

Introduction

In the final stages of writing *The Unfinished Politics of Race*, a series of public conversations took place about the experiences of the so-called *Windrush Generation* of post-Second World War migrants from the colonies during the *harsh migration* regime instituted by successive governments during the first three decades of the twenty-first century. Although many of them had come and settled in the United Kingdom as citizens of the British Empire and its colonies, a number of these very same migrants and their children found themselves entangled in the efforts of the British state to manage immigration and refugee settlement by developing both strong controls at the border and within British society more generally (Gentleman 2019; House of Commons Home Affairs Committee 2018b: 6, 2018c). Indeed, several of them were excluded from the society that they had settled in, laboured in, and called home for several decades (de Noronha 2020; Peplow 2019a; Social Scientists Against the Hostile Environment 2020; Taylor 2020). As a result, we saw a wide-ranging set of campaigns, both within the mainstream political sphere and beyond, to remedy the situation and provide some form of compensation to the individuals and families that had been impacted by these events. Such campaigns struck a chord both within and beyond black and ethnic minority communities, and to some extent remains a point of reference for both mainstream politicians and activists in civil society (Bhattacharyya et al., 2021; Bhattacharyya, Virdee, & Winter 2020).

This scandal, which came to the surface after a long campaign to highlight the plight of the victims, was in many ways part of a long history of measures to control and minimise the rights of migrants from the ex-colonies of the British Empire. But it also emphasised the seemingly contingent and fragile position of British citizens who were seemingly still constructed as outsiders even after decades of settling and working in the ‘mother country’ (Jones 2021; Jones et al., 2017). Although at first there were attempts to underplay the importance of the Windrush scandal as more evidence emerged about the extent of its impact, the Conservative

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Government eventually accepted that an injustice had been done, and it launched an investigation and promised compensation for those affected (Williams 2020). Such measures did not assuage the anger of those who were directly impacted by the scandal, and it remains a point of reference both in academic debates and in activist interventions (Bhattacharyya et al., 2021). It is also important to note that the controversy about the Windrush Generation was taking place alongside other racialised iconic moments, including the fire at Grenfell Tower in 2017 that led to a wide-ranging conversation about both issues of race and migration and urban social inequalities (Back 2021; Bulley, Edkins, & El-Enany 2019; Danewid 2020).

At the same time as this sorry episode in British postcolonial history, the police shooting of Breonna Taylor in Louisville in March 2020 and George Floyd at the hands of a police officer in Minneapolis in May 2020 led to widespread protests across the United States that focused on both the immediate issue of police violence against African Americans and the wider question of institutionalised racism. These mobilisations, in turn, led to a wider set of international protests that were framed under the broad banner of *Black Lives Matter*. Although these protests were focused on demands calling for the end of institutionalised racism and police violence aimed at black communities, they also involved demands for greater efforts to tackle institutional and structural racism. The original *Black Lives Matter* movement had grown up in 2013 and 2014 in the aftermath of a series of deaths of several African American men at the hands of the police, and the killing of Trayvon Martin at the hands of George Zimmerman in 2012 (Makalani 2017; Thompson 2017; Thompson & Thurston 2018). What became evident in the more globalised mobilisations that took place in 2020, however, was the growing sense of frustration at the recurring nature of everyday violence by the police in several US cities and the failure to tackle the root causes and the call for more effective measures to deal with racism and racialised exclusion.

In the British context, the conversations in both the popular media and in political institutions about these questions focused on a complex range of issues, including the role of policing, the limited and fragile nature of migrant and refugee communities and their rights, to the broader historical legacy of race, empire, and colonialism within the context of contemporary society, the historical role of slavery and abolition, and forms of white privilege that remain part of the economic and social structures of contemporary societies. Given the shifting and evolving nature of these conversations, they also linked up to wider debates about the changing position of black and ethnic minority communities, the role of measures

aimed at promoting integration and community cohesion. The importance of these debates was highlighted by the publication in early 2021 of the report of the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, chaired by Tony Sewell, that argued somewhat against the bulk of scholarship, research, and policy thinking over the past few decades that Britain was not characterised by deep-seated forms of institutional racism but by racial and ethnic differences that are shaped less by racism and more by age, sex, class, and geography (Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities 2020, 2021). The publication of the Commission's report proved to be controversial and led to a wide-ranging debate about the current state of race and racism in British society, but it also highlighted the increasing divergence in policy approaches in this area and the contested nature of concepts such as institutional or structural racism when used to analyse the contemporary conjuncture. It also helped to highlight the growing divergence between approaches to politics and policy that see racism and discrimination as the product of structural processes linked to capitalism and explanations, increasingly favoured by the Conservative Party, that focus on the interplay between culture, individuals, class, and geography, rather than race (Knox 2021; Solomos 2022). We shall return to this issue at several points later in the book, particularly in Chapters 5 and 10, but the fraught debate in the aftermath of the publication of this report can be seen as symbolic of the lack of a consensus about what the root causes of racialised inequalities and divisions are, and how to tackle them.

All these conversations seemed important to us as we were trying to make sense of the body of research that has fed into this book. They linked up to the main theme that we wanted to explore, namely the contingent and unequal rights that racialised minorities have managed to establish, often through long and still ongoing struggles through political institutions and civil society. While there is a strong and growing body of research and scholarship in the United States that addresses this issue (McClain & Johnson 2018; Smith & King 2021), there is a dearth of research-based accounts that focus specifically on the British context. An important part of our motivation for writing this book derives from our feeling that our research has something to contribute both to academic scholarly debates and to wider conversations in society.

Events such as the ones outlined previously have highlighted yet again, as if we needed reminding, of the deeply contested and conflictual nature of both governmental and popular discourses about race, immigration, and multiculturalism in British society. These are the overarching issues that are at the heart of this book, and which have been part of the ongoing research over the past two decades that has encouraged us to write this

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book to provide a contribution to current debates about the changing role of racialised politics in British society. In developing the overarching frame of the book, we have had, inevitably, to address key questions both about the history of racialised politics and about the transformations that have taken place at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

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We mention these public controversies because they tie up well with what is in many ways the starting point of this book, namely questions such as follows: what is the current state of racial and ethnic politics in Britain today? How can we locate the forms of racialised politics that have become entrenched in our everyday political institutions within a wider historical frame that traces their development up to the current conjuncture? Given this starting point, addressing these questions against the background of recent trends in British society will allow us to look both at the processes that are helping to shape the current conjuncture in some detail as well as locating the present in the wider frame of the period from 1945 onwards and likely trends in the future.

As will become evident, all three substantive parts of the book draw on research material from both the local and the national political context to engage with three key policy and political conversations about the nature of racism in the contemporary environment.

The first of these conversations focuses on the changing and evolving transformations that we have seen in the politics of race and post-race in the context of the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century. Much of the substantive material in this book is framed around the evolving debates that we have seen in British society during this period about the changing dynamics of black and ethnic minority political mobilisation and brings in research that addresses both national and localised political transformations. Rather than seeing these transformations as part of a monolithic state-centred agenda, we argue that it is important to develop an account of the political that recognises the agency of black and ethnic minority communities as they seek to shape their political futures, even if they do so in constrained circumstances.

The second arena that we shall focus upon is the ongoing conversation that has run through the past two decades that argues that because of the emergence of new forms of migration and minority formation, we are witnessing a crisis of integration and multiculturalism in the current global conjuncture. In doing so, we shall frame the ways in which discourses about a crisis of integration and multiculturalism have

emerged and taken hold locally, nationally, and globally. This will be one of the recurring themes that we return to at various stages of the substantive narrative that run through the book, particularly in Parts II and III.

The third issue we shall take up, and which is, in a sense, the key one for the purposes of this book, addresses the question of the evolving everyday realities of the politics of living with difference and diversity in the context of British society more generally and in cities such as London and Birmingham. This is the focus of the five chapters that make up Part II of the book, which cover the key forms of political participation and engagement during the first three decades of the twenty-first century. In exploring these everyday forms of political engagement, we shall argue that a defining feature of the contemporary conjuncture is the high degree of volatility in forms of political mobilisation that have emerged over the past two decades.

Although much of the empirical material on which we shall draw derives from our research in the British context, we shall also bring in conceptual and empirical examples from other national and geopolitical environments, particularly as they relate to our key concerns. There is a wide-ranging comparative body of scholarship and research that highlights the reality that because of these processes, xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment is on the rise in Europe, and in the European settler, cultures of North America and Australia. In the environment of the present, migrants have become the cipher for creating scapegoats, be it asylum seekers, refugees, illegal immigrants – whose unwanted presence could both explain the source of social and political crisis, at the same time carrying the blame for it (Balibar 2017, 2018; Bojadžijev & Klingan 2018; De Genova 2017; Virdee & McGeever 2018).

As we see the spread of various forms of anti-immigrant populism in many countries of the Global North, we also see the articulation of new ideological expressions of racism, often expressed in terms of ethno-cultural nationalism. Rather than seeing these two trends as part of different fields of scholarship and research, we see them as inextricably linked, and it is through this analytical frame that we have developed much of the substantive analysis to be found in this book. We have also paid particular attention to the role that both antiracist mobilisations and community-based movements and organisations play in articulating alternative discourses about key facets of racialised inequalities, police harassment and violence, and related patterns of exclusion in the current conjuncture. We argue throughout this book, and particularly in the chapters in *Part II*, that it is wrong to portray black and ethnic minority communities through the lens of victimhood or as not politically engaged. Such a portrayal does not do justice to the often complex and

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messy mobilisations that have emerged over the period since the 1950s that have sometimes been seen as communal and not political, but which have helped to create spaces for various minority communities to address either institutional injustices or exclusionary practices. It also underplays the important role of antiracist mobilisations that challenge expressions of racism in all spheres of society and in the political sphere.

Recurrent and New Themes

The questions that are addressed in this book lie at the heart of several academic and policy-related debates that have come to the fore in the first three decades of the twenty-first century. These debates are focused on the political incorporation of minority ethnic and migrant communities within the social and political institutions of contemporary societies in Europe, in North America, and at a wider global level. Although debates about the changing patterns of political incorporation of these communities have been an increasingly prominent theme over the past two decades, it has also become evident that there is a much longer historical context that must be considered. In the British context, for example, scholarly debate about this facet of race and ethnic relations can be traced back to several pioneering studies that were carried out in the 1970s and 1980s (Layton-Henry 1984; Miles & Phizacklea 1984, 1979; Phizacklea & Miles 1980; Rich & Layton-Henry 1986). Other studies have highlighted the shifting forms of political incorporation in both national and local environments.

These debates have, however, not always been accompanied by systematic research that explores the specific forms of political mobilisation and participation that have emerged in societies such as Britain over this period. It is to address this gap that we have pulled our efforts together to write this volume. The core concerns of this book can be traced back to two debates that have been part of British society since the 1970s. The first debate relates to the inclusion and exclusion of minority communities within mainstream political institutions, such as local government, parliamentary institutions, and political parties. This is an issue that came to the fore, both in the wider civil society and in academic research, in the period since the 1980s (Hampshire 2005; Layton-Henry & Rich 1986; Saggat 1992). The second debate that underpins this book is the question of the changing forms of political mobilisation among minority communities, both within and outside of the mainstream political institutions. During the early 1990s, Les Back and John Solomos conducted a detailed study of the changing politics of race and minority politics in Birmingham that led to the publication of *Race, Politics, and Social*

Change (1995). This study focused on such issues as the patterns of political inclusion and exclusion that impacted on minorities within mainstream political institutions, the emergence of political representation as a core issue in both local and national politics, and the growing number of minority politicians elected to local councils in places such as Birmingham (Back & Solomos 1992, 1993; Solomos & Back 1995).

In the period since we conducted that study, several other studies have addressed facets of these issues, from a range of theoretical angles and in relation to specific local and national political environments (Garbaye 2003, 2005; Hochschild & Mollenkopf 2009a; Martiniello 2006; Morales & Giugni 2011). There has developed over the past two decades a recognisable sub-field focused on the evolution and changing forms of minority ethnic, racial, and migrant forms of political incorporation and participation. It remains, however, a relatively small sub-field, and there are still relatively few studies that are focused on the political sociology of forms of minority ethnic mobilisation and their impact on political institutions and policymaking processes (Givens & Maxwell 2012; Messina 1989b).

Therefore, we have focused through the research that frames this book on developing a conceptualisation of black and minority political mobilisation that seeks to go beyond a narrow definition of the political. We believe that our research points to the importance of two major insights in theorising an understanding of democracy and participation in multicultural settings (Shukra, et al., 2004a). First, we emphasise the need to conceptualise *the staging of political participation* in terms of networks of actors, the efficacy of agents, the creation of new political associations, and the generation of trust relations. Second, we seek to broaden the definition of the political such that it captures the sorts of cultural contestation explicitly related to the ethics of multiculturalism (Back et al., 2009). In Part I of *The Unfinished Politics of Race*, we develop an account of the politics of race that is framed by a conceptualisation of how minority politics has become incorporated into different spheres of political life. We argue that the presence of increasingly multicultural communities in the cities of the United Kingdom has posed major challenges to the institutions of liberal democracy. These challenges came to the fore in the 1980s and 1990s initially and involved the ability of such institutions to represent demographically the diversity of their populations and the ability to represent and accommodate the ethical challenge of multiculturalism within the values of the political settlement (Solomos 1998; Solomos & Back 1995).

In contrast to an approach that focuses simply on the mainstream political institutions and political parties, we argue that it is important

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to develop a broader analytical frame that includes both the sphere of formal political engagement and other emergent forms of political participation and activism. From this perspective, it is important therefore to consider both the accommodation of black and ethnic minority communities within the *formal political sphere* and the impact of multiculturalism on the workings of the sphere itself. We also suggest that it is equally important to develop an account of the role of the *alternative public sphere*, involving organisations such as ethnic minority housing associations, and multi-racial single-issue campaigns to test hypotheses about the forms of social capital emerging in ethnic minority communities in Britain. In Part II, we include several chapters that cut across the heuristic distinction between a mainstream and an alternative public sphere such as the Operation Black Vote campaign and the officially sanctioned efforts of all three major political parties to encourage minority participation. These chapters bring together contemporary interests in both the development of a vibrant public sphere that facilitates political participation and the actor networks that characterise forms of social and political action. Putnam's (Putnam 1995: 67) definition of social capital as the 'features of social organisation such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate co-ordination and collaboration for mutual benefit' is of particular interest to the political participation of ethnic minority communities and raises potentially interesting questions about the way in which social capital generates and is generated by the historical development of values such as trust and the reproduction of ethnic difference through forms of political action. By exploring this dimension of political participation in relation to ethnic minorities, we seek to raise important questions about the development of social and political capital in communities that are socially and politically marginalised.

In addition, our conceptualisation of a *transitional sphere* has enabled us to identify the growth and development of organisations that acquired a greater significance from the period leading to the election of a New Labour Government in 1997 and became better organised in the period from the early 2000s onwards and are concerned with defending or advancing the interests of black and ethnic minority communities (Consterdine 2018; Garbaye 2005). Whether these organisations were set up to be overtly political, to act as professional associations or are faith-based, we argue that an important role in black and minority politics is played by organisations that are situated outside mainstream institutions whilst maintaining a close relationship with that mainstream. A key distinction between *transitional sphere organisations* and *alternative public sphere organisations* is the focus of the former on questions of strategy and policy rather than on service delivery or single issues. As

we discuss in some detail in Chapter 5, while each organisation had a distinct history, membership, and structure, we also found informal activist networks, overlaps in membership, crossovers in staffing, common campaigns, and issues. We also identified a bridging role played by these organisations. Clear links into mainstream networks, such as the Greater London Authority and local councils, were evident. There were also links with some of the alternative public sphere organisations, serving to maintain a connection with campaigns, churches, mosques, and community organisations on the ground. The multiple positioning of some actors facilitated these connections and enabled forms of political influence often beyond the size of organisations.

As we shall argue throughout this volume, it is necessary to develop a perspective on the contemporary politics of race and ethnicity that can engage with the multiple forms of mobilisation that have emerged over the past few decades. The campaigns around the murder of Stephen Lawrence, the role of faith communities in local structures of governance, the debates about asylum seekers, and, more recently, Black Lives Matter are simply not possible to understand within a restricted notion of the political that corresponds with a limited notion of political participation (Hall 1999; McLaughlin & Murji 1999; Squire & Darling 2013). Consequently – though simplifying slightly – we want to demonstrate that notions of race and multicultural tend to be either marginalised within many accounts of the principal political institutions of British governance or celebrated within a populist discussion of the cosmopolitan culture of the contemporary British metropolis. We shall argue that it is important to move beyond the dominant narratives about race and politics and develop a more nuanced approach that takes issues such as place, minority formation, and processes of incorporation fully into account.

In this context, we have attempted to analyse alternative forms of participation in civil society institutions that clearly address the ethical settlement of the multicultural society. There is a very real sense in which cultural politics defines a different *space of the political*. Paradoxically, the reception hall of the architectural practice and the recording studio may share the ability to define a new place of politics where dominant or conventional values are challenged. This in part might be seen – after Charles Taylor – as a realisation of a *politics of recognition* (Appiah & Gutmann 1996, Taylor 1994). More prosaically, there is a real sense of ethical commitment reinforced by trust relations and perceived efficacy of participation being generated by participation in relatively new institutional forms of the alternative public sphere. It can be captured by a notion of participants *seeing themselves somewhere* at the heart of the

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alternative public sphere rather than in the periphery of mainstream institutions.

The specific studies presented in Part II provide a strong sense that participation in the different political spheres was distinguished by the fact that *politics here is linked to a politics of elsewhere*. By this, we mean that multiculturalism challenges the configuration of the polis within the politics of the nation state. It also makes visible sometimes forgotten links between (commonly colonial) pasts and hotly contested present-day political settlements. This is true in different ways in the development of racialised networks across the country around racist attacks, the flows of influence that structure musical or architectural practice, the role of Islam in uniting mobilisation, or the broadcasting of feminist tracts to Iran from London. In part, this speaks to the way *cosmopolitan realities* of value, culture, and demography challenge conventional theorisations of political participation. An important theme that runs through Part II of this book is that we need to include in any analysis of contemporary racial politics the presence of a *global familiar* through which a sense of community network transcends national boundaries to provide a different frame of reference for political participation than the institutions of the liberal democratic state.

As we shall argue later, a recurrent feature of the reasons given for participating in the institutions of the alternative public sphere was that they were putatively not complicit in the institutional forms of conventional politics. Paradoxically, both the political values at the heart of such mobilisation and the banal realities of political activity meant that such social movements needed to be placed against and commonly in opposition to the analytical horizon of state forms. Asylum seeking, housing rights, voluntary sector funding, campaigns for civil rights, all involved working simultaneously with and against governmental institutions. In this sense, the reasons for becoming involved might in some senses become undermined by the practice of the movements themselves. In part, we tried to capture this phenomenon by an understanding of *the fictitious world beyond the state* that is central to the rationalisation of participation in some of the institutions of the alternative public sphere. Such a conceptualisation fits well with political theory writing that captures the transactional boundary between state and civil society through nuanced regimes of governmentality.

A direct corollary of the desire to be involved in organisations that were not contaminated by the institutions of the mainstream political sphere was a fear in many of the institutions of the alternative public sphere that they would be subsumed by the *mainstreaming* of their effort. Specific needs once campaigned for through political participation might be