): 5, GPI (NEW/14/13).

[190] BUFP, 'Struggle Continues', 1.

new black workers from the Third World against those striking in Britain, or even to relocate production there: "a workers strike against any multi-national firm in Britain can only be effective when the sea is the only place left for the capitalist rat to jump in."[191]

If both strikes ultimately ended in defeat, they nevertheless demonstrated the necessity of "a proletarian perspective," grounded in "the fundamental factor … of organising politically." This insight was shared by white and black workers alike, the latter also recognising that the strike's political dimension stemmed from engaging sections of the black community beyond the factory gates. The challenge of organisation for the black proletariat, therefore, was to hold together a mobilisation premised on a common racial identification, an organisational form built on the dual recognition of race and class (black caucuses), and the primary contradiction that "the struggle we wage is one based on class—that of the working class against the ruling and owning class!"[192] Once put under the direction of the revolutionary organisation, the politics of the strike was seen as the proper means to realise this articulation.

The relationship between economic and political struggle is also at the centre of Sivanandan's writings on the struggles of the black community and his critique of the trade unions. In the context of post-war British capitalism, the latter had become "a stabiliser of the system" rather than an "instrument of class struggle," precisely to the extent that they separated the economic from the political rather than articulating them within a unified struggle. What the unions did, in other words, was to barter away the possibility of a comprehensive process of politicisation of the British working class for partial wage and employment concessions benefiting only a segment of it. In so doing, they reduced class struggle to an immediate struggle against the economic effects of exploitation, losing sight of the fact that through such struggle "the working class attains to political struggle, struggle with *the causes* of exploitation."[193] This separation was not possible for black workers, who, when confronting racism, were compelled,

> by virtue of the fact that their experience of economic exploitation is hardly separable from their experience of racial oppression, … to recognise that a purely quantitative

[191] BUFP, 'Editorial', 1973, 2.
[192] BUFP, 'Time to Analyse the Leicester Strike', 8.
[193] A. Sivanandan, 'Put Politics in Command', *Race Today* 5, no. 8 (1973), https://asivanandan.com/put-politics-in-command/ (emphasis mine).

> approach to the improvement of their conditions can by itself have no bearing on the quality of their lives.[194]

The specific social position of the black proletariat is therefore at the origin of a politicisation of economic struggle that simultaneously addresses both the effects and the causes of exploitation—its immediate intelligibility as an unequal exchange between capital and labour, and its structural dimension, consolidated also through the societal effects of racism. It is precisely this politicisation that puts black workers "in the vanguard of working class struggle." A radical, militant black proletariat is thus able to confront capital in its changing relation to racism, both domestically and internationally, as well as in the transnational constitution of both dimensions. Black workers' political struggle, ultimately, is that when it is able to reduce "the concept of three worlds into its basic components of capital and labour" and to seize the opportunity of such internationalisation "here in the metropolitan country," where the political economy of migration results in the simultaneity of a multiplicity of material conditions, out of which a black political subject can be articulated. The practice of the strike, therefore, enables a politicisation of blackness that is not identitarian but anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist, through a genuine 'politics' to be "based on a common consciousness of class exploitation," and that must "put in command."[195]

The significance and assessment of industrial disputes brought forward by black workers in Britain should therefore be measured against this interpretation. This is precisely what Sivanandan achieves by commenting on and contrasting the strike at Imperial Typewriters with the longer strike at the Grunwick film processing factory in North London. The Grunwick factory was a large employer of Asian workers, particularly women from East African backgrounds. In August 1976, Jayaben Desai, a worker at the factory and then leader of the strike, walked out against management's requirement to do compulsory overtime. Over a hundred Asian women workers joined their colleague in denouncing the harsh working conditions, constant threats of dismissal if they failed to meet overstated productivity requirements, and in asking for union membership and the possibility of making the strike official. This happened soon, as it was backed by the Association of Professional, Executive and Computer Staff (APEX). Picketing lasted

[194] Ibid.
[195] Ibid.

almost two years, with mass demonstrations reaching up to 18,000 participants, until its defeat in July 1978, with none of the strikers' demands met.[196]

For Sivanandan, the importance of this dispute lay in the relationship between Asian workers—one of the most militant sections of the British working class—and the unions, completely interested in unionising them. This eagerness revealed an "inordinate anxiety" that must be understood "in the larger context of government-trade union collaboration in the Social Contract," Sivanandan argued, as the Grunwick strike threatened to disrupt this arrangement precisely because, by also challenging racism, it transcended the boundaries of a mere industrial relations dispute.[197] Its significance was further heightened by its coincidence with the passage of the Race Relations Act 1976, which formed part of the so-understood complex legal compound underpinning the Social Contract as an explicit attempt to govern the British working class by governing its black component.

> It is the very fact of colour that has, as so many times before, lent a political dimension to the struggle of the Grunwick strikers—and the unions, as so many times before, are anxious to keep that dimension out, particularly in view of the Social Contract. … Now that the state has decided that the social and political cost of racism has begun—in the objective circumstances—to outweigh its economic profitability … the unions are equally anxious to contribute to that effort.[198]

The union's treatment of black workers must therefore be understood in the context of the changes to institutional racism outlined by Sivanandan in *Race, class and the state*. The black working class continually raised the question of their collective liberation as both a class and a race. In response, the state and capital attempted to neutralise

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[196] Ramdin, *Black Working Class*, 280–309; Virdee, *Racism, Class and the Racialized Outsider*, 132–35; Amrit Wilson, *Finding a Voice: Asian Women in Britain* (Virago Limited, 1978), 65–71; also see Parmar, 'Gender, Race and Class: Asian Women in Resistance'; Jack McGowan, '"Dispute", "Battle", "Siege", "Farce"?—Grunwick 30 Years On', *Contemporary British History* 22, no. 3 (2008): 383–406; Linda McDowell et al., 'Striking Narratives: Class, Gender and Ethnicity in the "Great Grunwick Strike", London, UK, 1976–1978', *Women's History Review* 23, no. 4 (2014): 595–619; Sundari Anitha et al., 'From Grunwick to Gate Gourmet: South Asian Women's Industrial Activism and the Role of Trade Unions', *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique. French Journal of British Studies* 23, no. 1 (2018): 1–22.

[197] Sivanandan, 'Grunwick', 129. The Social Contract was the name of the economic policy of the 1974-79 Labour governments as an attempt to govern inflation by freezing wage pay raises, granting trade unions the repeal of the 1971 Industrial Relations Act and other forms of indirect welfare, such as price control on food and rent. This was also meant as a way to ease trade unions' pressures on the government. For an account, see Robert Taylor, 'The Rise and Fall of the Social Contract', in *New Labour, Old Labour: The Wilson and Callaghan Governments, 1974–1979*, ed. Anthony Seldon and Kevin Hickson (Routledge, 2004).

[198] Sivanandan, 'Grunwick', 130.

revolutionary aspirations by actively committing to preventing "a black under-class from bringing to the struggles of the white workers political dimensions peculiar to its own historic battle against capital."[199] At Grunwick, the crucial role of the trade unions in the early stages of the dispute resolved itself into their corporate function within the corporate state. This involved stripping the strike of its general political significance by first reducing it to a narrowly economic dispute and then, when workers continually reproposed its political dimension, shifting to "a concern with the legality." This strategy, which resulted in the alienation of the support from the black community, was in fact read as an attempt "to contain and incorporate it" part of the black community, favouring "the use of 'official channels'" and steering "the black workers away from community based support."[200][201]

According to the RTC, the Grunwick strike had consequently "split the Labour Movement right down the middle on a question of class power."[202] In the confrontation between workers and management, a broader contest was being fought between the institutionalised representation of the labour movement—with Labour in government and the Trades Union Congress torn between solidarity with the "strikers in saris" and caution not to exacerbate the conflict—and the self-activity of the working class, embodied by the Asian strikers. This dynamic had already appeared at Imperial Typewriters, where Asian workers self-organised and rejected mediation by the Indian Workers' Association.[203] At Grunwick, however, immediate collaboration with the union has made

[199] Sivanandan, 'Race, Class and the State', 101.

[200] A. Sivanandan, 'Grunwick 2', *Race & Class* 19, no. 3 (1978): 292. This analysis resonates with Sivanandan's reading of the White Paper on Racial Discrimination, which anticipated the 1976 Race Relations Act (Sivanandan, 'West Indian Community'). It is no coincidence that the two analyses—his first article on Grunwick and this report on the West Indian Community—are originally published as two sections of the same article, significantly titled *Race, class and the state (2)*. This not only suggests Sivanandan's interest in developing on his previous theoretical analysis through concrete examples, but also his understanding of political blackness, as both Asians' and West Indians' struggles are analysed in their particularities and simultaneously put under the same theoretical-political categories.

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[202] RTC, 'The Grunwick Strike', *Race Today* 9, no. 4 (1977): 75.

[203] "[The IWA] wanted to know how they could achieve prominence by running the strike, not what they could do to assist it. … An organisation that had achieved mediating status had pitted itself against the emergent independent force of Asian workers. The mediators lost. Without the help of the IWA, the strike came to an end with a negotiated return to work. After the event, IWA activists said that one faction was giving the other a bad name, but the truth remains that the Indian Worker's Association, enmeshed as it is now with the Community Relations Councils … can never reinstate itself as a force for the independent material struggle of Asian workers." (RTC, 'New Perspectives on the Asian Struggle. Part 2', *Race Today*

it more difficult to maintain this conflictual dialectic, ultimately bending black workers' demands towards the trade union's strategy. The strike was fought almost entirely on the terrain of unionisation, an issue largely irrelevant to a predominantly black workforce, employed through "hire-and-fire tactics by the management" in a factory with high turnover rates.[204] According to RTC, accepting this strategy proved the strikers' "greatest weakness," especially when compared with the struggles waged by Asian workers throughout the 1960s and 1970s, during which they had demonstrated the capacity to develop "new modes and strengths of organisation," while "in every single case of Asian workers action, a reliance on the good offices of the union to which they belonged … has led to a defeat of the action.""[205]

On the one hand, reducing the struggle to a defence of trade unionism enabled the involvement of sections of the white working class. But in order to do so it had to neutralise "the power of Asian workers" whose struggles were directed against "the abuse, the exploitation, the near starvation wages and awful conditions of work." For these workers, industrial struggle in Britain was not conceived as a union dispute for the sake of the union, but rather "they have viewed industrial struggle in a 'foreign' land as something akin to a war of community emancipation," exposing the quasi-slavery conditions of their employment and the racism of management. The choice to rely on the union meant giving up to that black power they had helped to build and consolidate over the years with their self-activity, and which, through the active involvement of the black community, had been the real source of strength for black strikes, making them political rather than merely trade union struggles. The problem with the trade union strategy, then, was that it sidelined what the international black movement, together with the struggles of black youth and workers in Britain, had placed at the centre over the previous decade, that is, the question of "race" as "the basis for a powerful national and international linkage of our struggle."[206]

11, no. 5 [1979]: 106–7). In a previous issue of *Race Today*, they had published the prequel to this article, retelling the emergence of the IWA as an organisational expression of Asian workers' self-activity and its relation with Black Power, up to its transformation into a social-democratic and race relations industry's instrument, see RTC, 'New Perspectives on the Asian Struggle', *Race Today* 11, no. 4 (1979): 79–85.

[204] RTC, 'The Grunwick Strike', 75.

[205] RTC, 'Grunwick Strike. The Bitter Lessons', *Race Today* 9, no. 7 (1977): 151–53.

[206] Ibid., 154.

It is on this terrain that the political connections promised by political blackness must be forged—an expansive, comprehensive form of struggle, rather than a sectional one. The issue was not the search for support from white workers, but the fact that it was pursued in their terms and on their priorities (unionisation) at the expense of those advanced by black liberation struggles, against both exploitation and racism. The consequence, otherwise, was the inability to connect the point of production with the community, as lamented by Jayaben Desai herself. For Desai, what the strike represented (despite its defeat) was the possibility of a life not dictated solely by the rhythms and demands of capital, which she illustrated in the words: "how to work here, go home and do the house job, go to sleep and then start again on the factory job." By contrast, the strike was seen as a means for articulating workers' immediate situation with structural conditions. Through striking, black women refused (even provisionally) to comply with capital demands and resisted pressures from their husbands urging them to return to the factory and their households. Finally, through the strike, Desai invoked the possibility for a political understanding of "community," influenced by political blackness. She was not using the term in an ethnic sense only—as evidenced by the support of Asian workers' organisations in Britain for the strikers—but rather as a means of achieving political solidarity and taking common actions among black workers in general, and black women in particular—as highlighted by the (albeit late) joining of West Indian women on the picket line.[207]

3.3.3 Resistance, rebellion, and uprising

Black strikes allowed for a multiplicity of political communications among different subjects—within the racial and sexual division of labour in the factory, as well as between factory and community—against the racism of capital, which sought to erase the very grounds for these communications. By contrast, institutional racism, embodied by the police at the borders, in the courts, and on the streets, violently intervened to stop that communication, restoring and reinforcing a hierarchical and oppressive social order threatened by black workers' actions towards organisations. It is therefore specifically as a response to the progressive consolidation of a social power that black radicals and intellectuals interpreted the "wave of racial violence which has coincided with Thatcher's

[207] Jayaben Desai, 'Talking about Grunwick', *Race Today* 10, no. 1 (1978): 22–23.

preparation for an assault on the rights of blacks in Britain."[208] Not that racial violence had been absent before Thatcher; indeed, part of her political success relied precisely on the normalisation (and therefore legitimisation) of such violence, which, with her election, could now be enshrined as state policy. During the 1970s, a number of explicitly fascist groups emerged, such as "the organised racists—the National Front,"[209] whose goal was "to inflict political punishment on the black community in this country." Yet, as Darcus Howe noted, they "didn't seem likely to win political power in the near future." By contrast, Thatcher has that power, being able both to legislate and to mobilise the armed forces of the state against the black community.[210]

Although it always manifested as extreme violence, organised racism assumed different forms and modalities, which black people were compelled to confront also on an organisational level. In the analyses of black radicals, urban violence and racially motivated attacks carried out by hard-right organisations were not directly equivalent to those perpetrated by the police, partly because the latter affected Asian and Afro-Caribbean communities differently.[211] While West Indians had been subject to police harassment since the late 1960s, Asian communities began to encounter this form of violence only later, in response to their mobilisation in self-defence movements against the threats, marches, and explicit assaults of fascist groups.[212] In any case, according to

[208] RTC, 'Law & Order Hoo! Hoo!', *Race Today* 10, no. 4 (1978): 76.
[209] RTC, 'Notting Hill and After', 194.
[210] Howe, 'Enter Mrs Thatcher. A Race Today Statement for Our Times', 58.
[211] Adam Elliot-Cooper, *Black Resistance to British Policing* (Manchester University Press, 2021), 21–53.
[212] RTC, 'Editorial', *Race Today* 8, no. 7/8 (1976): 147. Afro-Caribbeans were the main target of searches and arrests under section 4 of the 1824 Vagrancy Act, which authorised police officers to arrest individuals suspected of intending to commit a crime (the Act was therefore colloquially known as the 'Sus'). Against this practice were led several actions and organised campaigns such as the Black People Against State Harassment, in which BWG was involved together with TBL, an Asian organisation, and other black platforms (Colin Prescod, 'Black People Against State Harassment (BASH) Campaign—A Report', *The Black Liberator* 1, no. 1 [1978]: 5–7, GPI (JOU/3/8); RTC, 'Parents and Youth against "Sus"', *Race Today* 8, no. 12 [1977]: 243; BWG, 'Scrap Sus Now', in *Speak Out! A Brixton Black Women's Group Reader*, by BWG, ed. Milo Miller [first published in *Speak Out!* 2: 4-5, 1979; repr., Verso Books, 2023]; OWAAD, 'Scrap Sus Conference', *FOOWAD!*, no. 1 [July 1979]: 3, BCA (DADZIE/1/1/3); BUFP, 'Are You Acting Suspiciously?', *Black Voice* 10, no. 1 [1979]: 3, UCL (ALTER PRESS/Box 32); also see Nicole M. Jackson, '"A Nigger in the New England": "Sus", the Brixton Riot, and Citizenship', *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 8, no. 2 [2015]: 158–70). The first organisations of young Asians influenced by political blackness were formed in response to the National Front's marches and patrols in predominantly black neighbourhoods, whose consolidation and notoriety are linked to the anti-immigration campaign against Ugandan Asians expelled from the country by Idi Amin in the summer of 1972 and given the option to settle in Britain as refugees (see Ramamurthy, *Black Star*, 22–29; Michael Higgs, 'From the Street to the State: Making Anti-Fascism Anti-Racist in 1970s Britain', *Race & Class* 58, no. 1 [2016]: 67–70).

RTC, resistance to the police expressed "a general attitude of hostility."[213] Likewise, the BUFP read them as the proof of "an attitude of resistance in the black communities … arisen out of the oppression which we face."[214]

These struggles literally set entire black communities on the move on a national scale, even if such mobilisation had not yet developed "into an organised political movement."[215] The existence and visibility of this movement—especially of its most affected sections by police harassment, "army of young men and women [who] are linked together in one struggle … to survive without a wage," a group rapidly expanding as a consequence of the economic crisis of the late 1970s—laid the basis "for mass organisations of working class West Indians around this particular issue." Yet all the challenges already observed in its industrial section remained. That earlier experience had already demonstrated the problem of the political form organisation could take. Whereas the factory proletariat confronted trade unions and the Labour Party, unemployed and marginalised youth faced institutions and experts of the race relations industry. On one side was the self-organisation of young black people and their parents, as exemplified by the Black Parents Movement, which directly involved the North London black community in struggles against police interference in schools, extending that conflict into a broader fight against the structural causes of racism. On the other side was the delegation of campaign management to legal and social workers who "spring up around the most dramatic of these cases," claiming their expertise and ultimately excluding parents and defendants. In such cases, "all perspective on the general struggle is lost and chaos and defeat face the movement as a whole."[216]

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[213] RTC, 'Editorial', 147.

[214] BUFP, 'Editorial', *Black Voice* 12, no. 2 (1981): 2, UCL (ALTER PRESS/Box 32). It is around this structural understanding of racism that a divide developed between the British anti-fascist movement and anti-racist movements in the 1970s. As Sivanandan puts it, "There were contradictions, however, between groups like the Anti-Nazi League (which was anti-fascist first and, incidentally, anti-racist) and the Campaign Against Racism and Fascism (which was anti-racist and therefore, anti-fascist)" Kwesi Owusu, 'The Struggle for a Radical Black Political Culture: An Interview with A. Sivanandan', *Race & Class* 58, no. 1 (2016): 14. On this debate, see Gilroy, *There Ain't*, 115–35; Higgs, 'From the Street to the State'; Alfie Hancox, 'The Anti-Nazi League, "Another White Organisation"? British Black Radicals against Racial Fascism', *Historical Materialism* 31, no. 3 (2023): 276–303.

[215] RTC, 'Editorial', 147.

[216] RTC, 'Up Against the Police', 150, 153–54. The Black Parents Movement was founded in 1975 by the writer and publisher John La Rose following the arrest and beating of Cliff McDaniel, a 17-year-old black boy, by police outside his school in north London. The Movement was built on the legacy of the previous education movement, which focused on addressing the inadequate education of black children in British

In response to police brutality, court cases, and racially motivated murders, black communities developed various organisational strategies: from campaigns and self-organised public enquiries exposing the racism of the judicial system and the absence or inefficacy of official investigations, to marches and demonstrations. Both strategies were exemplified by the response to the New Cross house fire, in which thirteen black youths (aged 14 to 22) lost their lives on 18 January 1981. Despite the dubious circumstances, the police dismissed the possibility of arson and suggested that the fire had been caused internally—either by "a faulty television … a spark from a gas fire … someone smoking cannabis … an abundance of alcohol … [a] gatecrasher who had been turned away." The hostility towards the police that Howe had already highlighted—and towards a government that failed to express any solidarity with the victims' families—was confirmed in this instance. An Action Committee was formed not only to investigate the fire's causes but also to expose the structural living conditions of black people in South London.[217] On 2 March 1981, the Black People's Day of Action took place, a major demonstration through London (from New Cross to Hyde Park, passing Scotland Yard and the Houses of Parliament), involving thousands of black people.[218]

The mass presence in the streets—remembered by Howe years later with the same words used by RTC to describe the 1976 Notting Hill Carnival clashes, namely as "a general strike of blacks"—did show that they "had some power in this place,"[219] yet it did not resolve the question of consolidating that power into a durable project capable of overturning racial oppression. For the BUFP, what it did achieve was to expose the

schools. Additionally, it intervened in court cases involving police violence against Black youth, aiming to politicise and actively engage parents and young people in taking control of their cases. Archival materials on the Black Parents Movement can be found at the George Padmore Institute in London. On John La Rose, see Chris Moffat, 'Against "Cultures of Hiatus": History and the Archive in the Political Thought of John La Rose', *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 22, no. 1 (55) (2018): 39–54; Cantres, *Blackening Britain*, 169 ff.

[217] BUFP, 'New Cross Massacre - The Fact Finding Commission', *Black Voice* 12, no. 1 (1981): 6, GPI (NEW/14/20). About the decision leading to the establishment of an independent Fact Finding Commission, they say it "was a vote of non-confidence in the way the police were dealing with this grave tragedy and to counter the deliberately misleading statements in the press" (ibid., 6). On the autonomous organisations of black people after the fire, see Aaron Andrews, 'Truth, Justice, and Expertise in 1980s Britain: The Cultural Politics of the New Cross Massacre', *History Workshop Journal* 91, no. 1 (2021): 182–209.

[218] Numbers differ, with estimates ranging from 9,000 to over 20,000 people (Simon Peplow, *Race and Riots in Thatcher's Britain* [Manchester University Press, 2019], 99; Bunce and Tatchell, '"Race Today Cannot Fail"', 197–99).

[219] Darcus Howe quoted in Mike Phillips and Trevor Phillips, *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain* (HarperCollins, 1999), 337.

structural nature of racist violence, revealing the negligible value assigned to black lives, as demonstrated by the reactions of the police, media, and the government to black deaths, whether accidental or violent—"…and too often the motive of their death is usually Racist."[220] Then, the black response "dispelled the myth of the congenial British society and brought to light the underlying differences in the society,"[221] whose structural relations are preserved and reproduced precisely through racism: "that relationship in which we are, and have always been the slave partner, would exist in an extremely unsteady state. Were is to be acknowledged bye [*sic*] and large and these attacks on black people were racial." The inability of government and media to recognise the racial character behind New Cross, behind police violence, behind the mass unemployment and rebellion of black youth, lay precisely in the stabilising function that racism grants to the entire social system. For that reason, "Black youth in Southall and Brixton cannot be asked to distinguish between the National Front and the police." Since racist violence serves the same social purpose, it makes little difference whether it is carried out by a state institution or condoned by them while being executed by fascist organisations.[222]

The explosion of black youth anger that culminated in a series of race riots between 1980 and 1985 must therefore be read within this framework. Always following yet another police incident—a raid on a black-owned café in Bristol in 1980, and in reaction to the heightened police presence and activities in Brixton following the Operation Swamp 81—urban disturbances erupted in the forms of looting, arson, and clashes with the police. These involved diverse groups: young and old blacks, mainly West Indians but also some Asian and white participants.[223] According to black radicals, these were "not riots but rebellions," or "uprisings," highlighting a "positive response to developing state oppression" and the growing "self confidence to struggle for our basic rights." Labelling these events as "riots" formed part of a broader strategy of repression, inserted within the larger dispute over the shared understanding of racism as a form of societal oppression

[220] BUFP, 'Editorial', *Black Voice* 12, no. 1 (1981): 2, GPI (NEW/14/20).
[221] BUFP, 'Editorial', *Black Voice* 12, no. 3 (1981): 2, GPI (NEW/14/21).
[222] BUFP, 'Editorial', 1981, 2. It is around this structural understanding of racism that a divide developed between the British anti-fascist movement and anti-racist movements in the 1970s. As Sivanandan puts it, "There were contradictions, however, between groups like the Anti-Nazi League (which was anti-fascist first and, incidentally, anti-racist) and the Campaign Against Racism and Fascism (which was anti-racist and therefore, anti-fascist)" Owusu, 'Sivanandan Interview', 14. On this debate, see Gilroy, *There Ain't*, 115–35; Higgs, 'From the Street to the State'; Hancox, 'The Anti-Nazi League'.
[223] Peplow, *Race and Riots in Thatcher's Britain*; Duranti, *Dis-union Jack*, 241–74.

articulated with capitalist exploitation. According to the BUFP, it was indeed part of the "discreet attempts to divert people's attention away from the real reason for the Uprising—British Racism which is part and parcel of this capitalist system." Despite this divisive attempt, the BUFP emphasised that the participation of large sections of the working class—not only West Indians—expressed both the general nature of the conflict and the specific "change in Black peoples' reaction to normal policing."[224]

Although some contemporary commentators read this multiplicity of actors as evidence of a form of political blackness,[225] the heterogeneity of organisational definitions prevented black radicals from considering the question of organisation as theoretically or politically resolved.[226] In fact, the insurrection itself intensified the organisational difficulties of political blackness, rather than solving them. Organisation, understood as articulation, aims to hold differences together within a long-term project in which power can accumulate—even through defeats. Insurrection, by contrast, allows diverse subjects to both exercise and demand an immediate power aimed at resolving their problems here and now. In this explosive character, insurrection enables a provisional recognition in a shared action, so that "then, for the first time, one is no longer alone. But when the mob disperses, society returns to adhere perfectly to every street and every wall. Then 'no longer alone' changes to 'back in society'."[227]

According to the BLF, there was a direct relation between "the intensity of the militancy in black people in Britain" and "the intensity of their oppression," which led them to suggest that the repression of black uprisings inevitably carried with it the seed of new militancy and conflict against racial oppression.[228] This was so because in the streets of Brixton, they saw a new confident black political subject arising, freed from

> the constraints of class and race demoralisation. Their very existence inside British capitalism rendered them incompatible with the social arrangements they had inherited. They made their own 'frontlines' by breaking the organisational and

[224] BUFP, 'Not Riots but Rebellions', *Black Voice* 12, no. 3 (1981): 6, GPI (NEW/14/21).
[225] S. D. Reicher, 'The St. Pauls' Riot: An Explanation of the Limits of Crowd Action in Terms of a Social Identity Model', *European Journal of Social Psychology* 14, no. 1 (1984): 1–21.
[226] As noted by an analysis of arrest in Brixton, black residents were mostly involved in clashes with the police, while looting broadly interested different groups of people, especially whites coming from other areas of the city (Michael Keith, *Race, Riots and Policing: Lore and Disorder in a Multi-Racist Society* [Routledge, 1993], 101–4).
[227] Andrea Cavalletti, *Classe* (Bollati Boringhieri, 2009), 20 (translation mine); English translation *Class* (Seagull Books, 2019).
[228] BLF, 'Black Revolt in Leicester', *Grassroots*, December 1980, 2, GPI (NEW/9/31).

> theoretical impasse created by their very presence and the Police's attempts to control their rebellion.[229]

This raises once again the issue of the political subject and its constitutive relation with organisation as articulation. In their reciprocal relation, organisation and subjects must be defined, articulated, and represented through specific processes of political mediation; in rebellion, however, every mediation collapses in favour of an uncontainable immediacy, posing significant challenges for those who present themselves as organisers. Such immediacy reveals potential yet offers no guarantee that it will reappear as power. Indeed, that potential was recognised not only by black organisers but also by their adversaries. The state itself understood that "an energy which makes spontaneous battles and turns them into politically supported defences in court, is capable of generating fierce organisation in class combat."[230] Consequently, it mobilised its apparatuses, both repressive—policing black communities—and ideological—the press portraying black communities as the cause of their own deprivation and as a problem of public order. Finally, a third response relied on repression through co-optation, based on an increase in public spending, though not in the welfare terms demanded by black struggles:

> In spite of the welfare spending drought, the threat of civil disorder that the West Indian community has posed, will bring in its wake a catch of state funding, whether a new Ministry holds them in its gift or not. The funds will flow for more hostels for the black urban homeless, for the drive to recruit more blacks to the police force; to fatten the rising black class that each year renews its promise, as yet unfulfilled to find gimmicks to induce young blacks to accept training and humble employment. The solution has not worked in the past and will not work in the future.[231]

Already in the late 1960s, the British Panthers had experienced both "the stick," which dampened the community's political activation, reducing it to "passive sympathy," and "the carrot," in the form of the Urban Aid Programme.[232] Howe's historical rereading underscores how, in the relation between black communities, black organisers, and the British police, these two strategies—repression and co-optation—constituted the state's two strategies of response to long-standing black struggle, though they ultimately

[229] BLF, 'Brixton - the Underlying Causes', *Grassroots*, July 1981, 14, BCA (LIBFRONT).
[230] RTC, 'Carnival Belongs to Us', *Race Today* 8, no. 9 (1976): 170.
[231] Ibid.
[232] Darcus Howe, 'Bobby to Babylon: Blacks and the British Police. Part 3: Brixton Before the Uprising', *Race Today* 14, no. 2 (1982): 64. On the active repression of Black Power by the British government both in Britain and in the Caribbeans, see Ben Gowland, 'Britain and the Repression of Black Power in the 1960s and '70s', *Race & Class* 64, no. 2 (2022): 20–37.

expressed the same oppressive power: racist violence and the race relations industry. According to Howe, "the only countervailing power capable of releasing the black community from this exercise of state power was the black working class." While the class as a proper political subject seems to dissipate in the immediacy of uprisings, at the same time, it is that struggle that can provide the class, in its process of organisation, with new lifeblood to be "set in motion."[233]

For the RTC, this applies as much to the white working class as it does to the various black sections of the class, both employed and wageless. If the latter are "in complete revolt," nonetheless, the "white working class calls for a political strike to bring the government down."[234] What happened inside the factory resonated with what occurred outside it, as the race uprisings in Bristol, Brixton, Moss Side, Toxteth, and Southall infused renewed energy into the struggles of the black proletariat.[235] The strike and the rebellion thus represented "the beginnings of a mass movement in Britain," which political militants had the responsibility to assist, strengthen, and develop.[236]

[233] Darcus Howe, 'From Bobby to Babylon. Blacks and the British Police. Part 2', *Race Today* 12, no. 2 (1980): 35.
[234] RTC, 'Building the Mass Movement', *Race Today* 14, no. 4 (1982): 116–17.
[235] RTC, 'The State of Play at Fords', *Race Today* 14, no. 3 (1982): 93–97.
[236] RTC, 'Building the Mass Movement', 116–17.

4 Conclusion: Thatcherism and disarticulation

When set against the trajectory reconstructed in the preceding chapters, the claim that the 1980–1 riots "marked the beginning of a new era of race relations in Britain"[1] may appear misleading. On the one hand, since her earliest interventions on migration, Thatcher had already decisively broken with the post-war consensus surrounding race relations, recasting race as a central site of institutional conflict and public concern, and transforming it into an integral element of Thatcherism as a hegemonic project. On the other hand, the politics of race relations—as subjected to critique by the authors discussed—was itself characterised by a different set of policies: the gradual tightening of immigration, targeted welfare interventions in the inner cities aimed at promoting and incorporating black communities, and the intensification of police surveillance and coercion. In this light, Thatcher's first initiatives on the matter, such as the proposal of repatriation and the redefinition of citizenship, did not represent a radical rupture but rather an intensification of existing tendencies—indeed, the British Nationality Act expanded upon the Green Paper produced by the previous Labour government.[2] The true rightward turn of Thatcherism lay instead in its ideological and material emphasis on law and order, coordinated with a monetarist economic strategy that anticipated severe social cuts.

However, in a specific sense, the riots did inaugurate a new phase in race relations. Although they were triggered by yet another instance of police arbitrariness and violence against working-class black communities, they occurred against the backdrop of ordinary racism, whether encountered in daily interactions with state authorities or capital's sway. In other words, the riots revealed, in a directly political form, the articulation of race and class and highlighted the systemic nature of racism that black radical theorists and organisations had long elaborated. They compelled both the British government and wider society to face this lived reality of exploitation and oppression. The novelty of the government response, therefore, was not simply that it could no longer rely solely on

[1] Keith, *Race, Riots and Policing*, 52.
[2] Layton-Henry, 'Race and the Thatcher Government', 83–87.

coercion, but that it had to consider the Scarman Report or urban spending. Instead, it lay in the need to confront this theoretical-political articulation itself. It is within this confrontation that the Thatcherite project of disarticulation can be seen: as a new form of race relations, no longer characterised by the antagonistic presence of radical black politics; no longer situated within a society experiencing economic growth or recession, but within a context where deindustrialisation was a deliberate political strategy amid a broader reconfiguration of capitalist valorisation; and grounded in a different class composition, and thus in a diverse field of political subjectivation and organisational options.

This concluding chapter analyses the forms and implications of that disarticulation. As Hall contended, disarticulation is never an entirely negative process but a necessary moment in the work of re-articulation. He develops this notion through the Gramscian irruption (and interruption) in his reading of Althusser. As shown, through Gramsci's perspective and concepts—first of all, hegemony—Hall brought Althusserian analysis back to the level of class struggle. According to Hall, not only does the very concept of hegemony imply "the struggle to contest and dis-organise and existing political formation,"[3] but also Gramsci's understanding of ideological struggles concerns

> a process of differentiation and change in the relative weight that the elements of the old ideologies used to possess. What was previously secondary and subordinate, or even incidental, is now taken to be primary—becomes the nucleus of a new ideological and theoretical complex. The old collective will dissolves into its contradictory elements since the subordinate ones develop socially, etc.[4]

At both ideological and organisational levels, Hall identifies in Gramsci a principle of political evolution—that is, of transformation of the existing order—which is based precisely on the de-structuring of what already exists in order to reorganise it into a new formation. If articulation is the structured organisation of differences into a unified combination that redefines the meaning of its constituent elements, disarticulation begins from those same specific differences to contest the overall combination and its articulatory principle, before advancing an alternative one. To achieve this, it does not necessarily require the *replacement* of all the elements within the combination, but rather

[3] Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (Verso, 1988), 7.
[4] Gramsci, *Selections PN*, 195 (Q8 §195).

their *displacement*—repositioning them within a new "competing and conflictual political force."[5]

The act of disarticulating the complex and provisional unity secured by a previous articulation therefore creates not only new connections that re-signify individual elements but also new spaces that can be occupied once the prevailing articulation has been unhinged. Thatcherism emerges thus as the proper political project capable of unhinging,[6]—creating precisely the spaces it would then occupy within the social formation, while "polarizing it to the right."[7] In his analysis of the emergence of Thatcherism, Hall stressed first the internal struggle within the Conservative Party, where it displaced the old Tory approach to consensual post-war politics, and subsequently across the social formation, where it sought to affirm a conception of confrontational politics measured against the very political logic practised and, in fact, imposed by radical social movements. These movements had already contributed to steer the social and political crisis out of which Thatcherism organised its new social bloc.

While these demands were radicalising the meaning of democracy—not as a mere decisional mechanism but as the expansive movement of struggle and liberation against oppression and exploitation, carried forward by different political subjects—Thatcherism represented the political project aiming to enact a "regressive modernisation" of British society, imposing its counter-movement. It thus reaffirmed a conservative social order, with its traditional hierarchies and structures of oppression along patriarchal, racial, and class lines, albeit within an innovative project of economic restructuring which pointed towards neoliberal futures. The hegemonic dimension of this regressive modernisation lay in its ability to actively involve social subjects external to the social bloc actually engaged in and benefitting from this reorganisation. Through its authoritarian populism, Thatcherism mobilised them around a new ideological unity—an operation that necessarily entailed a specific practice of political disarticulation.[8]

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[5] Stuart Hall, 'Thatcherism — Rolling Back the Welfare State', *Thesis Eleven* 7, no. 1 (1983): 15.
[6] Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal*, 11.
[7] Hall, 'The Great Moving Right Show', 44.
[8] Stuart Hall and Martin Jaques, *The Politics of Thatcherism* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1983); for 'regressive modernisation,' see Stuart Hall, 'Gramsci and Us', in *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (1987; Verso, 1988); for authoritarian populism, see Hall, 'Popular-Democratic vs Authoritarian Populism'; Stuart Hall, 'Authoritarian Populism: A Reply to Jessop et Al.', in *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (1985; Verso, 1988).

By positioning itself simultaneously as a challenge to the mode of governance of post-colonial capitalist society and as a counter-movement to the politics of those new social subjects that had emerged from that conjuncture, Thatcherism defined itself both as the swing to the right that decisively opened a new conjuncture and as the political force responsible for that shift—one that, as Hall observes, "was not interested in another political view, it was interested in contestation."[9] In this sense, Hall identifies a close relationship between Thatcherism and crisis. The latter does not signify a temporary malfunction of society to be resolved in order to return to a previously ordered state. Rather, crisis represents the condition of possibility for a radical and comprehensive reorganisation. While Thatcherism presented itself as the solution to crisis, it was in fact that which systematically produced crisis, since it thrived within it. This permanent characteristic reflects the fact that Thatcherism never constituted a fully realised hegemony but rather a hegemonic project—one constantly engaged in disarticulating what other competing forces sought to articulate in their favour. The election of Thatcher, therefore, did not resolve once and for all the problem of hegemony, nor the continuous process of ideological and political (dis)articulation.[10]

As the struggle for hegemony involves a struggle over "the conceptions which organize the mass of the people," the disarticulation of collective meanings (ideologies) and political and social formations (organisations) also involves the interpellation of individual "social subjects [who] can be 'won' to a new conception of themselves and society."[11] This is particularly evident with reference to racism. In noting how Thatcherism brought the racist positions of the National Front into Parliament, Hall stressed the fact that both sides of the hard right (the one playing institutional racism and the other enacting street racism) attempted "to disarticulate some of the same contradictions," and significantly the articulation of race and class:

> [Thatcherism's] appeal to "ordinary, hard-pressed" people against the conspiracies of the liberal state occupies some of the same space. The point can be usefully encapsulated in the report of the anti-fascist slogan (in the business of building

[9] Hall, 'Thatcherism — Rolling Back the Welfare State', 17.
[10] Hall, 'Gramsci and Us', 164–65. On the ability of the neoliberal programme to internalise the crisis, not least in order to respond to democratic pressures emerging from a society that it is unable to completely abolish, see Maurizio Ricciardi, *La politica dello stato globale. Democrazia, migrazioni e neoliberalismo nella società-mondo* (Meltemi, 2025).
[11] Hall, 'A Reply to Jessop et Al.', 10.

> alliances), "Against the bosses, For the blacks," altered by a simple National Front amendment to "Against the bosses, Against the blacks."[12]

If the radical critique of the race relations paradigm had produced a structural conception of racism—as a constitutive force shaping both British and global society—Thatcherism's project of disarticulation sought precisely to neutralise that understanding. It responded to the political definition of race and to its articulation with class by culturalising race into ethnicity, thereby incorporating it into the broader project of social individualisation. In doing so, it eventually delegitimised the very possibility of organised radical politics—particularly one grounded in the transnational, anti-racist and anti-capitalist solidarities articulated through political blackness—and replaced it with an ethnically fragmented competition conducted within the boundaries of institutional political channels.

4.1 Disarticulating institutional racism

The disarticulation of racism has taken place through its redefinition in individualising terms, as racial prejudice and interpersonal discrimination. A crucial turning point in this reformulation is represented by the public inquiry to investigate the causes, events and role of the police in the three-day disturbances of Brixton. Entrusted to Lord Scarman, the inquiry—conducted through public hearings during the summer of 1981, while further racial violence erupted in Southall (London), Moss Side (Manchester) and Toxteth (Liverpool), and published in November of the same year—specifically emphasised racial disadvantage and urban decay, recommending policies intended to address those issues. The report identified inadequate housing, unemployment, and the particular marginalisation of ethnic minorities concentrated in inner-city areas such as Brixton as the "social *conditions* which create a predisposition towards violent protest" that contributed, though not directly caused, the unrest. Marginalisation, seen as the result of difficulties in adapting to the British way of life, and thus of poor educational and working success, was said to produce "the sense they [young blacks] have of a concealed

[12] Hall, 'Popular-Democratic vs Authoritarian Populism', 146.

discrimination against them,"[13] which they eventually perceived as embodied in their relation with the police.

Although that relationship had long been deteriorating, Scarman attributed this partly to the police themselves—towards whom he did not withhold criticism—yet he still framed such tensions as long-term contributory factors rather than the immediate trigger of the riots. It is precisely with reference to this aspect of police involvement and responsibility in the riots that Scarman confronted the question of an institutional definition of racism, one that would regard the police as "the oppressive arm of a racist state." Rejecting this interpretation outright, the report instead sought to acknowledge, while simultaneously downplaying, the accusations of racism, harassment, overreaction to disorders, and failures of community sensitivity voiced during the hearings. In his account, an 'institutional' definition of racism functioned as "the myth which led young people into these disorders." The point was not to deny the existence of racism altogether, but to confine it to "instances of harassment and racial prejudice among junior officers," excluding both senior officers and the general direction and policies of the Metropolitan Police. If such attitudes were nonetheless among the factors contributing to the unrest, they were, in Scarman's view, on a par with the responsibility of "community leaders … for the atmosphere of distrust and mutual suspicion," due to their role in devising and propagandising a specific understanding of racism and in fostering hostility towards the police.[14] In response, he recommended a governmental intervention on urban deprivation, mechanisms of positive discrimination, and some police reforms—emphasising a more consultative relation with communities, better training, and strategies to enhance diverse recruitment.

Both the inquiry and the report were criticised and rejected by black radical organisations, for whom "the idea that somehow we must find out what happened in Brixton and the underlying causes, is an insult to peoples intelligence."[15] From their perspective, a structural understanding of racism—embedded in the operations of state and capital—was sufficient to explain both the causes of the riots and their political

[13] Leslie G. Scarman, *The Scarman Report: The Brixton Disorders 10-12 April 1981* (1981; Penguin, 1986), 35–36.
[14] Ibid., 105–6, 118–19.
[15] BUFP, 'Scarman - Investigate the Police', *Black Voice* 12, no. 2 (1981): 3, UCL (ALTER PRESS/Box 32).

character of uprisings, as "a legitimate opposition to racist policing and *not* mere 'criminal acts'."[16] The establishment of the autonomous Brixton Defence Campaign to defend those arrested and to boycott Scarman's inquiry thus represented these organisations' attempt to continue the work of community mobilisation opened by the uprisings.[17] Yet the urgency of legal defence and material assistance, as well as the insistence on the immediate political nature of the black rioter, risked overlooking what Stuart Hall described as "the politics of the document" Lord Scarman had written, which went beyond the mere repression and concealment of the underlying causes of riots.[18] In fact, the report aspired to acknowledge those causes while promoting specific solutions articulated within a new discourse that moved on the same terrain as Thatcher's appeal to law and order, but did not fully coincide with it.

Hall noted that Scarman "perfectly understands the roots of the 'disorders' in the deprivation and destitution in which blacks live and the impact of recession," and how these roots were activated by "contingent triggers." What Scarman refused to acknowledge, however, was any idea of "structural processes at work which constitute the conditions and circumstances in which, sooner or later, the trigger will occur."[19] Reading Scarman, Hall proposed a distinction between long-term and structural phenomena and forces. Recognising, as Scarman did, that clashes with the police were the cumulative result of everyday harassment over the years was not the same as, and in fact served to discredit, understanding that very repetition as a structural consequence of the way society itself worked—that is, as the outcome of social forces inscribed in specific laws of the state, its institutions, and the its relations with individuals and social groups.

> That chain of causality is too long for him, and its starting point too structural. Hence the idea that oppressive policing is not a set of fortuitous events but a process, a structural condition, is beyond his grasp. The concept of 'institutional racism' is not merely repugnant to his sympathies. It is unthinkable within his discourse.[20]

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[16] BWG, 'Brixton Defence Camapaign', in *Speak Out! A Brixton Black Women's Group Reader*, by BWG, ed. Milo Miller (first published in *Speak Out!* 4: 11, 1982; repr., Verso, 2023), 241.
[17] Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe recall the active role of black women in organising this Campaign, against the neutralising role of the institutional inquiry (*The Heart of the Race*, 177–79). On the Brixton Defence Campaign, see Simon Peplow, '"A Deadly Weapon Aimed at Our Hearts": The Scope and Composition of Lord Scarman's 1981 Public Inquiry', *Critical Military Studies* 10, no. 3 (2024): 321–37.
[18] Stuart Hall, 'The Lessons of Lord Scarman', *Critical Social Policy* 2, no. 5 (1982): 66.
[19] Ibid., 68.
[20] Ibid.

For Hall, the significance of Scarman's operation lay not only in its ability to break through the authoritarian consensus surrounding Thatcher's law and order agenda—a breaches Hall observed, in fact opened "by the very nameless and spontaneous ones into whom [Scarman] was inquiring"—but also in its capacity to occupy the critical space that the riots themselves had created. The convergence of long-term phenomena and trigger events, the joint presence of black and white working-class youth, and their shared resistance to police violence all revealed the presence of structural forces shaping the reproduction of daily life. Police repression alone could no longer contain these representations and demands. Yet the rearticulation of both within the discursive parameters of the British democratic system aimed to neutralise their systemic outlook. Scarman's narrative thus spoke in the place of the subjects of the uprisings, translating the demands of the oppressed creature against an entire social system into the sigh of a general reform, prefiguring the possibility for a "policing with a human face; social-democratic policing." To do so, Scarman had to both acknowledge and ignore the "history of the relations in which policing is located."[21]

Indeed, "the lesson of the black experience in Britain," documented time and again, had shown that police violence, harassment and racism have become "a way of life in the cities" and that this way of life had been integral to Thatcher's monetarism "not as an economic doctrine, but as a political economy, a regime of social discipline."[22] Even in Brixton, the riots had not been confined to the West Indian community, though it was the local majority. Their spread to other inner cities made evident that "though the repudiation of an oppressive and racist white *society* by blacks is widespread, anti-white *feeling*"[23] does not follow automatically, as the effects of Thatcher political economy are to hit indistinctively:

> growing unemployment, deindustrialisation, hopelessness, frustration and the sense of a whole community being silently consigned to the scrapheap, have combined to generalise social disaffection through some white and black sections of the

[21] Ibid., 67–68, 69.
[22] Stuart Hall, 'Summer in the City', in *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*, ed. Paul Gilroy and Ruth Wilson Gilmore (*New Socialist*, (September/October): 4-7, 1981; repr., Duke University Press, 2021), 72–73.
[23] Ibid., 74–75.

> community and fuse resistance against the brunt of the crisis being hoisted onto the shoulders of working people of whatever colour.[24]

It was this particular political economy—a reorganisation of exploitation and oppression under the sway of capital—that lay at the root of the riots, while racist policing served as their immediate catalyst. Yet that reorganisation did not operate indifferently, for "racism arises from every single political development which has taken place in Britain since the new right emerged." Thatcherism thus laid the groundwork for the further impoverishment, exclusion, and policing of black youth, reconstituting around racism "the social core" of its social and political bloc.[25] Nonetheless, commenting on the new race riots in 1985, Hall remarked that "it is now considered slightly *de trop*, slightly outdated, to refer to the question of racism at all."[26] Regardless of black experience or political definition, racism had by then been reduced to "a problem of altering the personal and interpersonal attitudes of one group to another."[27] This reduction, which had triumphed in the aftermath of the racial disturbances, returned the discourse to the terrain established by race relations, though now reframed in light of Thatcher's intensified policing. In the Scarman Report itself, "there are no doubt [about] instances of prejudice and harassment. … However, the instances are individual lapses, particular misjudgements, bad apples. There is no institutional process at work here. Discrimination, but no racism."[28]

It was on this interpretation—reclaiming the notion of racial prejudice—that Scarman's recommendations focused on tackling racial disadvantage and discrimination, not by addressing racism as a structure of power generating those inequalities, but by treating them as unreflective subjective attitudes. As Sivanandan observed, organising the report around discrimination and disadvantage conceived in attitudinal terms had several consequences. If racial disadvantages could not be attributed to a racist structure, they had to be sought within the relations between black communities and white society. Although the police—whose mediating role Scarman acknowledged as "broken"—were

[24] Ibid., 75.
[25] Stuart Hall, 'Cold Comfort Farm', in *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (1985; Verso, 1988), 79, 76.
[26] Stuart Hall, 'Urban Unrest in Britain', in *The Roots of Urban Unrest*, ed. John Benyon and John Solomos (Elsevier Science & Technology, 1987), 47.
[27] Ibid., 48.
[28] Hall, 'The Lessons of Lord Scarman', 69.

a constant presence in mediating these relations, the differing outcomes among ethnic groups, he argued, suggested that internal conditions within those communities also required scrutiny: conditions in which, as Sivanandan caustically remarked, "racial disadvantage begins to smell of inherent disability."[29]

The Scarman Report thus advanced and rested on stereotypes about the West Indian family—as seen, long contested by black British feminists—such as negligent mothers, rebellious youth, and unwillingness to work, so that Sivanandan noted a similarity with the Moynihan Report on *The Negro Family* in the US.[30] Unlike the latter, the former was not a sociological study of a segment of the population but a proper inquiry into the causes of the Brixton riots, interested in "acquit[ting] the state of institutional racism." It was concerned thus with the participation of other minorities in riots and clashes with the police, which gave the opportunity for ethnic judgements on different black communities. By arguing that Asians faced not familial degradation or youthful rebellion, but linguistic and cultural barriers, Sivanandan stressed how the Report eventually pointed to the differing conditions requiring differentiated measures to meet "West Indian and Asian ethnic need."[31] Even in this ethnicisation of racism, what was ultimately at stake was its redefinition along private, quasi-biological and definitely not institutional lines:

> Underlying the whole of Scarman's report is a sociopsychological view of racism … Institutional racism, for Scarman, is not a reality of black life but a matter of subjective feelings, perceptions, attitudes and beliefs. … Racism, for Scarman, was in the mind—in attitudes, prejudices, irrational beliefs—and these were to be found on both sides of the divide, black and white. Institutional racism was a matter of black perception, white racism was a matter of prejudice.[32]

The confinement of racism to the realm of perception discredited structural racism as either a myth or a black prejudice against white society. At most, the problem was reducible to individual bias among certain whites, to be corrected through personal reform. By contrast, Sivanandan's critique sought to reaffirm that "racism is about power not about prejudice."[33] By addressing individual behaviour within certain state

[29] A. Sivanandan, 'RAT and the Degradation of Black Struggle', in *Communities of Resistance: Writings on Black Struggles for Socialism* (Race & Class 26, 4: 1-33, 1985; repr., Verso Books, 2019), 92.
[30] Daniel P. Moynihan, *The Negro Family: A Case for National Action* (Department of Labor, 1965). For a black feminist critique of the Report, see bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (1981; Routledge, 2015), 142–46, 241–44.
[31] Sivanandan, 'RAT', 93–94.
[32] Ibid., 95.
[33] Sivanandan, 'Challenging Racism', 65.

apparatuses, the policies suggested by the report—such as Racial Awareness Training for police officers—served only to preserve that institutionalised structure of social power. Insofar as they refused to recognise it as a structure to be demolished, and treated it instead as a prejudice to be challenged,[34] those policies maintained and adapted it to the new imperatives and rationalities of an increasingly global capitalism, reconfigured under Thatcher.

> The nature and function of racism was beginning to change. The recession and the movement of capital to the labour reserves of the Third World … had stopped the importation of labour. … Hence the rationale of racism was no longer exploitation but repatriation, not oppression but repression—forged on the ideological level through the media (directly) and the schools (indirectly and long-term) and effected on the political level through the forces of law and order: the police and the courts principally.[35]

This transformation of institutional racism had to be understood within the reconfiguration of capital relations, which domestically entailed the dissolution of society into its elementary components: individual men and women (and families, but also ethnic communities) now set in competition with one another. The individualisation of both the cause of racism and its solution thus aligned perfectly with Thatcher's emphasis on the individual, allowing even anti-racism itself to be requalified through the market, via competition for government funding among communities and the valorisation of successful blacks.[36] The reorganisation of institutional racism, therefore, once again functioned as a means of governing society as a whole through policies addressing a

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[34] This was the provocative accusation made by CLR James in his opening speech at the Ethnic Minorities Unit Consultation Assembly, organised by the Greater London Council on 12 March 1983 under the banner 'Challenging Racism.' Among the attendees were Ken Livingstone (leader of the GLC), Paul Boateng (vice-chair of the GLC's ethnic minorities committee) and a host of black radicals who were critical of the overall approach of the discussion, including Cecil Gutzmore, Sivanandan and Farrukh Dhondy, as well as James himself. According to Race Today, the Trinidadian historian began by stating that his aim was not merely to challenge racism, but to demolish it. He reiterated the articulation of race and class in the contemporary forms of racism in Britain, and the need for an anti-racist struggle capable of challenging the political power of the state and the social power of capital. However, as soon as James stepped down from the stage, the debate shifted towards integration and the professional success of black people pursued by "meritocrats using the tools of meritocracy … to some this is what anti-racism means" (Farrukh Dhondy, 'GLC's Challenge to Racism', *Race Today* 15, no. 1 [1983]: 21–22). The text from which Sivanandan's last quotation is extracted is the revised version of his speech at the assembly.

[35] Sivanandan, 'Challenging Racism', 69–70.

[36] A telling example is the Conservatives' 1983 election poster, in which a young black man dressed in a suit is said to be recognized as "British" by the Tories, while the Labour Party continues to see him only as "Black." Paul Gilroy commented that "the slightly too large suit worn by the young man, with its unfashionable cut and connotations of a job interview ... conveys what is being asked of the black readers as the price of admission of the colour-blind form of citizenship promised by the text" (*There Ain't*, 57–59).

particular segment, its black component. In this case, the goal was not to regulate the movement of black migrants but to "improv[e] the lot of 'black' individuals" at the expense of "whole black communities." Through this individualisation of racism, the achievements of black struggle—rooted in a specific political definition of lived conditions, oppression, exploitation, and resistance—were discredited, along with the legitimacy of collective struggle itself as a class and as a race. In this conjuncture, there emerged "the nascent 'black' petit-bourgeoisie," while what was displaced was precisely the meaning and subject that black as "a political colour" had sought to name, represent and organise.[37]

In other words, whereas the definition of racism as a structure and its institutionalisation through the laws and practices of the state had been a fundamental component of radical black politics over the previous two decades, its coincidence to *racialism*—"prejudiced attitudes," or "power relationships between individuals (however derived)" rather than between classes hierarchically located within a social formation—signalled "the decline of black struggle."[38] This was the symptom of a defeat, though not a final one, for this new social and ideological reorganisation was itself fraught with contradictions. The first of these lay in its psychologising and culturalist explanation, which roots racism into white culture and thereby condemns white people to "never be anything more than 'anti-racist racists'."

> They are racist racists to begin with, born as they are to white privilege and power; but if they do nothing about it, 'collude' (consciously or unconsciously) in the institutional and cultural practices that perpetuate racism, then they are beyond redemption and remain racist racists. If, on the other hand, they 'take up arms' … against such privileges … at least, they could become 'anti-racist racists.' Racists, however, they remain in perpetuity.[39]

The circularity of this argument, as Sivanandan sharply noted, can be broken only by returning to a broader definition of racism that takes into account the material conditions that breed racism—conditions that must be confronted politically, not merely corrected as the unconscious predisposition of every white person, but abolished as a structure of power. The first definition, confined to attitudes, may give rise at best to a

[37] Sivanandan, 'RAT', 96–97.
[38] Ibid., 114–16.
[39] Ibid., 116–17.

form of anti-racism for the middle class and for atomised individuals within Thatcher's society, but it remains incapable of addressing both "the naked racism of the working class, … and the exploitative racism of the ruling class." The participation of black individuals in this redefinition of racism, ultimately, "has been able to misappropriate black politics and black history, and degrade black struggle."[40] Black struggle against racism had in fact been the movement that articulated working-class, community, anti-imperialist, anti-fascist, and feminist struggles into a shared and complex politics of race and class. The redefinition of racism, by contrast, was instrumental to their disarticulation, undermining not only the comprehensive understanding of the functioning of a social formation through hierarchies and power lines but also the legitimacy of political struggles constructed along, across, and against those lines. In doing so, it displaced a political understanding of race strictly articulated to the concept of class, eventually transforming the politics of race into a series of race policies, thus altering its meaning as a political concept.

4.2 Disarticulating political blackness

The impact of the riots on Thatcherite politics proved decisive in several respects. Among the most significant was the transformation of race: not merely as an ideological device around which to consolidate a social bloc, but as an actual domain of policies. In fact, Scarman's recommendations to address racial discrimination and disadvantage could not be entirely ignored. A series of projects, not all of them overtly 'racial,' together with a range of state interventions at both governmental and local council levels, contributed to redefining race as an administrative issue and to its consequent depoliticisation, that is, its disarticulation from class. The earlier politicisation of race had occurred through its redefinition not as a biological attribute but as the outcome of the articulation between racism and exploitation: a subordinated social position from which it was nonetheless possible to organise both the insubordination of a partial subject united by the shared experience of racial oppression, and its political communication with a broader, more differentiated social subject engaged in the struggle against capitalist exploitation. It was precisely this insubordination that the institutions of the emerging neoliberal society—

[40] Ibid., 118.

prefigured in Thatcherism—sought to discipline, through the reassertion of the imperatives of capital.

The introduction of the Youth Training Scheme, intended to provide new skills to the growing number of unemployed, must therefore be read both in its general dimension—as a measure directed at the working class as a whole—and in its specific objectives, aimed particularly at young black people. For the BUFP, this was not a genuine attempt to address the problem of employment, since these short-term job programmes provided "inappropriate skills and d[id] not solve the problem of what real employment they will undertake when training is over." Their real purpose was to discipline into labour a specific section of the class—those whom the Scarman Report itself had reiterated to be "lazy, workshy and enjoy being on the dole." The taxation of unemployment benefit—and thus the general impoverishment of welfare provision, despite the absolute rise in public expenditure in the context of persistent and growing unemployment until at least the mid-1980s—performed the same disciplinary function,[41] as did Thatcher's reform of citizenship. The new law, which introduced three categories of citizenship, established a distinction between British citizenship—defined through the notion of patriality (those able to claim a parent or grandparent born or registered in the UK)—the citizenship of the British Dependent Territories (within existing dependencies or associated states), and British Overseas citizenship (for those not qualifying for either of the first two and designed to lapse, as it was not to be transmitted).[42]

In BUFP's analysis, the effect of this legislation was to formalise the experience of second-class citizenship, an experience already familiar to black people since their arrival in the UK.[43] Whereas earlier British governments had focused primarily on regulating immigration, the new concern became determining who did and did not possess the right to social provision, housing, and education—thus establishing a new "systematic framework for the partial exclusion and denial of Black people" to supplement the already

[41] BUFP, 'Social Services. Who Do They Serve?', *Black Voice* 16, no. 1 (1985): 3. On Thatcher's welfare policies, which combined a fierce anti-welfarist discourse with its reconfiguration in in-work benefit to stimulate the unemployed to accept low-paid jobs, see Peter Sloman, 'Welfare in a Neoliberal Age: The Politics of Redistributive Market Liberalism', in *The Neoliberal Age?: Britain Since the 1970s*, ed. Aled Davies et al. (UCL Press, 2022).
[42] Layton-Henry, 'Race and the Thatcher Government', 83–84.
[43] BUFP, 'Scarman - Investigate the Police', 3. Also see BUFP, 'Whitelaw's Anti-Black Law', *Black Voice* 12, no. 2 (1981): 4, UCL (ALTER PRESS/Box 32).

existing and well-established "racist legislation which denies Black people their entitlements." Welfare itself was reconfigured as one of the mechanisms through which to discipline the class as a whole and reproduce its dependence on wages. Yet, when combined with the new citizenship regime, it revealed its specific "racist form," that is, "this legalized state discrimination and the resulting surveillance of the Black community."[44]

In this process of disarticulation, race and class became instruments of neoliberal social fragmentation. From being recognised as dimensions of a shared political struggle rooted in structural antagonism, class was reimagined as a social condition to be transcended within a new market society that promised to reward everyone according to merit, provided they were morally upright, industrious, and entrepreneurial.[45] In this configuration, race too ceased to refer to any objective social relation to be contested, becoming instead one among a number of individual or group characteristics through which subjects might participate in market competition. Scarman's call for positive action and his insistence on the state's responsibility to foster a black middle class thus became the testing ground for this disarticulation of race and class, while the urban policies for the inner cities translated these recommendations into Thatcherite practice.[46]

The Urban Aids programmes mobilised private as well as public capital and were intended to stimulate entrepreneurialism. As radical organisations soon observed, however, their effect was not to address the needs of black communities but to fragment them along class lines. Although Thatcher had expressed ideological support for black businesses since her election,[47] it was only after the riots that the government extended

[44] BUFP, 'The New Nationality Act Effects You', *Black Voice* 14, no. 1 (1983): 6, UCL (ALTER PRESS/Box 32). Such combination is even more telling in light of Thatcher's polemic with post-war ideas of social citizenship, see Lenon Campos Maschette, 'Revisiting the Concept of Citizenship in Margaret Thatcher's Government: The Individual, the State, and Civil Society', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 28, no. 2 (2023): 180–98.

[45] On Thatcher's challenge to class discourse and analysis, see Jon Lawrence and Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, 'Margaret Thatcher and the Decline of Class Politics', in *Making Thatcher's Britain*, ed. Ben Jackson and Robert Saunders (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[46] Scarman, *Scarman Report*, xvi. For a discussion of Scarman's remarks on these issues, see John Rex, 'Disadvantage and Discrimination in Cities', in *Scarman and After: Essays Reflecting on Lord Scarman's Report, the Riots, and Their Aftermath*, ed. John Benyon (Elsevier Science & Technology, 1984); Usha Prashar, 'The Need for Positive Action', in *Scarman and After: Essays Reflecting on Lord Scarman's Report, the Riots, and Their Aftermath*, ed. John Benyon (Elsevier Science & Technology, 1984).

[47] BUFP, 'Black Business "Boom or Bust". Our Own Mini Survey', *Black Voice* 11, no. 2 (1980): 1–2, UCL (ALTER PRESS/Box 32).

its interventions in the inner cities through specific funding and increased the participation of black people in such projects.[48] The organisation of a Black Business Conference in Brixton was, according to the BUFP, serving two purposes: as a publicity exercise enabling the government to claim it was providing aid to sections of the black community, and as a means of consolidating an emerging class of small black entrepreneurs.[49]

The growing specialisation of this segment of the community—the creation of interest groups and representative structures for a black middle class—represented, for radical observers, a significant departure from the previous fifteen years of black radicalism. This was not because all members of the black community had been radicals or working class, but because it had been the politicisation of the community through the politicisation of race that ensured that the particular struggles of one section did not collapse into particularism but retained a broader relevance for the whole:

> In the early 70s the middle class although it pursued its own interests sought to do so in the context of the whole movement and made demand for the community as a whole. It demanded the end of Police harassment and better education for the community. So their demands transcended the narrow interests of the middle class. … This is no longer the case.[50]

Historically, the existence of a black middle class had always been a minor yet constant tendency within the black movement, a presence against which radical organisations could define themselves. As seen in the positions of the BLF, the black middle class could even play a significant role in the survival of black people in the metropoles, insofar as it was willing to make its economic resources and institutional networks available to the community, accepting to be guided by it politically.[51] The very existence of this middle class thus depended, in this view, on the continued presence of the black movement itself. In response to the radicalisation of that movement, however, BUFP identified both the State's explicit interest "to counteract black unity" through the race relations industry and the readiness of an aspiring black middle class "to rise within capitalism." Yet their upward mobility was limited: at most they could become a petit

[48] Layton-Henry, 'Race and the Thatcher Government', 89–90; Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Rob Waters, '"The Privatization of the Struggle": Anti-Racism in the Age of Enterprise', in *The Neoliberal Age?: Britain Since the 1970s*, ed. Aled Davies et al. (UCL Press, 2022), 206–8.
[49] BUFP, 'Black Business Conference in Brixton', *Black Voice* 12, no. 3 (1981): 3, GPI (NEW/14/21).
[50] BUFP, 'Middle Class Organizations?', *Black Voice* 13, no. 2 (1982): 4, GPI (NEW/14/22).
[51] BLF, *Revolutionary Black Nationalism*, 5–6.

bourgeoisie, still marked by race. And although they could act as an avant-garde of the community through their limited recognition in the market, BUFP emphasised that their interests increasingly diverged from those of the broader community—even when they appeared to be defending them, for example in education (by supporting private schools) or in housing (as landlords profiting from rents).[52]

From this perspective, government intervention effectively returned the black community—one of the political forms through which race had been articulated in radical theory and practice—to its definition in terms of human geography. In other words, precisely because these measures were directed at the inner cities and their specific inhabitants, they contributed to defining the community more in objective than in subjective terms, revealing that every community, even that politically articulated by black radicalism, is ultimately 'imagined' in its unity—a simplification of multiple differences that, once disarticulated, can be mobilised against each other. Even Sivanandan, one of the most convinced advocates of the community as a political form of race and class, appeared to recognise this when he wrote:

> The rebellions shook the government. The danger now was not the black community as such. There was no *black* community. The promotion of cultural separatism … was keeping Asians and Afro-Caribbeans apart; the development of a youth culture and a women's culture was further decomposing the forces within the community, without, as yet, realigning them in a new black configuration; and the emergence of an Afro-Caribbean managerial class in the race relations industry (and sub-managers in the nationalized self-help groups), together with the flowering of Ugandan Asian entrepreneurship, was breaking up community into classes.[53]

Yet what Sivanandan also introduced here was a second consequence of the fragmentation of the black community: the crystallisation of its meaning into an ethnic and identitarian recognition that rendered it static, fixing it as a space and a culture to be affirmed in its difference. This shift is encapsulated in his critique of ethnicity. "Ethnicity refers, therefore, to the creation of a new reactive culture on the part of British-born Asians and West Indian alike," whose racial experience made them feel "neither

[52] BUFP, 'The Politics of the Emerging Black Peti-Bourgeois', *Black Voice* 14, no. 1 (1983): 4–5, UCL (ALTER PRESS/Box 32). Commenting on this passage, Shafi e Nagdee writes "What was significant was less the fact of the existence of this petit bourgeois layer of Blacks and Asians, and more the fact that they were now able to advance their interests as the antiracist mainstream" (Azfar Shafi and Ilyas Nagdee, *Race to the Bottom: Reclaiming Antiracism* [Pluto Press, 2022], 64).
[53] Sivanandan, 'RAT', 89.

Asian/Afro-Caribbean nor British but afflicted by both."[54] As the previous analysis of the politicisation of race made clear, cultural and historical redefinition had played a central role—though always presenting the risk of foreclosing the political signifier 'race' around pre-given, self-evident meanings. In other words, the politicisation of race as the assertion of a politically relevant difference necessarily operated through its social definition, which was at once economic, political, and cultural. These three dimensions were required in their relative autonomy as well as in their articulation. Articulation, as we have seen, was inherently precarious, since it depended on the conjuncture—that is, on the political struggle underlying the movement of society—and it was itself an active part of that movement, as it was shaping and continually transformed by it at the same time.

Political blackness—the term that, in this theoretical reading of the radical intellectual and organisational elaborations of the 1970s in Britain, describes this specific articulation of race and class—functioned as a provisional solution that made it possible to name both the relative autonomy and the combination of race, class (and gender) across the economic, the political, and the ideological. Yet this combination was always subject to new mediations, according to the evolving forms of each of these dimensions of racism—its relation with capitalist operations, its evolution as institutional racism, and its cultural turn. Insofar as these three dimensions moved both autonomously and in relation to one another, they continually challenged and displaced any fixed definition of political blackness, drawing it towards one pole or another. In the BUFP, this articulation tended to be compressed towards class, while in the BLF, race appeared to take precedence. The shift to ethnicity intervened precisely in the provisionality of the articulation sustained by political blackness—that is, in the conjuncture itself—by amplifying its cultural tendency and thereby disarticulating race from class. In doing so, it did not merely represent a state imposition but rather operated within the very contradictions of political blackness, transforming its contingent and conflictual unity into a new "mosaic" of differences—to borrow Sivanandan's metaphor.

As employed in the Scarman Report and in subsequent policies and recommendations, this definition thus came, for Sivanandan, to "deny the connection between race and class and between racism and imperialism—and reincarcerate the

[54] Ibid., 91.

second generation in the castle of their skin." From an articulated political subject (race), ethnicity multiplied the subjects "to include a variety of national and religious groups—Chinese, Cypriots, Greeks, Turks, Irish, Italians, Jews, Moslems, Sikhs—till the term itself became meaningless," while dividing both their politics and, correspondingly, the distribution of government grants, since race no longer denoted a polemical subject but rather the object of specific policy interventions. Through ethnicity, moreover, these groups could valorise themselves within the governmental and local-council markets of ethnic funding—funds that, "so distanced from the horizontal [mosaic] of class politics, … lacking the race/class perspective which would have allowed them to dismantle the institutional racism of their own structures, institutionalized ethnicity instead."[55]

The emergence of ethnicity must therefore be understood as part of the broader dispute over racism, race, and class: "what ethnicity has done is to mask the problem of racism and weaken the struggle against it." This concept was not the outcome of black working-class struggle, but rather of the efforts of the state and capital to contain the radical potential of the articulatory politics that had emerged from those struggles and that threatened "to politicise the working-class as a whole."[56]

> Ethnicity was a tool to blunt the edge of black struggle, to return 'black' to its constituent parts of Afro-Caribbean, Asian, African, Irish—and also, at the same time, to allow the nascent black bourgeoisies, petit-bourgeoisie really, to move up in the system. Ethnicity delinked black struggles—separating the West Indian from the Asian, the working-class black from the middle-class black. … Black, as a political colour, was finally broken down when government moneys were used to fund community projects, destroying thereby the self-reliance and community cohesion that we had built up in the 1960s.[57]

This proliferation of national and local funds channelled into the communities—and against the self-reliance of black organisations—signalled not merely an attempt "to diffuse the active struggle in our community by incorporating groups into passive projects," dividing community projects and self-help groups from the organisations and politics that had prevented them from lapsing into mere welfarism.[58] More significantly, it indicated that "the sites of struggle … had moved from the (predominantly) economic

[55] Ibid., 92, 94.
[56] Sivanandan, 'Challenging Racism', 63.
[57] Ibid., 67.
[58] BUFP, 'GLC Intervention in the Struggle', *Black Voice* 14, no. 2 (1983): 4, UCL (ALTER PRESS/Box 32).

to the ideological and political." Ideologically, ethnicity succeeded in disarticulating race from class on the one hand, and from the specific sense of political blackness on the other; politically, it enabled "the development of a parallel power structure for black people, separate development, bantustans."[59] Ethnicity redefined the social dynamics through which race had been politicised, replacing a relation grounded in struggle and social antagonism with one organised around cultural identity and administrative recognition.

In this sense, it was no longer sufficient simply to claim that "an Independent Organisation is essential,"[60] as ethnicity was entering and affecting the very black movement. This is evident in the rediscovery of a more aesthetic and symbolic definition of blackness by BUFP, despite their previous harsh criticism, as reiterated in the out-of-time call to be "proud to be black."[61] Despite establishing itself in opposition to the naturalness of race, ethnicity ended up returning race to nature precisely by disarticulating it from class.[62] Politically and organisationally, this meant thinking of separate rather than autonomous but articulated actions. Ethnicity was thus directly built on tensions within the black movement itself, as the very meaning of 'black' was multifaceted, contested and never entirely resolved, not least because it was the result of an articulation of differences. Even OWAAD, the most successful experiment in political blackness, was ultimately not immune to these contradictions. In addition to the controversy over the definition of black feminism, the very definition of black womanhood is called into question, as issues of sexuality and gender have arisen throughout the years.[63]

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[59] Sivanandan, 'Challenging Racism', 70, 68.
[60] BUFP, 'GLC Intervention in the Struggle', 4.
[61] BUFP, 'Are We Proud to Be Black?', *Black Voice* 15, no. 3 (1984): 1; BUFP, 'Editorial', *Black Voice* 15, no. 4 (1984): 2, UCL (ALTER PRESS/Box 32).
[62] Stuart Hall captures this point very well in his discussion of the category of ethnicity: "I now want to suggest that ethnicity not only functions within the same discursive chain as race but also operates in similar ways, that is to say, as a sliding signifier. Thus, whereas race is grounded in the biological and slides toward the cultural, *ethnos* or ethnicity in the strong sense that I've just described appears to be grounded exclusively in the cultural, in the realm of shared languages, specific customs, traditions, and beliefs, *yet it constantly slides*—especially through commonsense conceptions of kinship—toward a transcultural and even transcendental fix in common blood, inheritance, and ancestry, all of which gives ethnicity an originary foundation in nature that puts it beyond the reach of history" (Stuart Hall, *The Fateful Triangle: Race, Ethnicity, Nation*, ed. Kobena Mercer [Harvard University Press, 2017], 108–9). In these discursive definitions, both ethnicity and race happened to be disputed in an ideological struggle that resulted in "the 'ethnicisation' of 'race'" and "the 'racialisation' of ethnicity" (Stuart Hall, 'The Multicultural Question', in *Essential Essays 2: Identity and Diaspora*, by Stuart Hall, ed. David Morley [2000; Duke University Press, 2019], 112).
[63] BWG, 'On Black Women Organising'.

4.3 Disarticulating organisation

As active organisers of defence campaigns following the uprisings, black women were also among the first to experience the intertwined processes that led to the disarticulation of black radical ideas and practices of organisations elaborated during the Seventies. Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe note that "the fact that we initiated the Brixton Defence Campaign, took on a lot of the leadership and, as a group [BWG], put in most of the work, shows how strong politically Black women had become."[64] Yet, this very involvement also posed an obstacle "to the original commitment to work [as] a Black socialist feminist group," both because of the amount of work it required and the challenge of operating within "a mixed group with men."[65] As previously argued, the organisational problem confronting black militants could not be reduced to the mere form of the organisation itself. It consisted instead of a specific theoretical and political practice of articulation—a practice claiming both to respond to the immediacy of the various instances of racism and to address its structural characteristics as a relation of power. Organisation as articulation thus concerned the specificity of one or more partial subjects who, through the politicisation of their difference, nevertheless contested a social generality. Within this context, the theoretical practice of articulation named and made visible that generality precisely through the valorisation of differences. This tension between specificity and generality—calling directly upon organisation understood as the structured activity of militants in facilitating, consolidating, and reiterating a general political communication—depended, therefore, on the (black) working-class self-activity discussed in relation to the strikes and riots at the turn of the 1980s.

It is against these developments that the disarticulation of black political organisation must be measured—as the outcome of multiple, local and global processes[66] that affected not only organisational practices but also the very mode in which black intellectuals and radical organisations perceived, interpreted, and responded to these

[64] Bryan et al., *The Heart of the Race*, 177.
[65] Suzanne Scafe in 'Afterword', 373.
[66] Rob Waters summarises them in the changes in post-colonial politics (with the success of radical Islam in Iran's Islamic Revolution and the defeat of the Grenada revolution, which marked the end of the Black Power movement's historical and global relevance); the already analised demise of the black community through state fundings and the increased participation of black people in institutional politics, both at local and national levels; ethnic challenges to the 'black' signifier, as expressed in Modood critique of political blackness (Waters, *Thinking Black*, 211–18).

transformations from the point of view of a (dis)articulated politics. The police, legal and state response to the riots, for instance, revealed the structural nature of their causes precisely through their attempt to downplay them by depicting black people in Brixton as allegedly prone to riot "to completely absolve this racist society and its practices from any responsibility for the uprisings."[67] Such a reaction demanded an organisational response operating at that same structural level. At the same time, the everyday manifestations of racism—expressed in ordinary policing and harassment and in the continuity of clashes between the police and black communities even following the 1981 riots[68]—created an urgency that posed decisive organisational problems, ultimately redefining "what our priorities were" and generating "some uncertainty about what we were struggling for." The specificity of black women's experiences eventually appeared as "inconsequential, eclipsed by the larger black struggle." That very form of engagement ended up "reinforc[ing] the drift away from involvement in women's group," precisely insofar as it sacrificed the autonomous organisation of a partial subject in favour of its dissolution within the black community.[69]

Although the accusation of dividing the black struggle was not new and seemed to take black politics back to the previous decade,[70] the post-uprisings black community differed profoundly from its radical 1960s and 1970s antecedents. Above all, it began to intersect with development funds—of which the BWG had been among the first recipients even before the uprisings, for the establishment of the Black Women's Centre. As the most structured component of the black movement in the early 1980s, black women's organisations were incorporated into the GLC's Ethnic Minorities and Women's Committees.[71] As BUFP observed, their organisations thus "became reorganised within the framework of State initiatives … instead of [dealing with] political education,

[67] BUFP, 'Anniversary Risings?', *Black Voice* 13, no. 1 (1982): 10, UCL (ALTER PRESS/Box 32).
[68] BUFP, 'Editorial', *Black Voice* 14, no. 2 (1983): 2, UCL (ALTER PRESS/Box 32).
[69] BWG, 'On Black Women Organising', 265–66, 260.
[70] BLF, 'Which Way Forward for OWAAD', *Grassroots*, November 1982, 3, 7, BCA (LIBFRONT). While the accusation of dividing the black struggle is used in the BLF's text more as a defence of a committed and aware black man, the real focus of the dispute is the black socialist feminism that is promoted and discussed (not without contradiction) by OWAAD, as noted by BWG in their reply, see BWG, 'Letter in Response to Grassroots Editorial (*Grassroots* Oct-Nov 1982)', *Grassroots*, June 1983, 5, BCA (LIBFRONT) now in BWG, *Speak Out! A Brixton Black Women's Group Reader*, ed. Milo Miller (Verso Books, 2023), 251–54.
[71] Bentil, 'The Black Women's Movement', 99–104.

progressive organisation, and commitment to explore radical means to combat Black womens [sic] oppression." Such incorporation not only concealed "the reality of Black womens continuous involvement and participation in all spheres of Black struggles," but also signalled a reorientation of black politics towards the idea that "nothing else can be done."[72]

This sense of the absence of alternatives began to resonate within radical black thought itself, echoing the Thatcherite ambition to remove the future from the horizon of those organising to transform the conditions of their social reproduction. The historical and political production of those conditions—and of the hierarchies sustaining them—was thus obscured. This occurred through the enclosure of democracy within the competitive procedures of funding access and the broader delegitimation of a concept of transformative politics that had been both theoretically and practically affirmed through the social struggles of the 1970s. That concept had enabled the articulation of class and race not as static sociological positions but as political dynamics within a concrete project of transforming the existing order. It is precisely this potentiality that the disarticulation of black political organisation sought to neutralise—and, as seen, the methods deployed echoed those used against black political organisations since the era of Black Power.

Alongside repression and intensified policing—refashioned by Scarman's recommendations on community policing, anti-racist training, and increased diversity through Black police officers—both the Conservative and Labour parties developed strategies of active minority involvement. If Thatcher's explicit racism rendered her electoral initiatives towards minorities practically invisible to black radicals,[73] who focused instead on her entrepreneurial rhetoric promoting a black middle class, the establishment of Black Sections within the Labour Party was widely debated and criticised. The "long history of racist activity" within Labour was almost unanimously invoked to explain why its black members could not assert themselves politically within the party. It seemed unlikely that they could oppose "the Labour party's policy of oppressing Black people both internationally and in Britain, while paying lip service to

[72] BUFP, 'The Rise and Fall of O.W.A.A.D.', *Black Voice* 16, no. 2 (1985): 4.
[73] Matthew Francis, 'Mrs Thatcher's Peacock Blue Sari: Ethnic Minorities, Electoral Politics and the Conservative Party, c. 1974–86', *Contemporary British History* 31, no. 2 (2017): 274–93.

anti-racism and social justice."[74] Thatcher's re-election, riding on post-Falklands patriotism, further exposed the fallacy of placing hopes for Black struggle in Labour reformism.[75] For both BUFP and BLF, the answer remained an independent organisation—the only means through which "Black workers will establish direct control over our struggle."[76]

As shown, the organisational question concerned, on the one hand, the relation between difference and the social movement—how specific sections of the class acted within and upon society, creating moments and spaces of contention with capital— and, on the other, the relation between these partial movements, the movement as a whole, and the organisational forms attempting to intervene differently on it. The call for independent organisation could therefore not be reduced to a rhetorical appeal without accounting for the changing composition of the class and of the black community. From this perspective, the relationship between the black middle class—taking advantage of institutional openings for career advancement—and the black movement is complicated by the fact that "this class emerged as a result of the Black movement," at the very moment when that movement appeared powerful enough to enable other, even contradictory, forms of subjectivation.[77]

Whether the Black Sections were themselves one of the outcomes of Black struggles is thus theoretically significant for the question of organisation: both as an index of transformations within the social movements of black people—without which organisation itself loses meaning—and for the possibilities of political communication and articulation that this institutional solution opens or forecloses. Sivanandan is unequivocal in asserting that, historically and in the present, the Black Sections "belong to the Labour Party" and not to the community struggles of black people. They represent, in fact, the failure of the Labour Party "to support the struggles of black working people, and … to incorporate the history of those struggles into the history and traditions of the

[74] BLF, 'Labours Coloured Brethren', *Grassroots*, September 1984, 3–4, GPI (NEW/9/34).
[75] BUFP, 'Minorities', *Black Voice* 14, no. 2 (1983): 1, 12, UCL (ALTER PRESS/Box 32).
[76] BLF, 'Labours Coloured Brethren', 4.
[77] BUFP, 'Can Labour Be Our Saviour?', *Black Voice* 15, no. 2 (1984): 4.

white working class." In this sense, the Black Sections are a product of Labour's racism: unable to represent black workers effectively, it sought to do so racially and identitarily.[78]

While eventually sharing Sivanandan's conclusion, Stuart Hall and RTC offered a more open assessment, identifying within the Black Sections certain possibilities beyond Labour's well-known limitations.[79] For the RTC, the Black Sections were indeed one of the outcomes of the post-Brixton black movement, which, together with miners and women, had forced a degree of reconsideration within an otherwise paralysed Labour Party confronted with Thatcherism.[80] For Hall, the Black Sections were not a problem in themselves but became one if advanced as the only possible form of Black politics. They nonetheless represented a potentially significant strategy for bringing into the traditional structures of the organised labour movement—still institutionally represented by Labour—specific histories and experiences of exploitation and oppression.[81]

The reference to the miners' strike in the early 1980s is not accidental. As Darcus Howe and Leila Hassan observed, at the first (failed) internal vote on whether to establish the Black Sections, the only union in favour was that of the miners, whose appreciation "stemmed from their experiences with the police in the last months," which resembled "the difficulties faced by blacks."[82] Born out of what might be seen as a 'regressive' current within the Black movement, the struggle inside the Labour Party nevertheless envisaged possible political communications often obstructed by working-class racism—allowing that racism, which fragmented class politics, to be confronted directly through an articulated struggle against the material conditions of its production. This was possible not because of the Party itself, which continued to embody the racist structure it had always represented, but because the miners' strike was in fact paving "the political basis for radical mass struggles in Britain." The Party thus represented one means through which institutionalising a political connection "has aroused so much passion and attracted so much solidarity from black workers and unemployed as the one-year old Miners'

[78] A. Sivanandan in Diane Abbott et al., 'Black Sections: Radical Demands... Or Distraction? A Roundtable Discussion', *Marxism Today*, September 1985, 33.
[79] See the third part of Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal*, 175–268, titled 'Crisis and Renewal of the Left'.
[80] RTC, 'Black Representation in the Labour Party', *Race Today* 16, no. 1 (1984): 3.
[81] Stuart Hall in Abbott et al., 'Black Sections: Roundtable', 32.
[82] Darcus Howe and Leila Hassan, 'Defeat for Black Sections', *Race Today* 16, no. 2 (1984): 11.

Strike." This was so because the miners "learned what the black population have had to learn during 30 years of hard experience with the police and the courts."[83]

Despite John La Rose's expectations (or hopes) in the face of the miners' defeat ("armed truce,"[84] he called it indeed), there was no guarantee of automatic political recomposition. Even if revolution continues its work as the old mole that, between one defeat and another, occasionally surfaces in fleeting class convergences as the ones emphasised by La Rose himself, the possibility of its victory once again invokes the theoretical-organisational labour of a genuine politics of articulation. It is precisely the absence of such a politics that ultimately brings Hall's and Howe's assessments of the Black Sections to coincide with Sivanandan's: if Black Sections become isolated enclaves, disconnected from what occurs outside the party and offering "no other programme than the Labour Party's, … [t]hey grand stand about black people, but it is in the Labour Party their navel strings are buried."[85]

The absence of a specifically black politics—not as an inherited tradition but as a politics addressing "the variety of experiences of exploitation and oppression of black people in society,"[86] and confronting "the rabid racism of inner cities … [and] the horrendous racist attacks mounted on our people in the ghettoes"—ultimately determined their inadequacy. If the problems that black politics must deal with were localised in the inner cities, the Black Sections neither addressed those conditions nor allowed for organisational discourse on them. Instead, they definitively revealed the stratification of the community itself, to the extent that there was no longer a "black *qua* black movement any more" through which to assert demands "in the course of ordinary black working class struggle."[87]

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[83] John La Rose, 'The Miners' Experience of the Police, the Magistrates, the Judges and the Courts', *Race Today* 16, no. 4 (1985): 6. On the significance of the miners' strike for black politics, also see BLF calls for the participation of black people in that struggle, as their common experience of police violence and repression could work as a bridge between them and indeed "to help awaken the British workers politically to the real world around them" (BLF, 'The Black Community & the Miners Fight', *Grassroots*, September 1984, 3, GPI (NEW/9/34)). The miners' union had already been present in pickets at the Grunwick strike (Virdee, *Racism, Class and the Racialized Outsider*, 134). Gilroy noted that both the miners and the blacks discovered they shared the label "enemy within" and this fostered solidarity actions such as "a well attended rally: 'Black People's Solidarity with the Miners'" held in London on 7 December 1984 (Gilroy, *There Ain't*, 34, 41).
[84] La Rose, 'The Miners' Experience', 6.
[85] Darcus Howe, 'Black Sections for the Black Middle Class I Say "Yes"', *Race Today* 16, no. 5 (1985): 11.
[86] Stuart Hall in Abbott et al., 'Black Sections: Roundtable', 32.
[87] A. Sivanandan in ibid., 33.

The organisational problem thus re-emerged in all its complexity and, once again, unresolved, on the eve of the racial uprisings in Handsworth, Brixton, and Broadwater Farm (Tottenham) in 1985. In both Sivanandan's and Hall's readings, these riots were a specific product of Thatcherism, insofar as deindustrialisation, cuts to housing, health, and grant aid, and rising unemployment fostered a "pattern of neglect and decay" met with racism in these areas. Racism, indeed, is what "structures such poverty," leading not just to the clashes and fights with the police but also to looting and arson of shops.[88] The significant difference from 1981, however, was that whereas "the banks and the businesses and the insurance companies fled the place," it was ethnic shops that "stayed on to prop up Thatcher's ghetto economy." The targeting of specific Asian shops and the deaths of two Asians in Handsworth were thus exploited to once again downplay the structural articulation of racism and class divisions, and present the riots not as uprisings against white society but as ethnic disputes. By contrast, Sivanandan emphasised that "at the point of 'riot' they, too, or rather their meagre shops proclaim them as a class—not a race—apart."[89]

The absence of a clear racial justification, however, should not be read as a simple revival of the inter-ethnic articulation once promoted by the political signifier black. For Hall, the 1985 riots were in every sense a victory of Thatcherite racism and proof of the defeat of black politics in the five years separating Bristol from Tottenham. The disarticulation of black politics—most evident in its institutionalised face through the Black Sections—had not spared grassroots politics and theorisations, which, by

[88] A. Sivanandan, 'Britain's Gulags', in *Communities of Resistance: Writings on Black Struggles for Socialism* (New Socialist, 1985; repr., Verso Books, 2019), 133–34. In describing both the progressive deindustrialisation of the inner cities—which compelled black inhabitants to reinvent forms of everyday reproduction independently of whether or not they had access to waged labour—and their over-policing as a mode of state control exercised even over these minimal forms of communal reproduction, Sivanandan synthesises the two conditions underpinning that form of struggle which Joshua Clover has termed the "riot prime": the specific form of riot that emerged alongside the economic crisis and the global capitalist restructuring of the 1970s. In Clover's formulation, both the riot and the strike are forms of struggle over reproduction, yet each corresponds to distinct economic cycles and historical phases, privileging different modalities of recognition and antagonistic aims. While the strike seeks to set the price of labour-power among those who appear in their social role as workers, the riot aims at setting the price or availability of market goods, "featuring participants with no necessary kinship but their dispossession." Like its pre-industrial antecedent, the riot remains a specific struggle within the sphere of circulation. What distinguishes it, however, is that it increasingly positions itself explicitly against the state—and its apparatuses, namely the police—while capital becomes less directly visible, and its participants are disproportionately drawn from racialised minorities (Joshua Clover, *Riot. Strike. Riot: The New Era of Uprisings* [Verso Books, 2019], 16).

[89] Sivanandan, 'Britain's Gulags', 136.

concentrating on community defence, became ensnared between the pursuit of ever-diminishing government programmes (soon to end altogether with the abolition of the GLC) and continuous racist confrontation with the police and white society as characterising feature of their racial oppression. However, Hall argues, "it is no longer possible to fight racism as if it had its own, autonomous social dynamic, located between white people or the police on one side, and blacks on the other." The conflict was not only with state power in its repressive form, even if that was its most visible manifestation, for the economic dimension appeared to have vanished—or to be itself present precisely as absence, either of employment opportunities, productive locations, or welfare benefits. While the riot was the struggle of "the dispossessed" resulting from Thatcher's economic reorganisation, whose spontaneity of resistance stemmed from their everyday oppression, it was also the proof of "a crisis of and for black politics," unable to articulate "a politics for the society as a whole."[90]

Conclusion

A decade after his intervention at the "The Way Forward" conference—where he had registered the shift of power from the institutions of race relations to the radical black grassroots politics—Hall, together with the intellectuals and collective experience of militancy and theorising examined throughout this thesis, found himself facing a different kind of transformation: a deeper and more systemic shift of power that would redefine the very terrain of political struggle. The crisis of black politics in the face of Thatcherism was in fact understood as a symptom of a broader historical rupture, represented by the reorganisation of capitalist command, and, simultaneously, the exhaustion of a specific theoretical-political articulation. The crisis of the forms of collective politics that had sustained the radical conjuncture of the 1970s exposed the fragility of that unity and the necessity of renewed theoretical invention. Yet, as this thesis has argued, such provisionality is intrinsic to the very logic of articulation. Because an articulation is a unity of differences always exposed to attempts at disarticulation, it can never be regarded as permanently settled. This not only reveals the profoundly historical character of any theoretical-political articulations, but also calls for forms of historical-theoretical analysis

[90] Hall, 'Cold Comfort Farm', 79.

that cannot rest upon a simple judgement of their success or failure. Rather, they must interrogate their historical nature and theoretical status, tracing their organising principle, their internal coherence and occasional contradictions, and assessing their capacity to bring differences into relation within the horizon of a politics of articulation.

This thesis has examined the articulation of race and class in Britain over the course of a decade, from the early 1970s to the mid-1980s. It has engaged with the writings and political experiences of grassroots black groups, black theoretical and political publications—such as the Black Unity and Freedom Party, the Black Liberation Front, The Black Liberator, the Race Today Collective, and black feminist experiences such as OWAAD and the Brixton Black Women's Group—as well as with the more refined analytical analysis of black intellectuals such as Stuart Hall and A. Sivanandan. The guiding concept of this analysis has been Hall's understanding of articulation, explored in its many meanings through a genealogy of black radical understanding of racism in Britain and its challenge to the sociological framework of race relations (Chapter 1); then, by reconstructing the theoretical debates on the articulation of race and class (Chapter 2) and their organisational implications as examples of political articulations (Chapter 3); and finally, through an examination of the crisis and reconfiguration of those articulations and their analytical understandings within Thatcherism's project of transformation of British society (Chapter 4).

The reconstruction of this theoretical debate—centred on the conceptualisations of racism as institutional and systemic, as both material power and ideology, and on the political redefinitions of race and class as autonomous yet mutually constitutive categories—has identified the contradictions and tensions that enabled their subsequent disarticulation and rearticulation. The aim has not been to chart a linear progression from unity to fragmentation, but to illuminate the co-constitutive nature of articulation and disarticulation as historical processes within political struggles. Each articulation, by uniting heterogeneous elements, contains within itself the potential for its own transformation. This history of radical black politics in Britain, therefore, should not be understood as the rise and decline of a single movement, but as an ongoing struggle over the meanings and configurations of race, class, and political organisation.

From this perspective, Thatcherism appears not merely as an economic or political project but as an operation of disarticulation and rearticulation that redefined both the

material base of society and its modes of thought. In the course of its wider reconfiguration of social and political power and the material reorganisation of capital's processes of accumulation, Thatcherism sought to dismantle the theoretical and organisational articulations that had been forged in the previous decade. Racism was integral to this project, not simply as the repetition of an old conservative refrain, that is, as an ideological element constitutive of any form of conservatism, but rather as a mechanism of disarticulation and rearticulation redeployed in the new project of neoliberal reshaping of capitalist command. If radical black politics had rendered the policies and paradigm of race relations untenable, the task was not to restore their legitimacy, but to delegitimise the structural critique of racism that had underpinned the theoretical–political articulation of race and class. This was pursued both to reassert the societal effect of order that racism historically secures, and to unhinge the political configurations in which race and class had previously been joined.

The disarticulation of radical links between race and class was therefore inseparable from their rearticulation within a neoliberal grammar. Racism was no longer recognised as structural to capitalism but redefined as cultural difference; inequality was reframed as individual responsibility. This ideological reorganisation did not merely suppress the politics of the previous period but rather incorporated its languages of difference and autonomy, translating them into the pluralist vocabulary of multiculturalism that would unfold in the following decade. Such research, which expands the significance of Thatcherism's disarticulation into the following neoliberal management of multicultural differences, remains to be conducted. However, this thesis maintains that those processes must be grounded in Thatcherism's revival of internal divisions within black and working-class politics, which mobilised those divisions against the very idea of collective action and political organisation. In this sense, the neoliberal project did not operate on an inert field but on existing contradictions: it was hegemonic precisely because it transformed the politics of articulated differences into a politics of fragmentation.

As this thesis has demonstrated, differences are the very material of articulation. The problem for black radical politics was not the existence of ethnic, cultural, or organisational differences, but how to connect them within a shared anti-racist and anti-capitalist project—that is, how to make *a* social difference politically relevant out of many partial differences. Political blackness offered one such attempt. It conceived blackness

not as essence but as relation, transforming distinct colonial and postcolonial experiences into a political unity grounded in a common struggle. The disarticulation that followed did not abolish these differences but redefined their meaning within a new hegemonic formation in the shift from political blackness to ethnic pluralism, and from structural analyses of racism to managerial frameworks of diversity. The redefinition of race in ethnic terms, the reorganisation of community relations through funding schemes, and the emergence of a black middle class transformed the social and political terrain. What had functioned as the articulation of differences within a common struggle was reabsorbed into the pluralist logic of neoliberal governance. Disarticulation here did not operate as a conspiracy but as a reorganisation of the social formation itself.

As Jacques Derrida observes, every repoliticisation passes through a moment of "relative depoliticization" of previous conceptions of the political.[91] The real-time critique of Thatcherism advanced both in the scattered analyses produced within the political organisations overwhelmed by Thatcher's hegemonic project and in the more refined theoretical interventions of intellectuals such as Hall and Sivanandan served to keep open the question of the political—that is, to reassert a specific form of politicisation against the depoliticising effects of Thatcherite disarticulation. By examining the historical struggles over their meanings, this thesis has demonstrated that the structural character of racism and its articulation within capitalist operations, as much as the interconnections of race and class, are not fixed but continually reconfigured. The concept of articulation, understood as the dual movement of critique and reconstruction, has provided a way to grasp both the historicity of those concepts and the political struggle over their definitions. Such a theoretical–political endeavour remains necessarily unfinished, for every process of disarticulation simultaneously sets the conditions for new configurations to emerge, ensuring that the terrain of theoretical and political invention remains open.

[91] Jacques Derrida, 'Marx & Sons', in *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's 'Specters of Marx'*, ed. Michael Sprinker (Verso, 2008), 223.

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