New Clothes For The Emperor?
The conceptual nakedness of Britain's race relations industry

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Nearly half a century has now passed since the S.S. Empire Windrush docked in Southampton, and since then "immigration" – or in other words the consequences of the arrival of substantial numbers of South Asian and Afro-Caribbean settlers – has provoked passionate debates in every quarter of British society. There has also been a great deal of real change: innumerable Immigration Acts have been passed; Race Relations Acts, Equal Opportunities Policies and even Ethnic Monitoring has been introduced; riots have exploded; and the scale of the minority presence has steadily increased. It now includes well over two and a half million people, more than half of whom are British-born, but all of whom are challenging the forces of majority exclusionism much more vigorously than ever before. But despite all this, have any of us yet really grasped the full consequences of post-war immigration?

If Malcolm Cross's remarkable editorial in the April 1991 issue of **New Community** is anything to go by, we still have a great deal of ground to make up: indeed he seems to be suggesting that much of the agenda which underpins current public discussions of racial and ethnic issues – including that conducted by specialist researchers and social policy makers – is so inadequate that their conclusions are likely to be hopelessly misleading. And they have done so, he argues, because for the most serious of reasons: the analytical perspectives which both researchers and policy makers have used to underpin their work has been inadequately conceptually grounded. Given the present scale of what can not unfairly be described as "the race relations industry", let alone Cross's key role at the core of it, these charges are strikingly iconoclastic. Even so, it is not at all clear that even he himself is fully aware the far-reaching implications of his conclusions.

Current Orthodoxies

Is it fair to speak in this way of a "race relations industry", and to suggest that its members have generated a conventional wisdom of received ideas? In so doing I have no wish to disparage, and still less to suggest that all those involved either acts and thinks in the same way. That would be absurd. Nevertheless there can be little doubt that an inter-connected network of state-supported institutions concerned with racial and ethnic issues has indeed come into existence over the years; and it would be strange indeed if those involved had not generated some kind of shared conceptual and analytical perspective. What, then, does this shared perspective consist of, and how did it emerged?

Developments in this area now have a long history: ever since "immigration" and "race" first began to feature as major items in the national political agenda in the early nineteen sixties, all sorts of efforts have been made to address what were identified as the attendant problematics. The Race Relations Board and the National Council for Commonwealth Immigrants (the precursor of the Community Relations Commission) were originally set up more than a quarter of a century ago, and that a further fifteen years have passed since the two were merged to form the Commission for Racial Equality. Chasteningly enough, state-sponsored initiatives in the academic sphere have almost as long a pedigree. The E.S.R.C.'s flagship Centre for

Research in Ethnic Relations, now in Warwick, but the heir to previous incarnations in Bristol and Birmingham has also just reached its age of majority – although there is little sign of the event being celebrated!

Between them, these institutions have launched a plethora of initiatives – as the yards of library shelf-space occupied by their reports and recommendations eloquently testify. Much has indeed been achieved on a small scale, but few would disagree that searching questions still need to be asked about their achievements. How much progress have we yet make towards a *comprehensive* understanding of the underlying issues, let alone about the way in which they might be resolved?

The Political Dimension

Those who wish to explain it all away can, of course, find all sorts of excuses for this lack of progress: pointing to the absence of a positive political climate provides a very easy way out. And indeed there can be no dispute that throughout the past decade public administrators – and especially those based in or answerable to Whitehall – have displayed little interest in issues of social justice, whether with respect to race, class or anything else. In these circumstances it is hardly surprising – so the argument goes – that C.R.E. and C.R.E.R. have had only the most marginal impact on public policy.

But how sound is such an argument? Institutional resistance to accepting arguments about reducing social injustice is only to be expected. Whenever exclusion is entrenched, intensive collective mobilisation by the subordinated group is invariably a prerequisite for the extraction of even the most minor concessions from an entrenched and privileged majority. Such mobilisation has indeed already begun to take place, and its impact can only increase. But since such mobilisation has – so far, at least – been most active within relatively restricted social and spatial arenas, it has had a much greater impact on Local Authority policies, especially in the major conurbations, than it has on those of central Government.

This is not to suggest that state-funded bodies such as C.R.E.R. or C.R.E. should be expected to act as vehicles for political mobilisation: what they can and should do – as Cross correctly recognises – is to highlight what the issues are, where they are located, and how they should be addressed. Hence one of their most crucial roles is to establish an appropriate agenda for debate.

So how much progress has as yet been made in this direction? How adequate, most especially in conceptual terms, are the arguments and analyses which underpin currently-conventional wisdom? How comprehensively do they illuminate the issues at stake, and the ways in which they might best be confronted? Reaching a judgement here is far from easy, since a very simple cop-out is available to those steeped in the vocabulary of anti-racism: when arguments fail to impress, it can always be suggested that this yet more evidence of the baleful impact of racial malevolence. But we should beware of such tautologous arguments and their consequent self-fulfilling prophecies. Hence the hard questions can be avoided no longer. If the arguments put forward by C.R.E. and C.R.E.R. have had little or no effect on public policy-making, or on public discussion in general – and few involved in either of these bodies would, I suspect, deny that that was so – is it because their proposals are politically unpalatable, or is it because they are intellectually threadbare? Those who either mis-identify or gloss over the most serious issues, should not be surprised if no-one takes them very seriously.

Cross's Perspective

Drastic and iconoclastic though it might seem, this is precisely this inference of Malcolm Cross's editorial. Reviewing past research and current discussion, Cross identifies three major areas of deficiency. Firstly, he criticises the widespread use of simplistic and over-homogeneous notions of "the black experience". Besides obscuring the variety and the complexity of exclusionistic processes, this usage has, he argues, had an even more unfortunate consequence: it has left no space for the exploration of the dynamic and creative character of minority responses to racial and ethnic exclusion. Secondly, he points to the failure of both researchers and policy-makers to recognise that because such reactive developments are invariably community-specific, they also tend to be highly localised. Thirdly – and perhaps most significantly of all – he argues that any analysis which casts off culture as a meaningless phenomenon in the "real" world necessarily overlooks a vital dimension of human motivation.

As Cross himself indicates, these deficiencies are in no way a peripheral: their implications penetrate to the very core of most research and policy initiatives. So salutary are his concluding remarks that they are worth quoting in full:

> Finally, it is time for some humility on the part of social researchers themselves. For many years, investigators of all theoretical persuasions and political views have assumed that they *knew* what the issues were. If the agenda for research and action is to be relevant into the 1990s, then it has to be one which is proclaimed by the minorities. To those who wish to hear, there are many articulate voices pressing the claims of a myriad new concerns. It will be our job to listen. (Cross 1991:311)

Such honesty is certainly refreshing. But it is startling, and surely also most significant, to find that someone in Cross's position – for he is Deputy Director of C.R.E.R. as well as editor of this Journal – should have been driven to make such a declaration of intellectual and conceptual bankruptcy. If he is right, it would seem that much of the mainline research in race and ethnic relations, as well many of the attendant analytical and theoretical debates about the issues in this sphere, may have been based on false premises.

Political Representation or Conceptual Inadequacies?

In facing up to this possibility, let me deal with a relatively minor issue first. Read simplistically, Cross can be seen as presenting a plea for members of the minorities to be given greater and more effective political representation in the corridors of power. But although such an increase is undoubtedly long overdue, it would surely be a gross mistake to conclude that this alone is the central cause of Cross's *cri de coeur*. However welcome such moves might be in terms of equal opportunities, it is not the scale of the minority presence which is the crucial issue: rather it is the *concepts* in terms of which the debate is framed. If the starting point is inappropriate little progress can be expected, regardless of the racial and ethnic affiliation of either the researchers or the policy makers.

One is reminded of the story of the Emperor's new clothes. Although he considered himself to be wonderfully adorned, he would have been outraged to know how he was viewed by others; but since all his courtiers were deeply in his thrall, none dared tell him that the garments of

which he was so proud were nothing but a figment of his own fertile imagination. Could it be that the greater part of the race relations industry is similarly deluded?

Deprivationism: the Conventional Wisdom

Most well established arenas of debate and discussion soon generate their own conventional wisdom, based on their own taken-for-granted conceptual paradigm: our own field is no exception. Thus although there are certainly important differences between the perspectives adopted by C.R.E.R. and the C.R.E., let alone between these well-financed agencies and the wide range of policy-oriented and academic specialists who also contribute to the debate – such a conventional wisdom can indeed be identified. Strongly deprivationist in character, it rests on two key terms – racial discrimination and racial disadvantage – which between them provide the conceptual foundations for almost all current research and policy formation.

While the origins this kind of terminology are clear enough, for they are rooted in the socially reformist Fabian traditions of British sociology, the practical consequences of its adoption are equally straightforward. Since racial discrimination is perceived as running parallel to, and thus as reinforcing the better-known structures of class inequality – and since the principal perceived consequence of class inequality is social and material deprivation – it follows that the racial deprivation from which the new minorities are regarded as suffering as a result of their exposure to racial discrimination must be understood within exactly the same conceptual framework.

One very obvious outcome of the use of this agenda has been the C.R.E.'s identification of its principal role as being to expose the extent of racial disadvantage in as many spheres as possible, and having done so, to propose anti-discriminatory measures to reduce it. Nor has the C.R.E. been alone in adopting such an agenda. The bulk of mainline, state-supported academic research – led by that carried out by C.R.E.R., of which Cross is Deputy Director – has also been conceived within the context of the same analytical framework.

And what, you may ask, is wrong with that? Few readers of **New Community** would disagree with the proposition that skin colour is regularly used as a social marker, and that as competition for scarce resources has grown steadily more intense, those who can be so identified regularly find themselves pushed to one side in the crush. For all those marked out in this way the experience of being put in a position racial disadvantage by members of the indigenous white majority is real, ugly, and distressingly commonplace.

What is all too often overlooked, however, is that this is *not* the end of the story. Although an assessment of the exclusionism encountered in any given context is undoubtedly a necessary component of an analysis of the minority experience, it is never a *sufficient* basis for doing so. And for a simple reason: an analysis which limits itself solely to an exploration of deprivation will inexorably suggest that the victims of exclusionism lack the capacity to take charge of their own destiny.

Exclusion constrains: that is what it is all about. What is all too often forgotten, however, is that no matter how intense exclusionary forces become, and no matter the what their focus – be it descent, physical appearance, nationality, gender, disability, occupation, age, caste or whatever – our human capacity to *resist* these forces is not only immense, but it tends to increase as conditions become ever more severe. Hence behaviour is never wholly *determined*

by the forces that constrain it, such that people become helpless pawns, wholly unable to negotiate the terms of their own existence. Indeed one of the most salient characteristics of the human condition is our immense – and intensely creative – capacity to *circumvent* oppression and exclusion, and our ability to devise moral and spiritual strategies, alongside more concrete and physical strategies, to achieve that end.

An Alternative Perspective: the Challenge of Resistance

Many advantages accrue when the concept of resistance, rather than deprivation, is given pride of place in the analysis of social inequality. Firstly it demands that everyone – without exception – must be treated as an active subject; by the same token it wholly rejects the proposition that huge masses of people – whether "workers" or "women" or "black people" can legitimately be regarded as nothing more than passive objects of unchallengeable social processes. Secondly, while accepting that careful attention must be paid to the strength and character of the forces which give rise to social inequality – for without such inequality there would be no need for resistance – it simultaneously directs attention to the extent to which all members of all excluded groups will, without exception, be constantly and creatively engaged in finding some means of subverting and to challenging, and thus at least partially to circumventing, the impact of the exclusionary pressures to which they are subjected.

Resistance always about establishing alternatives. And because it is an intrinsically creative process, it should most certainly not be conceived of solely in terms of making physical challenges to injustice and oppression. On the contrary it is mental, spiritual and cultural resistance – the construction of an alternative moral and conceptual vision with which to transcend the hegemonic ideologies in which dominators invariably seek to ensnare the excluded – which is an essential prerequisite for successful physical resistance. Indeed the more deeply institutionalised the structure of oppression, the more crucial the moral and spiritual precursors of physical resistance become.

As I have already suggested, the dialectics of hegemony and resistance are not restricted to any particular form of inequality: they are a basic human response to all forms of exploitation and disparagement. Nevertheless there are good reasons why their dynamics should loom particularly large in the case of Britain's new minorities. On the one hand contemporary European racism must be regarded as a particularly vicious form of exclusionism, for it seeks not just to relegate its targets to a subordinate social status – as happens along the vectors of class and gender – but rather to deny them any place in the society of which they are in fact a part. But if the new minorities consequently have a particularly urgent need to develop strategies of resistance, their migrant origins (and it is worth remembering that enslaved Africans were migrants too, even if on a wholly involuntary basis) offer them an immense advantage as they set about doing so, for they consequently have access to a set of values, expectations and understandings which are wholly unfamiliar to their oppressors. Hence the moral, cultural, linguistic and religious traditions which migrants bring with them can be regarded as a richly inspirational source of cultural capital, not least because it offers a comprehensive alternative to the ruling (and thus inevitably hegemonic) ideological assumptions of the dominant indigenes. Thus it is precisely the migrant minorities' capacity to be morally, spiritually and linguistically "deviant" that accounts for the extraordinary effectiveness of their strategies of resistance.

An *Ethnic* Perspective

Taking all this aboard entails making a radical shift in one's analytical paradigm. From a deprivationist perspective, the specificities of migrants' own values, styles, understandings and aspirations are of little significance; indeed anyone who seeks to highlight their possible importance risks condemnation for their irrelevant and diversionary interest in peripheral exotica. With the exception of the few remaining admirers of Robert E. Park and his Chicago School, social analysts of virtually all other persuasions have long assumed that absorbtion into an urban industrial society – proletarianisation, if you will – had its own necessary imperatives, which would in turn determine the social values of all urbanites. Rarely, if ever, were any questions asked about the varied goals groups of people of differing origins might set themselves, nor about the even more varied strategic competences that they might deploy to achieve those goals. Since neither culture nor resistance had any place in the established conceptual paradigm, such matters were regarded as straightforward and self-evident. The deprivationist perspective is nothing if not ethnocentric!

However the moment one abandons deprivationism, and replaces it with a perspective which assumes firstly that exclusion is always and everywhere resisted, and secondly that all strategies of resistance – no less than those of hegemony – are culturally grounded, one's whole understanding of social inequality in general, and racial and ethnic inequality in particular, is radically transformed. Once the excluded are viewed not as passive victims, but as active subjects, there is no need to assume that their fate will always be one of abject and depressing failure. Once their strategies for circumventing and resisting exclusion are brought into focus, so to does the possibility they might achieve real and concrete *success*. Indeed this can, and must, become just as important a focus for research and analysis as explorations of the extent to which the excluded have been overwhelmed by the forces ranged against them.

But if success thus proves to be a much more widespread phenomena than is commonly supposed – and most especially so once it is also recognised that there is no "objective" measure of success, for both the goals and the yardsticks of success are necessarily culturally grounded – it should also be clear that success itself provides no evidence of the absence of exclusionism. Close examination invariably reveals that such success is invariably achieved in spite of, rather than because of, the expectations of the dominant majority, whose negative views may well – paradoxically enough – have been reinforced by the gloomy prognostications of the deprivation theorists themselves!

Once resistance through non-conformity are put firmly on the agenda, then so too are the issues of culture and ethnicity, not least because minority groups so often find that the avoidance of assimilative expectations is the key both to their survival and their success. It is precisely through their rejection of the conventions of the dominant majority, together with their skilled and creative redeployment – both individually and collectively – of the alternative resources of their imported cultural traditions that the new minorities are not only beginning to circumvent racial exclusionism, but to do so with ever increasing success. Although great care must be taken not to romanticise these processes, their force is now self-evident, at least for those with eyes to see. The ethnic colonies which are now such a salient feature of inner-urban life, and whose very foundation lies in vigorous networks of mutual support and solidarity, provides clearest possible evidence of their vitality.
Indeed these developments have now become so salient that even the most dedicated deprivationists find themselves forced to acknowledge – as Cross does in his editorial – that membership of an ethnic network is a valuable asset in the maintenance of a positive sense of personal identity and self-worth, especially in the face of systematic denigration. Nevertheless

the current consensus signally fails to acknowledge – thanks, once again, to far-reaching deficiencies in its underlying conceptual paradigm – that "identity" (the term which Cross uses) has an impact way beyond the sphere of personal psychology. So even though he may be moving a few steps in the right direction, it is very manifest that he is not at all attuned to the vigour, and indeed to the success, with which members of *all* the new minorities have harnessed the richness of their alternative cultural resources to devise new – and from a majority perspective inevitably *unexpected* – structures of mutual reciprocity and collective solidarity. Lacking such sensitivities, most observers have been yet further non-plussed by the new minorities' success in using those structures not only to keep at least the worst consequences of exclusionism at bay, but also to escape from the condition of unqualified subordination which they might otherwise have been expected to occupy.

Black Success

Paradoxically enough, there is nothing more daunting for theorists of racial deprivation than evidence of black success. It is easy to see why: if the potentialities of resistance are left out of the equation, it follows that racism must inevitably precipitate black failure; hence, too, any indication that black people have begun to buck the trend, and to succeed, can only be adduced as evidence of the attenuation, and perhaps even the absence, of racial exclusionism. So it is that those who hold that racial discrimination is widespread, as indeed it is, but who are *also* strongly wedded to a deprivationist perspective, are often driven – thanks once again to the inadequacy of their analytical perspective – to adopt some desperate measures to keep what they see as their commitment to racial justice afloat.

A number of strategies are available. One is to discount, or better still to suppress, all evidence of black success; another is to argue, in the face of achievements which are too manifest to ignore, that such success is "untypical"; and yet another is to cast aspersions on the motives of anyone who has produced such evidence, accusing them of giving dangerous comfort to those who seek to deny the existence of racial exclusionism.

Anyone familiar with current debates about racial issues in Britain will be well aware of just how frequently such tactics are indeed deployed. Yet however justified such sleights of hand may appear to be – at least within the context of the deprivationists' own narrow paradigm – the downside is obvious enough. Their routine use can only lead to obfuscation, misrepresentation and gross conceptual confusion; this is just the way the Emperor came to wear no clothes.

Let us face the facts: despite the widespread practice of racial exclusionism, and despite the ever-rising intensity of its impact – thanks to the ever-increasing pressure on scarce resources of all kinds, together with the minorities' steadily rising ability to compete for those resources – many South Asian and Afro-Caribbean settlers, and even more so their children, *have* nevertheless managed to pull themselves a considerable way upwards from the very bottom of Britain's highly stratified social order. Whether one looks at educational achievements, property ownership, success in business enterprise, levels of income and savings, and above all at the extent of people's embeddedness in morally and socially supportive community networks, the degree of upward mobility achieved by most members of Britain's new minorities has been most impressive.

A particularly illuminating way of understanding those achievements by comparison with those of the migrants' immediate inner-city neighbours – the white, semi-skilled industrial workers *beneath* whom they were forced to slot, both in terms of housing and employment when they first arrived in Britain. Over the past half-century the fate of this section of the indigenous working class has generally not been a happy one. Though they enjoyed some temporary prosperity during the years of economic boom, the niches in the employment market on which they relied have now been largely swept away by de-industrialisation, while their traditional networks of kinship reciprocity – which had already been debilitated by several generations of exposure to the seductive pleasures of consumer capitalism – have been further undermined by the doubtful benefits of re-housing onto now disastrously run-down council estates. The results of this are now all too plainly obvious: thanks to the severe attenuation of their capacity to resist and survive adversity, the white inhabitants of many larger and less attractive council estates do indeed seem to provide a clear illustration of the deprivationists' thesis that social inequality inevitably precipitates social pathology.

What is striking about the new minorities, however, is that despite the very considerable additional disadvantages that they face, the vast majority of Asian, Afro-Caribbean and other non-European settlers have *not* gone down this route. Even the least successful have achieved a moderate degree of prosperity and stability, while the most successful have become positively bourgeois in their lifestyles and aspirations. It is precisely the minorities' reluctance to adopt the lifestyles and cultural conventions of their immediate white neighbours which have ensured that they have not shared their fate.

New Diversities – New Challenges

It should be clear, however, that such a negative generalisation – to the effect that apart from a restricted number of exceptional cases, members of the new minorities have rarely followed the same trajectories as the less skilled members of the indigenous working class – cannot be expected to give rise to any clear indication as to what the minorities *have* done; and it is certainly not to suggest that all sections of the new minorities have achieved a similar degree of upward mobility. Still less is it to argue that everyone has identified the same goals, or deployed identical strategies in seeking to reach them. Indeed the very opposite is true.

At the broadest level, the character of the cultural resources on which South Asian settlers have drawn differs markedly from those accessed by their Caribbean peers. In the South Asian case, settlers have access to a heritage on which Imperial hegemony had only had a relatively limited impact, while Afro-Caribbean migrants are heirs to an experience of much more vicious oppression. Each brings its own advantages and disadvantages. Thus while South Asians have drawn with some confidence on the alternative institutional structures which mutualities of religion, caste and kinship so easily facilitate – and which themselves ensure that Asian trajectories of adaptation have been many and varied – they have, for the most part, been wary of making outright challenges to majority hegemony. By contrast Afro-Caribbeans are generally much more weakly organised in institutional terms; they excel, instead in terms of their skills in personal survival and dignity-maintenance, not least because these have been finely honed during nearly four centuries of anti-racist resistance. Thus in sharp contrast to most Asians, Afro-Caribbean settlers, and even more so their British-born offspring have shown little hesitation in challenging racial exclusionism head-on.

That said, it is worth emphasising that such wide-ranging generalisations only provide an indication of the broad character of the strategic responses which members of these very large social categories tend to deploy. Explored more closely, these broad categories are actually far from homogeneous: rather each is composed of a multiplicity of much smaller operational groups, whose adaptive trajectories are yet more varied still, and whose power and richness can only be fully appreciated in the context of a much more finely-structured exploration of the variations in the cultural capital which inspires them. Thus amongst the Afro-Caribbeans it is island-specific, class-specific, gender-specific and very often Church-specific loyalties which actually provide the crucial building blocks in the process of network formation and ethnic colonisation. South Asian networks tend to be even more complex, for beyond the gross differentiators of region, religion and language, it is mutual loyalties of caste, sect and *biraderi* membership that have invariably proved to offer by far the most powerful and effective vehicles of collective mobilisation.

Yet although all such initiatives are in essence a response to exclusion, and although their object is invariably to advance the self-defined interests of those involved, neither the character of those interests, nor the nature of the tactics which may be deployed to achieve them can be predicted from a knowledge of the interests and tactics of the excluders. Indeed the very power of ethnic resistance is its ideological autonomy: if there is one set of values around which one can confidently predict that vigorously resistant minorities will *not* predicate their activities, it is those which underpin their excluders taken-for-granted cultural presuppositions. As Sivanandan puts it, the new minorities have "A Different Hunger".

Nowhere does this have greater consequences than with respect to the issues which have sparked off political mobilisation amongst Britain's new minorities, and the means by which that mobilization has been achieved. To the deprivationists – trapped within the confines of their procrustian conceptual framework – the likely pattern of developments on this front once seemed quite straightforward. Since the victims of racial exclusion all suffer a similar form of social disadvantage, it seemed logical to assume that when those so excluded rose up to protest their position, they would do so primarily as Black people (i.e. as a homogeneous aggregation drawing in everyone of non-European descent), and that the prime target of their protests would be the material dimensions of racial disadvantage. The ultimate test of a theory is the extent to which it predicts and illuminates real outcomes. Does it work?

Just as Asian and Afro-Caribbean settlers have followed strikingly differing trajectories of adaptation, so the issues which have precipitated collective outrage, and the styles and institutional resources used in the mobilization of that outrage have – not least because they, too, were strongly culturally conditioned – differed strikingly from community to community.

Resistance in Practice

To take the Afro-Caribbeans first, amongst the issues which inspired the most flaming anger were the New Cross Fire – which both the police and the media seemed to dismiss as nothing more than an inevitable consequence of the Caribbean tendency to hold over-large and over-long house parties; random stops and searches of young men on the streets – justified only on the grounds that their behaviour did not conform to white norms and expectations; attempts to close down Cafés and Blues parties, and to bar the use of Ganja – again on similar grounds. That is not to say that material deprivation did not hurt: but it was attacks on their *lifestyles* – and thus on their personal and collective dignity – which have caused the greatest hurt.

Similarly on the Asian front. Most graphically of all, it was the publication of *The Satanic Verses* – together with Rushdie's lionisation by the white media, and his (and their) dismissal of objections to the making of gratuitous insults to the Prophet and his family as nothing more than blind and illegitimate "fundamentalism" – which galvanised Britain's Muslims into collective political action as never before. On a rather less dramatic scale demands for single-sex schooling, for the right to wear a turban in place of a crash-helmet, for school uniforms to be changed to allow girls to cover both their heads and their legs have had a similar effect amongst Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims alike.

Even the "Southall Riots" of 1981 – which are often cited as counter-evidence of united Black political mobilisation – can also be seen as having culturally specific foundations of a very powerful kind. Firstly a meeting of the National Front was taking place right in the heart of Punjabi territory – a provocation that the Front had long since ceased daring to make in predominantly Afro-Caribbean areas; and secondly it was insults to Punjabi *women* – of whose provocative implications the Front's young thugs may well themselves not have been fully aware – which made outright war inevitable. Hence although the Southall uprising may have been coincident in time with those in Brixton, Moss Side, Toxteth, Chapeltown and elsewhere, the specificities of its precipitating causes were very different.

A close exploration of these overt challenges to majority hegemony – ranging as they do from physical battles to the police to demands for changes in the blasphemy laws – certainly serves to highlight the extensive variations in their precipitating causes. What is even more crucial, however, is the extent to which it also illuminates both the distinctive character of, as well as yet wider variations in, the moral solidarities which have been used by the minorities to underpin these acts of collective mobilisation and resistance.

As Karl Marx himself was well aware, the transformation of a body of people who formed only a social category (which he identified as a class-in-itself) into a social *group* (or in other words a class-in-itself whose members collective consciousness had been so raised that they were able to act in the corporate pursuit of their common interests) was crucial to any successful process of resistance and social transformation. Nevertheless his many followers – whose contribution to the development of deprivationist sociology has been very considerable – have paid remarkably little attention to what that collective consciousness might consist of, and above all to the role which religion (that opium of the people!) might play in it. What is most striking in this context, however, is the crucial role which *religion*, or rather religious ideology, has played in mobilising the new minorities' resistance to English hegemony.

Amongst younger Afro-Caribbeans, commitment to Rastafari clearly played a major role in developing the sense of confidence and collective solidarity which facilitated the success of the uprisings in the early 80s. However it is vital to avoid an over-simplistic – and still more so an over-romantic and over-exotic – perspective on these developments. Rasta itself is the outcome of a long history of creative reinterpretation of biblical mythology within the black churches. Moreover as we move on into the 90s it is becoming increasingly clear that those same black churches – although far less exotic-seeming in terms of either belief or practice – have offered a much sounder base for collective organisation, particularly amongst women, than has Rastafari. In like manner it is Hinduism, Sikhism and Islam – currently being reinterpreted in a multitude of competing fractions – which are providing a similar degree of inspiration, at both an individual and at a collective level, huge numbers of people. Most strikingly of all, it is not just the older generation of South Asian settlers who find inspiration

in these religious traditions: so to do very many of their British-born offspring, whose enthusiastic commitment has precipitated a wave of often highly revisionist religious revivalism.

Conclusion

Little or nothing of the analysis presented here is in any way new or novel. To those who belong to minority communities, the fact that they organise a major part of their lives – particularly in personal and domestic contexts – according to quite different values and principles to those employed by the native English is quite self-evident. Nor is the fact that they do so in any way hidden: as Geoffery Driver and I commented in a New Society article entitled "The Ethnic Approach", and which we wrote to mark the foundation of the Commission for Racial Equality

> "The minorities are not simply black and brown-skinned individuals living in a white society; they possess, in each case, a distinctive community and cultural life as an integral part of their being. These different lifestyles have now become as much a focus of so-called racial tension and conflict as their colour."

And we went on to argue that if the new Commission continued to operate in terms of the negative concept of racial disadvantage, it would fail to understand the positive vitality of ethnic-minority institutions.

While we were not entirely alone in adopting such a position, we were well aware that in so arguing we were flying in the face of conventional wisdom. Little did we imagine, however, that nearly fifteen years later the Commission, and indeed the race relations industry in general, would *still* be just as deeply entrapped by the same conceptual deficiencies that we set out to criticise then. Given that the established analytical model can hardly accommodate the idea of resistance, let alone the possibility that much of this resistance might be religiously inspired, it is small wonder that those who should no better still regularly find themselves deeply perplexed by the behaviour of the new minorities. No wonder, either, that they often have little or nothing to say about the issues which most move the minorities. What have the C.R.E. or C.R.E.R. had to say about the Rushdie Affair? Or about single-sex schooling? Or about the importance of the Black Churches as vehicles for social mobilisation?

To be sure all these ethnic initiatives have occurred within the context of – and are often a response to – systematic racial exclusionism. But the plain fact is that the agendas around which most members of the new minorities are choosing to organise both their personal lives, and indeed their strategies of resistance, are built on premises will still continue to elude the greater part of the race relations industry. As the contradictions around these issues grow steadily sharper, and one can but hope that Cross's *cri de coeur* is a straw in the wind, indicating a growing awareness for the need for a major shift in conceptual paradigms.

Fifteen years ago we suggested that "policy makers in the Commission for Racial Equality would do well to remember that ethnicity articulates shared concerns. Race does not do that, even if racism does." That advice would seem to be just as apt as we enter the nineties as it was back in the seventies when the Commission was first established.

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