Revisiting the 2001 Riots: New Labour and the Rise of 'Colour Blind Racism'

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Abstract

Following the Civil Rights legislation enacted in the 1960s in the United States, the notion of 'colourblind' racism has emerged within sociological literature. It has been used as a theoretical tool to explain the continuing presence of racism and racialised inequalities within a society where its significance in determining social location is increasingly disavowed. The use of the term has been restricted to those describing the politics of racism in America. However, this paper will consider the applicability of 'colourblind racism' to the UK context. The 2001 riots marked an important watershed in 'race relations' in Britain. They have been widely cited as marking the point at which New Labour retreated from the celebration of diversity in pursuit of a more monocultural, more 'cohesive' society. Through an analysis of the governmental response to the events of summer 2001 it will be suggested that notions of 'colourblind' racism can offer interesting insights into the development of the politics of 'race' in Britain. Drawing on Bonilla-Silva's (2006) elucidation of the key features of this dominant form of racism in the US, the extent to which these same factors guided New Labour's response will be considered. It will be argued that while it is important to recognize the different patterns of racial formation in the US and the UK, the government reaction to the 2001 riots demonstrates a broad adherence to the key tenets of colourblind racism. This is evident in Labour's failure to effectively engage with racism or the persistence of racial inequality.

Keywords: Colourblind Racism, Racism, Racial Inequality, New Labour, 2001 Riots, Neoliberalism

Colourblind racism in the United States

1.1 In the US, the notion of 'colourblind racism' has increasingly been drawn upon to describe mainstream attitudes to issues of 'race' and the persistence of racial inequalities. It has been argued that following the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, American discourse on racism has increasingly sought to deny its significance, downplaying the role of racial discrimination in the production of social, political and economic inequalities (Omi and Winant 1994; Ansell 1997; Brown et al 2003; Bonilla-Silva 2006; Goldberg 2008). It is argued, particularly by the New Right, that the Civil Rights Act eradicated systemic racism from American society. The end of the formalised Jim Crow system of segregation has led to assertions that the age of state-sanctioned racial inequality is over. For Bonilla-Silva, 'colourblind racism serves today as the ideological armour for a covert and institutionalized system in the post-Civil Rights era' (2006, p.3). Where racism persists, colourblind ideology posits the idea that this simply results from the prejudicial attitudes and actions of misguided individuals. Bonilla-Silva suggests that colourblind racism provides the 'dominant racial frame' in which race matters are interpreted. He asserts that the 'newness' of this racism is that it denies its very existence, identifying four central tenets of this form of racism: 'abstract liberalism'; 'naturalization;' 'cultural racism'; and the 'minimization of racism' (Bonilla-Silva 2006p.26).

1.2 According to Bonilla-Silva, 'Abstract liberalism' draws upon themes of economic and political liberalism, to reject the idea of intervention in the field of racial inequality, suggesting that this is a transgression of individual rights (Bonilla-Silva 2006, p.28). It is argued that 'race' no longer matters. Inverting the ideals of the Civil Rights movement, the proponents of this view suggest that America has entered an age of colourblindness. Attempts to implement colour-conscious policies are seen as the preserve of meddling liberals or threatening radicals, whose invocation of 'race' undermines the ideals of egalitarianism (Brown et al 2003). This most often manifests itself in the opposition of the political right, but not exclusively this group, to programmes of affirmative action (Omi and Winant 1994; Ansell 1997; Brown et al 2003; Bonilla-Silva 2006). A second key component of colourblind racism is the 'naturalization' of racial inequalities. Here, persisting racial disadvantage is seen as resulting from individual 'choices', cloaked in notions of

ethnic and cultural expression. For instance, racial segregation is cast as the result of the natural tendency of different 'racial' groups to congregate together. Such trends are then portrayed as simply reflecting the 'natural' order of things (Bonilla-Silva 2006, p.28). The third component of colourblind racism Bonilla-Silva identifies is 'cultural racism'. This relates to the way in which overwhelmingly negative cultural traits are assigned to particular racialized groupings. Here, forms and patterns of behaviour are divorced from structural considerations and constraints and instead relocated within a discourse of cultural pathology and inherent cultural differences that lie primarily between white and 'non-white' groups. The final facet of colourblind racism is the 'minimization of racism'. This rejects the idea that racial discrimination plays a determining factor in the life chances of minority groups. Even where racism is recognised to persist, its significance is diminished. This is partially achieved through the deployment of a definition of racism that recognises only extreme actions such as police brutality or forms of racial violence (Bonilla-Silva 2006, p.29).

1.3 Within the US, the development of colourblind racism has been identified as a key component in the rise of neo-liberal and neo-conservative political forces (Omi and Winant 1994; Small 1994; Ansell 1997; Brown et al 2003; Goldberg 2008). Goldberg notes that 'race' has been integral to the neo-liberal assaults on public services, welfare and economic redistribution in the US. For him, 'race' represents "a key structuring technology" of contemporary neoliberalism (Goldberg 2008, p. 338), as notions of racial difference have become central to explanations of the continuing and deepening of inequality since the 1970s. He terms the falsely asserted absence of racism within the public sphere, allied to the shift from welfarism and the acknowledgment of systemic processes of racial exclusion, 'racial Americanization' (ibid). Although pioneered by the American political right, notions of colourblind racism transcend any neat distinctions along party lines, and there has emerged a consensus between the Republicans and Democrats with regards to policies of economic liberalism (Omi and Winant 1994; Ansell 1997). Omi and Winant argue that the adoption of the ideology of colourblind racism was evident in Bill Clinton's successful election campaign in 1992. While advocating a greater state emphasis on job creation, education, and the development of public infrastructure, issues of racial inequality were conspicuous by their absence from frontline policy and debate (1994, pp.146-7). Omi and Winant suggest that this constituted, 'the Democratic retreat from race and the party's limited but real adoption of Republican racial politics, with their support for "universalism" and their rejection of "race-specific" policies'. It is argued that, 'This developing neoliberal project seeks to rearticulate the neoconservative and new right racial project of the Reagan-Bush years in a centrist framework of moderate redistribution and cultural universalism' (1994, p. 147).

1.4 Omi and Winant argue that despite discrepancies in the approaches of Democrats and Republicans, 'the neoliberal racial project' became 'the new form of racial hegemony in the 1990s' (1994, p.148). Ansell also states that 'race' has become the central political symbol in the rise of the New Right, arguing that it is mobilised to explain the demise of the post-war liberal consensus, economic decline, welfare dependency, and a general lapse in social order and traditional moral values (1997, p.26). The true ideological victory for Ansell lies in how the political ideology advanced by the New Right has assumed a 'commonsense' logic, subordinating oppositional discourses, and installing a new conservative consensus (1997, p.27). A key strength of Ansell's work is that she applies this to the UK as well as to the US. While her comparative approach rightly highlights certain distinctive characteristics between the UK and US incarnations of the New Right, she acknowledges shared 'ideological mechanisms' (1997, p.265). Ansell highlights two of the features the UK shares with the US, both of which are central to how colourblind racism has been defined in America: a strategy of 'reifying institutionalized patterns of racial inequality so that they appear above or outside history as natural and/or inevitable'; and secondly, 'mystifying complex structural sources of social disadvantage via the construction of racialized victims who are themselves blamed for their own subordinate social location' (p.265). This was particularly evident in the Conservative response to the 1980-1 and 1985 riots in Bristol, London, Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool. Here the Thatcher administration framed the events in a way that emphasised cultural difference while downplaying the role that structural inequalities and state racism played in the disturbances (Gordon and Klug 1986; Benyon and Solomos 1987; Small 1994; Ansell 1997).

Colourblind Racism: A purely U.S. phenomenon?

2.1 Despite Ansell's recognition of the similar trajectories of the New Right in both the UK and the US, there has been little engagement with the theory of colourblind racism in the UK. This relative neglect of the utility of US notions of colourblind racism, seems to largely result from the fact that much of the focus on the rise of the New Right in the UK has been trained upon it's racially exclusivist conception of national identity. This reflects the predominance that ideas of the 'new racism' as formulated by Barker (1981) have enjoyed within this area of discussion. Barker focuses on how the New Right, particularly Thatcher's Conservative government, instituted a new social contract based on notions of 'kin altruism', where fixed ethnic groups have a natural tendency to form bounded communities (1981, pp.95-98). While ethnicity is portrayed as being defined by distinct cultural norms, it is a racialised conception where notions of cultural difference conveniently align themselves with perceived racial otherness and the symbolically constructed boundaries of the (white) nation. It is this emphasis on national identity and 'race' that has been a key focus for academics in the UK (Barker 1981; Gilroy 1987). As a result the naturalization of racial inequalities has not been granted enough attention within this literature. Small (1994) points out that the 'new racism' is not only about reasserting a white national identity but also maintaining racialised inequalities and white hegemony, particularly through the rejection of anti-racist policy and the persistence of various forms of social, political, and cultural inequities (pp.92-3; also, Gordon and Klug 1986; Ansell 1997). Here, developments in the politics of 'race' in the UK bare strong similarities to the US.

2.2 The failure to consider how colourblind racism might be applicable in the UK context appears to have also occurred for a number of other reasons. Firstly, in global analyses of racism and its regional characteristics, the UK is often situated within a shared racial trajectory of Western Europe. Goldberg (2008), in his attempt to delineate regional variations in racial formation, identifies a distinctive process of 'Racial Europeanization'. Britain certainly demonstrates the characteristics that Goldberg identifies;

namely, the failure to recognise racism in forms other than anti-Semitism, racial violence, and far-right mobilisation; the prevalence of anti-Muslim hostility, and the increasing drive towards national strategies of assimilation. However, the similar neoliberal trajectories of the UK and US identified by Ansell above (1997), in addition to the tendency to reduce discussions of institutional racism in favour of a discourse of private preference, and the retreat from multiculturalism, suggest that the UK has much in common with 'Racial Americanization' (Goldberg 2008), dominated as it is by the ascent of colourblind racism. Goldberg himself recognizes that the regional racisms he identifies are ideal types and he is attentive to the centrality of 'racial neoliberalism' across the globe. He states that, 'the global relatedness of racially fuelled structures of exclusion and debilitation', indicates that racial americanization too lies, 'behind the blunted point of racial europeanization' (2008:193). It is through this realization that colourblind racism appears to have a particular applicability to the UK. While the UK and US exhibit distinct processes of racial formation, the adherence to economic neoliberalism in both countries has resulted in the dominance of a political discourse that emphasizes the significance of ethnic and racial 'differences' rather than addressing systemic patterns of racist exclusion. The result is that cultural differences are identified as the primary source of social division and marginalization, with inequalities being explained as a result of individual and group failure.

2.3 Another reason why perhaps notions of colourblind racism have not been utilized in relation to the UK context is due to the persistence of 'race conscious' policies in the UK, evident in the Labour Party's introduction of the 1965, 1968 and 1976 Race Relations Acts. In response to the 1980-1 riots, Labour attacked the Conservatives for a failure to recognise the role that systemic racial inequalities played in the disturbances. The party rejected explanations centered on cultural difference put forward by the Thatcher administration (Benyon and Solomos 1987). With the election of New Labour in 1997, it was hoped a new commitment to racial equality would emerge. Certainly, the party rhetorically attempted to initiate a move away from the racially-exclusive conception of national identity favoured by the New Right and Thatcher's Conservatives (Back et al 2002). Similarly, the commissioning of the Macpherson Report into the murder of Stephen Lawrence was seen as a pivotal moment in addressing racism and racial inequality in Britain (Back et al 2002; McGhee 2005; Pilkington 2008). The Report's emphasis on 'institutional racism' within the police force, the first time the term had been used in such an inquiry, led to Labour introducing the Race Relations (Amendment) Act in 2000. This legislation imposed a statutory duty upon all public bodies to prevent racial discrimination and promote racial equality (Pilkington 2008, p.1.3). However, such optimism was short-lived as the apparent commitment to multiculturalism and racial equality was compromised following the 2001 riots in Burnley, Bradford, and Oldham (Back et al 2002; Kalra 2002; McGhee 2005; Pilkington 2008).

2.4 Between April and July 2001, a series of disturbances swept through Oldham, Burnley and Bradford. Clashes between whites, South Asians, and the police led to 395 arrests and damages estimated at over £12 million. In addition, over 450 people were injured with the disturbances involving an estimated 1400 individuals (Denham 2002, p.7). Located along the M62 corridor in the north of England, the three former textile-industry towns all ranked amongst the fifty most deprived boroughs in the country at the time of the disturbances. Within these areas, the wards that were home to the majority of the towns' 'South Asian' (primarily Pakistani and Bangladeshi) populations, and sites of much of the unrest, were some of the poorest in the country. Indeed, all of the electoral wards where the disturbances were located ranked, 'among the 20 per cent most deprived in the country and parts of Oldham and Burnley rank in the most deprived one per cent; all have incomes that are among the lowest in the country' (Denham 2002, p.8; also cited in McGhee 2005, p.57). All three towns had suffered acutely as a result of de-industrialization, exhibiting high levels of residential segregation along lines of 'race' and class, poor quality housing stock, and low-wage labour markets. In terms of ethnic composition, the three locations have significant majority-white populations.

2.5 The unrest began in Oldham in May, following a march organized by far-right activists through the predominantly South Asian areas of the town. This represented the latest in a series of incursions into the town by far-right groups and white racists and led to clashes between the police, whites, and South Asians (Bagguley and Hussain 2008; Kalra and Rhodes 2009). The following month, in Burnley, an attack by a group of whites on an Asian taxi driver sparked scenes of unrest as a crowd of whites, including known far-right activists, gathered outside a public house and abused Asian motorists and passers-by. This again led to confrontation between the police, whites and South Asians (King and Waddington 2004; Bagguley and Hussain 2008; Kalra and Rhodes 2009). In July, unrest flared in Bradford in light of a proposed march by the far-right National Front (NF). Despite the Home Office banning the march, a number of far-right activists arrived in the town, where a peaceful demonstration of anti-fascist campaigners who had gathered in the town centre was taking place. Trouble erupted when a young Asian-Muslim man was attacked, leading to confrontation between the far-right activists, anti-fascists and the police. This escalated with police attempts to forcibly disperse the crowd back towards the predominantly South Asian area of Bradford. This led to clashes between the police and South Asians (Bagguley and Hussain 2008). The response of New Labour to these events reveals a shift towards colourblind racism as the dominant interpretive frame of 'racial' matters, as systemic patterns of racism and racial inequality were de-emphasized in favour of a discourse which focused primarily on the supposed cultural difference and separation of the towns' South Asian communities.

New Labour and the Response to the 2001 Riots

3.1 Riots are always highly contested events and interpretations attempt to impose a form of coherency which belies the complexity and contingency of the happenings (Keith 1993; Kalra and Rhodes 2009). While rival interpretations continue to exist, some inevitably gain more credence than others, as various contextual factors are either emphasized or de-emphasized according to the perspective of those involved in producing these accounts. The dominant accounts that emerge become highly significant in terms of how events are remembered and what lessons are to be drawn from them (Keith 1993; Bagguley and Hussain 2008; Kalra and Rhodes 2009). The dominant representation of the 2001 riots has come to focus

on the perceived lack of social cohesion that apparently 'self-segregating' South Asian communities possess through 'their' supposed cultural otherness and failure to adhere to the dominant values of British society (Cantle 2001; Denham 2002). The Cantle Report states that:

> 'Many of the present problems seem to owe a great deal to the failure to communicate and agree a set of clear values that can govern behavior. This failure is evident at both the national and local levels, and it has led to community breakdown in some parts of the country (2001, p.18).'

3.2 The proposed solution to the disturbances was to encourage a greater sense of shared values and identity, to be pursued through the promotion of 'community cohesion' (Cantle, 2001). It will be suggested that the reaction of the government to the events illustrates a broad adherence to the components of colourblind racism, identified by Bonilla-Silva (2006), as outlined above. This has served to accentuate conceptions of 'racial' difference at the expense of an interrogation of persisting racism and racial inequality.

Minimising Racism

3.3 A key tenet of colourblind racism is a tendency to minimize the existence of racism, rejecting the significance it exerts in determining social-economic location (Bonilla-Silva 2006, p.29). Where racism is recognized it is done so only in relation to individual actions. The role of the state in its perpetuation is diminished as inequalities are located in the realm of private preferences (Goldberg 2008, pp.78-9). As stated, the election of the New Labour government was seen as an opportunity for a more frank and concerted attack on racial inequality, exemplified in the passage of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act in 2000. However, just a year on from the implementation of this legislation, the events of 2001 were interpreted in a way that completely overlooked the role of institutional racism, especially within the police (Kalra 2002; King and Waddington 2004; McGhee 2005; Bagguley and Hussain 2008; Pilkington 2008). What was ignored was the way in which young South Asian males, particularly Muslims, had come to be increasingly criminalized during the 1990s, as a recalcitrant group prone to violence and criminality (Alexander 2004; Bagguley and Hussain 2008). This was an important factor in the riots, particularly in Bradford, where there was a greater degree of direct confrontation between South Asians and the police than in Burnley and Oldham (Bagguley and Hussain 2008).

3.4 Bagguley and Hussain place the conflicts between South Asians and the police in Bradford within a long history of antagonism resulting from institutional racism, and a perceived failure of the force to adequately protect the community from racist victimization (2008, pp.50-63). In Burnley, King and Waddington suggest that the police consistently granted more attention to drink-related violent disorder rather than repeated attacks on Asian taxi-drivers, a key trigger event in the Burnley disturbances; 'this exclusive concentration serves to place in the foreground "criminality" and de-emphasize racism as a key issue in the town' (2004. p.124). Again this was overlooked in the official responses. In the Cantle Report the action of the police to the disturbances is broadly commended (2001, p.40). This was despite the fact that in all three locations there was significant disaffection within South Asian communities towards the police, both in their historic dealings and in relation to the police response to the riots (Kalra 2002; King and Waddington 2004; Bagguley and Hussain 2008; Kalra and Rhodes 2009). While the Denham Report acknowledges antagonism towards the police, it fails to consider issues of policing and 'race relations' or the findings of Macpherson (Kalra 2002, p.22).

3.5 Racism was also minimized through a negation of the impact that the far-right, especially the British National Party (BNP), played in the escalating tension in Oldham, Burnley, and Bradford. While the BNP was identified as an important protagonist in the events in the three towns, the dominant representations of the riots significantly downplayed this (Bagguley and Hussain 2008; Kalra and Rhodes 2009). The unrest in all three locations was precipitated by an increasing far-right presence, both in the riot events themselves and within the local political landscapes. As mentioned, in Oldham and Bradford, this took the form of far-right incursions into the towns. In the 2001 General Election, the BNP secured 13,250 votes in Oldham and 4,151 in Burnley. Similarly, Bradford has a well-established history of support for far-right parties, traceable back to the NF in the 1970s (Bagguley and Hussain 2008). Indeed, since the 2001 riots, the BNP has had councillors elected in both Burnley and Bradford. Although subsequently the local electoral success of the BNP has received more attention, at the time the significance of such racist political mobilizations was de-emphasized. The Cantle Report viewed the racism evident in the riots as resulting from the exploitation of individuals' lack of knowledge about 'others', and the conflict that 'naturally' results from this; 'There is little wonder that ignorance about each others' communities can easily grow into fear; especially where this is exploited by extremist groups determined to undermine community harmony and foster divisions' (2001, p.9). The focus on the far-right as agents of white racism in these areas served to reduce the space for a discussion of more systematic forms of racism and racist exclusion, instead focusing on the actions of a small number of extremists. In this sense, the official reports were happier to attribute racist action to misguided individuals and 'outsider' groups rather than to the machinations of state institutions and agencies, as well as everyday practices of racial exclusion. For Goldberg (2008), this is a significant aspect of 'racial Europeanization'. He argues that in Europe, racism is only recognized as such when presented in its most extreme forms, manifest in far-right mobilization and racist violence. This leaves more systemic forms of racism to pass without adequate scrutiny.

Naturalising Racial Inequality

3.6 A close ally of the minimization of racism within colourblind discourse is the 'naturalization of racial inequalities' (Bonilla-Silva 2006, p.28). While all forms of racist inequality cannot be convincingly denied, its existence where acknowledged, is presented as reflective of a natural order. This is often expressed as a result of the imputed 'logic' of the market, or via an assertion that the source of such exclusions lies

within the marginalized group itself. This was most clear in the notion of 'parallel lives', which emerged as perhaps the most powerful discourse from the 2001 riots; 'Separate educational arrangements, community and voluntary bodies, employment, places of worship, language, social and cultural networks, means that many communities operate on the basis of a series of parallel lives' (Cantle 2001, p.9). Here, the inequalities experienced by South Asian communities in Burnley, Bradford and Oldham were obscured as marginalisation was seen as a result of the tendency of such communities to 'self-segregate' (Cantle 2001; see also Bradford District Race Review 2001; Oldham Independent Review 2001; Denham 2002). For instance, while the Denham Report noted the problems of geographic, racial, cultural, and economic polarization, it concluded that this was, 'to an extent by choice' (2002, p.11). 'Segregation' was presented as largely resulting from cultural preferences rather than material deprivation and exclusion. McGhee states that within the official responses, 'the focus of community cohesion discourses and programmes is on the cultural aspects of exclusion. Thus, the mechanisms of cultural inclusion and cultural exclusion take precedence here' (2005, p.43).

3.7 The acute levels of socio-economic deprivation which characterize the three de-industrialized towns were downplayed, providing a mere subtext to a more simplistic, dis-embedded discourse of cultural difference and insularity (Kundnani 2001; Amin 2002; Kalra 2002; Alexander 2004; McGhee 2005; 2008; Bagguley and Hussain 2008; Pilkington 2008). As mentioned, above, all three towns exhibit high rates of long-term unemployment, low-paid occupations, and poor quality housing stock (Bradford District Race Review 2001; Burnley Task Force 2001; Oldham Independent Review 2001; Bagguley and Hussain 2008). Most of the focus around issues of 'self-segregation' served to deflect attention from the institutional, individual, and private practices that serve to reinforce and produce racialised inequalities. Such processes have rendered Pakistanis and Bangladeshis the most deprived social groups in the country across a range of indicators such as housing, employment, income, and rates of child poverty (Peach 2006; Platt 2007). Between 2002 and 2005, 52 per cent of Bangladeshis and Pakistanis were living in poverty compared to 15 per cent of the white population (Platt 2007, p.38).

3.8 It was the area of housing that received much of the attention in the official reports, with concern expressed about the emergence of South Asian 'ghettoes'. Crucially this was seen as occurring through choice rather than systematic exclusion within the housing market. However, the attention granted to a perceived increase in segregation along lines of ethnicity is not supported by the evidence, with research suggesting that levels of racial segregation have either remained relatively constant or declined over the last two decades (Robinson 2008; Finney and Simpson 2009). Robinson points out that between 1991 and 2001, spatial polarization along lines of ethnicity remained relatively stable, while segregation along lines of class and income became more pronounced (2008, p.24). In Bradford, self-segregation was identified as a particular problem; 'different ethnic groups are increasingly segregating themselves from each other and retreating into "comfort zones" made up of people like themselves' (Bradford District Race Review 2001, p.16). However, Finney and Simpson observe a spatial dynamism not recognized within the official responses. In Bradford, they note a move by established South Asian populations away from the original inner-city areas of settlement, an increase in the number of mixed-ethnicity wards, and greater minority mobility to other areas of the UK (2009, p.123). Nationally, in 2001 the average white person lived in a ward that is more than 90 per cent white, while Pakistanis typically live in wards that have an average Pakistani population of 17 per cent (2009, p.123). Simpson and Finney suggest that the idea of increasing ethnic segregation is a 'myth'. They argue that the evidence from Bradford, 'stacks up to paint a picture of large clusters of mixed areas, a picture in which people of different ethnic groups are not retreating from each other' (2009, p.123).

3.9 The emphasis on self-segregation acted to minimize the role of racism and to naturalize the location of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis within some of the country's most deprived locales (Amin 2002; Kalra 2002; McGhee 2005). Robinson draws attention to research which shows that young people from minority ethnic communities have strong aspirations of spatial mobility. However, such aspirations are restricted by the discriminatory practices of social landlords, mortgage loan companies, estate agents, racialised conceptions of space, racism and racist exclusion, low income, high unemployment, and the concentration of community amenities (2008, p.27). As such, 'the factors putting a brake on the process of dispersal have been found to centre on restricted opportunities and choice in the context of poverty and racism, rather than the self-segregating tendencies of any particular group' (2008, p.26). Indeed, Bagguley and Hussain observe how the focus of the official reports was placed upon the housing market rather than the labour market; in the latter there exists both greater levels of interaction between different ethnic groups, as well as significant levels of exclusion. Here, South Asians are concentrated in the lowest paid occupations and the disparate pay levels that exist is evident as South Asian males earn just two-thirds the wages of white males (2008, p.41). This cannot so easily be explained with recourse to the discourse of 'choice', and perhaps explains why this issue was largely avoided in the official reports following the riots. However, any mention given tended once again to focus on problems with the cultural traits of those seeking employment, rather than considering the impediments such as a lack of education, economic disadvantage, and racism; 'Expectations are…very low in some areas and some occupations seem to be outside the knowledge and aspirations of some cultures' (Cantle 2001, p.44).

3.10 This denial of the institutional bases of racism reflects the common terrain of the contemporary politics of 'race' in the UK and the US. Within this discourse, racism 'is a racism, where acknowledged at all, as individualized faith, of the socially dislocated heart, rather than institutionalized inequality" (Goldberg 2008, p.23). While in the UK, 'race' conscious political and policy debates remain, partly resulting from the history of the social democratic state in the UK, these appear to be increasingly superficial. This reflects an unwillingness on the part of government to effectively engage with all forms of material inequality. The continuing existence of significant public services, suggests that the silencing of discussions of racism and racial inequality that Goldberg outlines is a process that such silencing differs in its degrees of intensity between the UK and the US. For instance, McGhee (2008) and Pilkington (2008) point to the publication by the Department for Communities and Local Government in 2007 of the *Race Equality in Public Services* report which called for the need to address racial inequality. However, Pilkington argues

that broadly the government emphasis on cohesion and integration has meant that, 'equality and diversity have been de-prioritized as an agenda' (2008, p.11.1).

Cultural Racism

3.11 The naturalisation of inequalities within the official responses to the riots relied on a form of cultural racism which casts South Asians as others, with cultural practices and traits deemed to threaten social cohesion. The notion of self-segregation was presented as indicative of the inherent cultural difference of South Asian communities. This cultural racism punctuated New Labour's response to the events of 2001 as it did the Conservative reaction to urban unrest in 1980-1 and 1985. In this earlier instance, the disorder was explained away as a result of young African-Caribbean males' propensity for criminality and drug use, produced through the single female parent structure of the pathological black family which fostered a culture of indiscipline (Gordon and Klug 1986; Benyon and Solomos 1987; Gilroy 1987). Where previously the Labour Party rejected the assertions of the Conservatives for its failure to consider structural problems relating to class, unemployment, and racism it now favours the use of a similar discourse. In New Labour's response the folk devils were different but many of these earlier themes were rearticulated in a modified form. Significantly, the young South Asian males involved in the riots were cast as criminals, much more forcefully than their white counterparts, evident in the harsher sentences given to South Asians involved in the riots in Bradford (Alexander 2004; McGhee 2005; Bagguley and Hussain 2008). David Blunkett was keen to view the riots in terms of criminality (Alexander 2004). This drew particularly upon notions of South Asian youth 'gangs' presented as 'dysfunctional' criminal elements. This perception gained more currency in the governmental response following the subsequent 9/11 attacks (Back et al 2002; Alexander 2004; McGhee 2005). Interestingly, the age and ethnicity of those arrested for their involvement in the disturbances, presents a much more complex picture than that which represented the rioters as young, South Asians. Figures from Burnley reveal that 27 per cent of those arrested were whites over the age of 30, with just 9 per cent of those arrested being South Asians between the ages of 17 and 20 (Bagguley and Hussain 2008:50).

3.12 Since 2001, this notion of self-segregation and South Asian/Muslim insularity has repeatedly manifested itself in anxieties over radicalization, integration, and the apparent threat this presents to national security and social cohesion. Within this discourse the pathology of the single-parent African-Caribbean family, so dominant during the unrest of the 1980s, was replaced by notions of South Asian family dissolution from within (Alexander 2004; McGhee 2005; Bagguley and Hussain 2008). Through this form of domestic breakdown notions of Asian criminality and gangs emerged, operating 'as a potent symbol of ethnic, gendered, and generational dysfunction and crisis that functions also as a testament to the failures of community and the limits of multiculturalism' (Alexander 2004, p.532). This perceived criminality was seen as resulting from, according to Blunkett, a form of inter-generational 'schizophrenia'. It was claimed that a younger generation of South Asian Muslims having been brought up struggled to deal with an apparent disjuncture between the South Asian identity possessed by their parents, and their own identities as 'British citizens' (cited in Alexander 2004, p.539). Here, South Asian communities are portrayed as being '"out of control" and the traditional authority of the older generation is being challenged' (Bagguley and Hussain 2008, p.148). It was argued that the emphasis multiculturalism placed on celebrating cultural diversity meant that social cohesion had become fragmented, due to the absence of a common set of values by which all 'communities' must abide. This premise operated on a reified construction of both South Asian culture and community, allowing no recognition of the complex ways in which these constructions are produced and lived, or the heterogeneity exhibited. Viewing both culture and community in these terms ignores the hybridized identities of second- and third-generation South Asians (Back et al 2002; Kalra 2002; Alexander 2004; McGhee 2005; Bagguley and Hussain 2008).

3.13 In this sense, the riots were viewed by the government as a rejection of citizenship rather than an assertion of belonging, a demand for full acceptance free from racist exclusion, or 'the violence of the violated' as termed by Kundnani (2001) (see also Amin 2002; Bagguley and Hussain 2008). This apparent rejection of citizenship was explained with recourse to notions of cultural difference and a refusal to adapt to British values manifest in rising 'self-segregation'. This has become central to New Labour's vision for national identity, citizenship and community cohesion, revealing itself most profoundly in 2006 in the wake of the London bombings. In October 2006, former home secretary, Jack Straw, encouraged Muslim women to stop wearing the *niqab*, suggesting that it represented, 'a visible statement of separation and of difference'. Straw added that the result of this was that it made, 'better, positive relations between the two communities more difficult…Those people who do wear the veil should think about the implications for community relations' (cited in Taylor and Dodd 2006, p.1). This again presented 'community' as being ethnically defined, from the primary roots of social exclusion as resulting cultural difference rather than systemic patterns of exclusion. Later that month, Tony Blair also claimed that the wearing of the veil represented, 'a mark of separation…we need to confront this issue about how we integrate people fully into *our* society' (cited in Woodward, 2006; emphasis added; see also, McGhee 2008, p.97). Again, the issue of integration is presented as being primarily about addressing the cultural difference of minority ethnic communities, principally Muslims. This focus on citizenship reveals an important difference between the US and UK contexts, and the contours of colourblind racism.

Abstract Liberalism

3.14 For Bonilla-Silva (2006), a central aspect of colourblind racism in the US is the assertion of an 'abstract liberalism'. This suggests the fundamentally egalitarian basis of US society, enshrined in the passage of the Civil Rights Act, presenting all individuals as equal in the eyes of the law. Within this context, 'race' conscious policies are cast as transgressing individual rights and freedoms. This notion of 'abstract liberalism' rests upon the ethnic plurality associated with US national identity. However this poses a problem in the UK, where the host/immigrant binary remains firmly entrenched. Unlike the US, 'claiming an ethnic identity within the framework of a common nationality' is more problematic for minority ethnic

groups in the UK (Bagguley and Hussain 2008, p.149). It could be argued that this notion of abstract liberalism is also compromised in the US when discussions of inequality come to focus on 'immigrant' groups, particularly Mexicans. In the UK, the racially exclusionary nature of national identity has meant that historically 'non-white' groups have been conceived of as 'immigrants' despite possessing full citizenship rights. When New Labour came to office in 1997 there was much talk of an attempt to move beyond such an exclusivist view of nation and national identity through the adoption of a more pluralistic vision. However, the response to the 2001 riots revealed the superficiality that lay behind the rhetoric. Following the publication of the official reports into the riots in December 2001, Home Secretary David Blunkett stated in 2002 that, 'We have norms of respectability…and those who come into our home-for that is what it is-should accept those norms just as we would have to do if we went elsewhere' (cited in Younge 2002). This implied that those involved in the riots remained 'immigrants', reinforcing the idea that the disturbances resulted from a 'lack' of citizenship amongst South Asians, rather than as a reflection of social, economic and political marginalization and a failure to recognize claims to citizenship (Kundnani 2001; Amin 2002; Bagguley and Hussain 2008).

3.15 The key governmental response to the riots was to introduce citizenship tests, forged around the idea that knowledge of the English language and allegiance to the nation should be prerequisites for those hoping to obtain UK citizenship (Denham 2002). The fact that this emerged as a response to the unrest of 2001 is strange, and again serves to frame those involved as 'aliens'. As Kalra (2002) points out, most if not all of the South Asians involved in the riots were native English-speakers, educated within the British educational system. However, the riots were cast as resulting from a lack of shared civic values. The responsibility for this was placed primarily on South Asians who were deemed to possess a cultural insularity, manifest in the persistence of 'foreign' languages, preventing 'them' from 'integrating' into British society. Blame was also attributed to multicultural policies which it was argued encouraged a sense of separation. Following the 2001 riots there has been a dramatic shift away from multiculturalism towards a policy of assimilationism (Back et al 2002; Alexander 2004; McGhee 2008; Pilkington 2008) with 'immigrants' and minority ethnic groups, particularly South Asian Muslims, expected to make greater efforts to integrate into mainstream society. While in America it is the policy of affirmative action that has been attacked as transgressing individual rights and egalitarianism, in the UK, such attacks have focused on multiculturalism, the principle way in which racial equality has been pursued (Bagguley and Hussain 2008; McGhee, 2008). Indeed, since 2006, the Commission on Integration and Community Cohesion (CICC) has primarily focused on addressing issues of perceived preferential treatment towards minority ethnic groups, rather than addressing inequality, particularly racial inequality (McGhee 2008, p.100). Here resources are increasingly directed, not necessarily according to need and the extent to which an allocation might alleviate inequality. Instead, they are focused towards initiatives and groups that are deemed to promote community cohesion (McGhee 2008, p.105).So, a key difference between the UK and the US is that while affirmative action is criticized due to the notion that it threatens an already existent universalism, in the UK multicultural policies- rather than racism and racist exclusion- are portrayed as preventing the movement beyond an increasingly dangerous particularism to more universal forms of belonging. The paradox here is that this denies the racialized bases upon which the proposed set of shared values are founded.

3.16 In place of multiculturalism, the government has called for integration into a 'shared' civic culture. There has been, at least rhetorically, an attempt to impose, 'a particular conception of patriotism and nationalism that emphasizes civic engagement over ethnic and biological attributes' (McGhee 2008, p.128). However, New Labour fails to recognize the heavily racialised notion of citizenship which underpins such conceptions (Back et al 2002; Alexander 2004; Bagguley and Hussain 2008; McGhee 2008). In interviews Bagguley and Hussain conducted with South Asians in Bradford, they found a widespread perception that, 'integration had been defined from a purely white British perspective. It was the norms and practices of a taken-for-granted, if difficult to define and articulate, white Britishness that people felt they were being asked to integrate into' (2008, p.121). The respondents asserted their claims to a citizenship that wasn't intimately bound to the particularity of national identity, precisely because of the racialised connotations associated with it (2008, p.144). However, the realignment of citizenship and a traditionally conceived national identity, evident in the imposition of citizenship tests, rests upon a conception of Britishness that still constructs minority ethnic groups, particularly Muslims, as 'outsiders'. National identity remains an 'ethnic' rather than a 'civic' identity (McGhee, 2008, p.130). It is this that prevents a more inclusive sense of citizenship from being established.

3.17 For Goldberg, the contemporary treatment of Muslims and the reemergence of assimilationist projects in the wake of 9/11, undermine claims to 'racelessness' in Western Europe. While in the US, it is predominantly the figure of 'the black' that lies at the heart of racial anxieties, in Europe and the UK it is 'the Muslim' (2008, p.164). Indeed, it is in relation to the issue of abstract liberalism that Goldberg's distinction between 'racial Americanization' and 'racial Europeanization' demonstrates its importance. New Labour has constructed a racially particularist basis for citizenship which differs significantly from the notion of universalism that underpins US conceptions of national identity. It purports to protect the safety of all (ethnically-defined) 'communities' and to reduce the likelihood of conflict. The particularistic grounding of these values is either downplayed or cast as necessary in the contemporary climate, having become more pronounced in the wake of the July 2005 London bombings. However, the racial particularism of this vision is not acknowledged at all. For groups that remain excluded, this is simply because of a failure on their part to accept these basic requirements. It is not that racialised others cannot belong, just that they choose not to. Similarly, racial inequalities are seen as resulting from this 'choice'. Rather than addressing issues of racism and inequality, multiculturalism is now conceived of as a divisive strategy that fosters and encourages separatism. This is a key difference with the dominant form of colourblind racism outlined by Bonilla-Silva (2006). While in the US 'colour-conscious' policies are seen to threaten individual rights, in the UK they are deemed to challenge the cultivation of a collective solidarity. The entrenchment of the host/immigrant binary means that notions of individual and group freedoms are deemed as subservient to the potential 'cohesion' offered by a shared national culture. The notion of 'abstract liberalism' appears to be less relevant to the UK context, where a benign particularism that denies its own racialised imagining is

instead asserted.

Conclusion: New Labour, Colourblind Racism and Neoliberalism

4.1 It has been argued then that the emergence of 'colourblind' racism in the US also seems to be applicable to the UK context. As mentioned above, Labour strongly attacked the Thatcher government for its response to the 1980-1 and 1985 riots. At that time the Conservatives presented the riots as representing a crisis of law and order, resulting from the cultural predisposition of 'black' youths to criminality and anti-authoritarianism (Benyon and Solomos, 1987; Gilroy, 1987; Small, 1994; Ansell, 1997). Labour was largely keen to distance itself from such views. The party linked the disturbances to high levels of 'social deprivation, racial discrimination and disadvantage, and unemployment', also blaming government 'complacency' as well as cuts to local councils (Benyon and Solomos 1987, p.11). However, New Labour's reaction to the 2001 riots marked a sharp rightward shift, adopting the rhetoric employed by the New Right in 1980-1 and 1985. New Labour minimized the role that racism played in the disturbances, naturalising racial inequality through a contemporary form of cultural racism directed towards South Asian Muslims. As Alexander states,

> 'Discussions of racism and structural exclusion are replaced with a UK version of the "cultures of poverty" or "cultures of deprivation" debates that have marked out discussions of "the underclass" in the United States…This results in a pathologisation of Muslim cultures and a simplistic blame-the-victim approach to understanding complex processes of social exclusion' (2004, p.534).

4.2 The nature of the New Labour response highlights the parallels between colourblind racism in the US, and the contemporary politics of 'race' in the UK. Post-2001, the distance between New Labour and the New Right has reduced even further. This shift has meant the creation of a relative consensual political silence on issues of racism and racial inequality, reflecting New Labour's move away from a politics of economic redistribution and the promotion of ethnic diversity and multiculturalism (McGhee, 2008). McGhee suggests that the government interpretation of the riots was presented so that,

> 'poor integration, ineffective communication and lack of contact between community groups was deemed to be the overwhelming problem behind the segregation of these communities in these areas above all related problems such as deprivation, targeted far right activities and alleged institutional racism and Islamophobia in the police" (2008, p.54).

4.3 This form of political consensus in relation to racism and racial inequality reflects the concordance which emerged between the Democrats and Republicans during the 1990s in the US. This results from the dominance of economic neoliberalism in both countries. As mentioned, notions of 'race' comprise an integral part of the neoliberal political vision (Omi and Winant, 1994; Ansell, 1997; Goldberg, 2008).

4.4 Goldberg suggests that the extent of claims to 'racelessness' within a society is intimately bound to the depth of the state commitment to the principles of neo-liberalism. He argues that the emphasis on the individual and apparently benign meritocratic systems, a key discursive and ideological aim of neo-liberal regimes, correspondingly reduces the space for discussions of racism (Goldberg, 2008, p.334). The problem for Goldberg is that, 'the individualization of wrongdoing, its localization as personal and so private preference expression, erases institutional racisms precisely as conceptual possibility' (Goldberg 2008, p.362-3). As a result, the notion of 'racelessness', 'reifies the impossibility, given the absence of a language of characterization, explanation, and condemnation of identifying the problematic, of addressing wrongs" (2008, p.189). This is reflected in New Labour's reluctance to engage in any significant consideration of structural inequality, particularly racial inequality. The application of the notion of 'colourblindness' to the UK context alerts us to how neoliberalism is shaping the contemporary contours of the politics of 'race', and how the discursive and ideological space in which racism can be openly addressed and challenged is being redrawn.

4.5 In both the US and the UK, discussions of racism are increasingly directed away from state structures, processes, and institutions and are instead confined within the parameters of an individualized, culturally-centered discourse. New Labour's response to the 2001 riots involved a reduction of the significance of racism, casting continuing racial inequalities as natural, while drawing on notions of cultural difference to explain the unequal positions occupied by South Asian Muslims in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham. Such political maneuvers are all identified as core components of colourblind racism by Bonilla-Silva (2006). The riots represented an opportunity for New Labour both to impose the more inclusive sense of national identity that it had pledged too, and to address the systemic racism that the Race Relations (Amendment) Act of 2000 had indicated a commitment towards, however superficially. In both of these instances New Labour has failed.

4.6 A key difference between the UK and US version of colourblind racism results from the endurance of the host/immigrant binary in the case of the former. This leads to a situation in which 'race' conscious policies are increasingly rejected on the grounds that they threaten social cohesion, while they are deemed instead to challenge individual rights and an inherent pre-existing egalitarianism in the US. I would argue that in the UK, an apparently benign particularism is more relevant than notions of 'abstract liberalism' (Bonilla-Silva 2006). This particularism presents itself as benign through a refusal to acknowledge the racialised imagining of national identity and common values upon which contemporary notions of citizenship are constructed. This indicates the importance to hold onto the distinction, despite their similar political and economic underpinnings, between 'racial Americanization' and 'Europeanisation' (Goldberg, 2008); However, this distinction should not obscure how New Labour's response to the 2001 riots demonstrates the increasing preeminence of colourblind racism in the UK, and how it has become the preserve of Labour as well as the New Right and the Conservatives. The differences between the US and the UK are a matter of inflection, with the tone of 'colourblind racism' being broadly similar in both

countries. While differences of racial formation exist, evident in the assertion of an 'abstract liberalism' in the US and the pursuit of a benign particularism in the UK, both share a tendency to naturalise racial inequalities, to minimize discussions of racism, and to draw upon a cultural racism that posits an essentialised conception of ethnic and racial difference as the primary basis of social division.

4.7 Contemporary racism within Europe demonstrates different histories of imperialism, colonisation, and immigration than the US, and also focuses on specific racial anxieties, primarily the Muslim figure of the Muslim in Europe, as Goldberg states. However, recognition of the applicability of colourblind racism to the UK context can ensure that considerations of material inequality resulting from systemic processes of exclusion remain a central area of attention within analyses of the contemporary politics of 'race', alongside the symbolic constructions of nation and national identity. This enables the similar political and economic trajectories that the UK shares with the US to be considered alongside the distinctive features of 'Racial Europeanisation' (Goldberg, 2008). Goldberg's regional distinction, while highlighting the different patterns of racial formation within the UK and the US, should not deflect attention away from the striking parallels between the two countries. In the wake of the 2001 riots, New Labour's rightward shift demonstrates the extent to which notions of colourblind racism as articulated by Bonilla-Silva are equally applicable in the context of the UK, as well as the US.

Acknowledgments

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