



Coronavirus and Race Attacks: Racial Violence and Racial Terror in Britain

“In our own time, the steady erosion of the inherited privileges of race has destabilised western identities and institutions – and it has unveiled racism as an enduringly potent political force, empowering volatile demagogues in the heart of the modern west... Today, as white supremacists feverishly build transnational alliances, it becomes imperative to ask, as Dubois did in 1910: ‘What is whiteness that one should so desire it?’”ⁱ

This paper explores the enduring phenomenon of racial violence against Blackⁱⁱ people in the White western world in general and in the United Kingdom in particular. This engages the historical antecedents of violence against Black people and the convergence of social phenomena such as race, class and gender in the everyday lived experiences of ordinary, everyday Black people. Our exploration begins its focus on the current racial violence, engendered by the *coronavirus pandemic*, which has dramatically increased in Britain and the White western world. We place this phenomenon within the broader context of racial terrorism and racist harassment and attacks against Black people, which have been historically endemic to British society, and the wider western world in general. In our review, we see that current manifestation of racial violence is in fact a continuation of over 500 years of racial oppression and violence which has been central to concepts of White identity. We see that the coronavirus inspired violence is but the tip of the iceberg of a deep enduring legacy of violence against Black people and crucially, a crisis and fracture in foundation of the mirage of a multinational non-racial society.

The coronavirus pandemic has inspired and inflamed racism and racial attacks and harassment in the United Kingdom, placing people of East Asian originⁱⁱⁱ in the cross hairs of violence which has historically been directed at and targeted people of African Caribbean and South Asian origin. It has been argued by a British-Chinese Journalist that the “*coronavirus panic*” has made Britain a “*more hostile environment*”, with the virus being “*racialised as a Chinese virus*”.^{iv} Many people seem to have “*pinpointed the virus*” as a Chinese virus, with people “*seeming to have put a whole race behind it*”, exposing underlying prejudices towards Chinese people or anyone looking Chinese.^v Many of the racial attacks have been stimulated or triggered by a kind of “*maskaphobia*” or fear of masks, with the majority of victims wearing masks and being called “*virus*” when attacked.^{vi} This has led to an exodus of Chinese students in British universities

“fleeing back to China” amid concerns about the British government's “handling of the spread of the virus” and the increase in racist attacks “triggered by so called maskphobia”.^{vii}

This contagion of racist attacks and harassment of Chinese and East Asian people has in fact been taking place globally,^{viii} including the United States,^{ix} Australia,^x Germany,^{xi} Italy,^{xii} Belgium,^{xiii} Canada^{xiv} and India.^{xv} In France, despite laws outlawing the collection of racial and ethnic data,^{xvi} there is growing evidence of racial attacks and harassment against Chinese and East Asian peoples.^{xvii} Ironically, China itself has not been immune to the contagion racial violence, harassment and abuse in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, with Africans being targeted in an outbreak of a slew of race attacks and harassment in China.^{xviii}

In a British context, the Director of London Services at Stop Hate UK, Mike Ainsworth, has indicated that his organisation has seen a *“spike in hate crimes and incidents”* being reported by Asian communities and individuals in the UK, with a *“significant increase”* in calls to his organisation's help line from the Chinese community, with incidents ranging from *“name calling”*, to *“spitting”*, to *“someone being pushed in the road in the path of oncoming vehicles”*.^{xix} Ainsworth called the increase a *“modest but marked one”*, given that his organisation *“traditionally didn't receive calls whatsoever”* from the Chinese community.^{xx} He asserts that:

“There's a narrative that happens with hate crime from the perpetrator which says, ‘I am attacking you, but actually lots of people agree with me.’ Where hate crime becomes really dangerous is if victims start to believe that....I've talked to victims of hate crime in London, and one of the things they say is ‘being racially abused on the tube station is horrible, but having two hundred people stand there saying nothing is the bit that starts to really upset me and corrode my trust in society’.^{xxi}

This complicity is reflected in the failure of Prime Minister Boris Johnson to condemn this alarming rise of racial terrorism, with it being asserted that the *“lack of official condemnation”* is likely to come as a *“missed opportunity for many Asians living in the UK”*, a group that in 2017 reported the country's *highest level of discrimination*.^{xxii} It also represents a failure to tackle what *“both anecdotal evidence and research”* have long described as a *“serious but hidden and under-reported problem”* in British society, *“especially for the UK's Chinese population”*.^{xxiii} It has been pointed out that the Chinese community is *“prone to under-reporting”* incidents of racially motivated attacks due to a *“significant lack*

of confidence in the police".^{xxiv}

This failure of the British government to address the phenomenon of racial terrorism, race attacks and racial harassment is of particular concern, given the indication that, in the "*aftermath of the EU referendum*", there was a marked increase in incidents of racist abuse,^{xxv} which "*began to be shared on social media almost immediately*", with "*long-established advocacy and campaigning organisations*" also noting "*sharp increases*" in the number of incidents being reported to them, as well as requests for support in a "*hostile and racially charged Britain*".^{xxvi} Similarly, Bristol-based Stand Against Racism and Inequality (SARI) have revealed that more people had been approaching it for advice, with another organization, Just West Yorkshire having called for an audit of "*race hate crime arrangements*" because of "*concerns about the response to violence and abuse in the region*".^{xxvii} Research by the Institute of Race Relations of some 134 post-Brexit incidents, the majority of which were "*incidents of racist abuse*", including "*physical assaults, arson attacks, death threats and stabbings*" with several people being "*hospitalised*", with the "*most frequent targets*" being "*European migrants*", particularly "*eastern European migrants*" and "*Muslims*". But there were also were "*incidents against Black people*" and "*Jewish people*". People were "*singled out for attack*" on the basis of "*speaking a foreign language*", or "*presumptions about their 'right' to be here*" with children being among those who "*received abuse*", sometimes "*traveling to or from school*".^{xxviii}

This official ambivalence is nothing new, as it has been earlier indicated that "*too many people in power*" condemn racism because they "*pass it off*" as the actions of an "*insecure, badly-educated and thuggish minority*", with verbal and physical abuse being treated "*almost like an act of nature*" or some "*inexplicable force*", the "*explosive reaction of inadequate individuals*". But when "*laws, policies and procedures*" are "*related back*" to explain the "*baseline for hateful acts*", British legislators have not been "*so keen to listen*".^{xxix} More crucially, it has been contended that the "*spike in race hatred*" has had a "*direct impetus*" from the "*divisive approach to race, religion and migration*" which is now "*official policy*" and that, if a "*hostile environment is embedded politically*", why should we be "*surprised*" when it "*takes root culturally*".^{xxx} Hate crimes are intricately linked to the "*culture*" of British society, with it being possible to trace a relationship between "*hate, media frameworks, government policy and institutional practices*".^{xxxi}

It has been asserted that the "*dominant narrative of racist violence*" following the referendum consequently becomes one of "*individualised hate, divorced from*

any political context” and that, “*at best*”, the context is the “*language of the referendum itself*”.^{xxxii} In this respect, racist violence was generally framed simply as part of a “*spike*” following the referendum, which in turn portrayed racism as some kind of “*aberration in an otherwise tolerant*” country, a sentiment “*echoed again and again*” by “*political figures and criminal justice representatives*”, and “*reproduced in the media*”.^{xxxiii} Burnett contends that, without in any way “*downplaying*” the level of racist abuse and violence following the referendum, its “*roots*” have to be sought in the way that a “*much broader political context*”, including the “*policies and practices*” of successive governments, had been its “*pump primer*”. But “*unable or unwilling*” to acknowledge this, political figures have “*articulated*” racist violence as the “*domain of isolated thugs’ or ‘yobs*” with the implications of this being that racism becomes defined as something “*rooted in the actions of a few*”, often already “*marginalised*” communities.^{xxxiv}

During the Referendum campaign, a report by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) found a “*number of areas of concern*” over “*political discourse and hate speech*”, as well as “*violent racial and religious attacks*”.^{xxxv} The ECRI Chair, Christian Ahlund, pointed out that it is no coincidence that racist violence is on the rise in the UK at the same time as there were “*worrying examples*” of intolerance and hate speech in the “*newspapers, online and even among politicians*”.^{xxxvi} The commission noted “*considerable intolerant political discourse in the UK*”, particularly focusing on “*immigration, discrimination against Roma, Gypsies and Travellers*”, and a “*spike in online abuse and violent racist incidents*”.^{xxxvii} The ECRI report singled out statements made by Mr Cameron during his tenure as Prime Minister as examples of degrading terms towards refugees that “*contribute needlessly to an increase in xenophobic sentiment*” and joined human rights groups in condemning his description of asylum seekers risking their lives to reach the UK as a “*swarm*” in 2015.^{xxxviii} The report also criticised Nigel Farage and the UKIP Party for comments claiming there was “*public concern*” about immigration partly because “*people believe*” there are some Muslims who want to form a “*fifth column and kill us*”.^{xxxix} The ECRI also condemned some British media outlets, particularly tabloid newspapers, for “*offensive, discriminatory and provocative terminology*”.^{xl}

In order to place this reality in proper context, it is important to trace the origins of racial terror and wider racism to its seminal roots in the early eighteenth century, when Britain had emerged as the “*biggest and most prosperous*” slave trading nation in the world and the “*number one slave carrier for European countries*”.^{xli} Lorraine White points out that the development of racism in its

“modern sense” traces its origins to the ‘role’ slavery played in the “rise of capitalism”. She indicates that it was during this period that all kinds of “pseudo-scientific theories” were put forward to justify the brutalities of slavery. These theories purported that Black people were “inferior beings”, that Africans were in the “late stages of the evolution line”, that they were “half man and half ape, primitive, inferior and without intellect”, with the use of science to “legitimise and justify slavery” paving the way for racism to become a “lasting tool of capitalist exploitation”.^{xliii}

Within this paper whilst not disputing older confirmation, we evidence clearly that racial violence is a phenomenon that has existed in Britain since at least the end of World War One^{xliiii} and that racial attacks and harassment against the Black community have remained a pervasive and constant feature of British society to the present day.^{xliv}

After World War one, in which people from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean enlisted to fight for Britain, a number of Black people, primarily sailors, settled in the “port towns” of London, Liverpool, Bristol, Cardiff, Glasgow and Hull.^{xlv} Many of these Black settlers were soon confronted with extreme prejudice, discrimination and racist violence.^{xlvi} 1919 provided a flash point of racial terrorism which has become known as the “Red Summer”. It has been pointed out that Liverpool may have been the “epicentre of the violence” but it was in Glasgow that the contagion of racist violence and unrest that “plagued” 1919 began,^{xlvii} from January 23 to 30, when the *British Seafarers Union and the National Sailors’ and Fireman’s Union (NSFU)* held “anti-immigrant” labour meetings blaming foreigners for “undercutting” white British employment. It has been pointed out that, at one dock, in January 1919, Black and White seamen, waiting to see if they would be hired, started “jostling each other” and soon a fight broke out and spilled into the yard, with White bystanders joining in, using “knives and makeshift weapons” to attack Black labourers.^{xlviii}

This signaled the beginning of a long hot “red summer” of racial violence in the British coastal seaports of Liverpool, Cardiff, Newport, Barry, Glasgow, South Shields, London, Hull and Salford, reaching its peak in 1919, with racist White thugs attacking Black workers, their families and their communities.^{xlix} This has been described as one of Britain's “most violent periods of racial upheaval in the 20th Century^l and reflected a “global wave” of political violence throughout Europe, the United States, the Caribbean and South Africa in the year following the Armistice.^{li} In May 1919, the *Strangers Home for Asiatic Seamen*, in West India Dock Road in the Isle of Dogs in London, was surrounded by a hostile

crowd and Black people were subjected to racial abuse, with it being necessary to “*bar the doors*” of the home at times.^{lii} Around this time, in Cardiff, a Malay boarding house and a shop of one Abdul Satar were “*devastated*”,^{liii} which was followed with three nights of racial terror in June, with murder and mayhem on the streets of the City, in the wake of which three people were killed, hundreds injured and homes looted.^{liv}

Liverpool, one of the areas of concentration of Black population, was said to have experienced the most “*ferocious and sustained*” rioting in June 1919. Charles Wooton, an African Caribbean youth, was lynched by the savage White mob.^{lv} Liverpool’s rioting crowd reached up to 10,000 and, out of fear from their safety, 700 Black people were temporarily removed from their homes seeking police protection.^{lvi} Black workers were also fired during the riots, while black, Arab, and Chinese homes and businesses were damaged or set ablaze by the angry white rioters.^{lvii}

By mid-June, Black people in Salford were attacked and their properties damaged or destroyed.^{lviii} Police intervention in the riots was also slow, with them often standing by and allowing the violence to proceed unhindered. However, when Black people “*retaliated*” in self defence against white rioters, the police intervened and arrested them. At the end of the riots, five people were killed, many were injured, and at least 250 were arrested.^{lix} Hunter points out that further rioting also ensued in 1920 and 1921 and that “*sustained racism*”, “*post-war economic hardship*”, and the “*reclassification*” of Black people and Arabs as “*aliens*” with the “*1920 and 1925 immigration mandates*”, further made life difficult for African, African Caribbean, Arabs, and Asian people, particularly in seaport areas after the 1919 riots.^{lx}

It has been indicated that, in the aftermath of the June riots, the British government, which had been “*monitoring Black communities*”, intensified its “*repatriation scheme*”, with the move to repatriate colonial citizens in Britain being launched in February 1919.^{lxi} However, after the June riots, the government began removing colonial citizens from Britain out of “*fear of a Black backlash*.” Between 1919 and 1921, an estimated 3,000 black and Arab seamen and their families were removed from Britain under the “*repatriation scheme*”. Shipping companies that employed Caribbean people also “*aided the state*” by firing black labourers and returning them to the West Indies.^{lxii}

In the United States, between late 1918 and later 1919, there were ten “*major race riots*”, “*dozens of minor, racially charged clashes*”, and almost 100 “*lynchings*”, as White Americans tried to “*enforce the continued subjugation of Black Americans*” in the postwar era.^{lxiii} Again, as in Britain, there was apparent complicity of law enforcement agencies in the reign of terror being perpetuated against Black people. It has been indicated that in almost every case, law enforcement either “*failed to quell*” white violence, “*sided with white attackers*”, “*disproportionately disarmed and arrested*” Black defenders, or “*blamed*” Black people for the violence. Key federal agencies, particularly the “*Military Intelligence Division*” and the “*Bureau of Investigation*” (forerunner of the FBI), “*reacted*” to the Red Summer by Intelligence officers, certain that socialists and communists were “*urging*” African Americans to take up arms, “*mistakenly*” believed that a revolution was imminent and that that Black people across the country were “*conspiring to attack whites*”. In their eyes, the “*Red Summer was a Red Scare*”. Ignoring the indisputable evidence that white mobs were initiating the violence, the Military Intelligence Division and the Bureau of Investigation began working with local authorities and gun dealers across the country to “*block the sale of weapons to African Americans*”.^{lxiv} This paranoia that has consumed American law enforcement is reflected in the development of Cointelpro, a program designed to subvert Black leadership and to destabilize the Black community.^{lxv} It is also reflected in the countless unarmed Black youth shot, brutalized and killed by law enforcement officers, with Black youth viewed as a “*menacing threat to be eliminated*”.^{lxvi}

Despite the concerted effort to repatriate Black People, migration from the Caribbean and South Asia increased in the wake of the end of World War Two, when Britain had a significant demand for labour due to the toll that the war had on the British population which had been significantly diminished in the conflict. Black people were actively recruited to fill key posts in the transport industry, factories and the NHS. The immigrants from the Caribbean became known as “*the Windrush Generation*”.^{lxvii} With this flow of migration from the Caribbean, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, there was a substantial increase of the Black population in Britain, with relatively large concentrations in London, Bradford, Leicester, Birmingham, Manchester and other towns.^{lxviii} Despite the crucial utility of this Black presence in the rebuilding of Britain, so diminished by the war, Black people continued to be subjected to racial terror, attacks and harassment, including attacks by thugs known as “*Teddy Boys*”, whose acts of terrorism against the Black communities were inspired by organizations such as Oswald Mosely's Union Movement and other xenophobic right wing groups, including the White Defence League.^{lxix} These right wing political groups sought

power on a platform of racial intolerance, with the “*Union for British Freedom*” establishing a presence in Notting Hill and the founder of the “*British Union of Fascists*,” Sir Oswald Mosely, rallying the local population with the cry of “*Keep Britain White*” at meetings in West London.^{lxx} Despite an atmosphere of “*menace and fear*” pervading the area,^{lxxi} with repeated concerns being raised by Caribbean community leaders about this “*flourishing prejudice*” and the potential it had to develop into conflict, they were ignored by government officials who took no action.^{lxxii} Violence broke out on August 20, 1958, in what has been described as “*short but vicious*” outbreak of “*anti-Black rioting*”,^{lxxiii} with an explosion of attacks on Black people by rampaging White mobs. It began with property owned by “*Caribbean immigrants*” being vandalized and the owners’ subjected to physical harassment. The racial terrorism escalated on August 24, when nine “*Teddy Boys*” attacked five black men in Shepherd’s Bush, and Notting Hill, leaving three seriously injured. On August 30, a mob of some 400 white youths, some armed with “*iron bars and butcher’s knives*” chased the Caribbean population in the area. It has been stated that “*petrol bombs and milk bottles*” were “*launched as missiles*”. There were “*counter-attacks*” by black youths, “*similarly armed*”, in self-defense. The rioting lasted for a week, but the “*wave of unrest*” spread up to the Midlands city of Nottingham, where there was rioting for two weeks.^{lxxiv}

The riots sparked an ongoing debate about race discrimination and the levels of immigration to urban areas. In 2002, it was “*discovered*” that contemporary government commentary on the events dismissed assertions that the attacks were racially motivated, preferring instead to frame the disturbance as “*hooliganism from both sides*”.^{lxxv} The authorities were similarly reluctant to acknowledge the Nottingham events as being “*racially motivated*”. The Chief Constable at the time, “*Captain Athelstan Popkess*”, dismissed claims that the rioting was caused by prejudice and the Nottingham Constabulary published a report as late as 1989 that blamed “*generic hooliganism for the violence*”.^{lxxvi} This reflects, a “*chronic reluctance to recognise the racism that pervades every level of British society*”,^{lxxvii} which is a consequence of what has been described as the “*socially destructive impact of neoliberalism and government policies*”.^{lxxviii}

Rather than the racial outrages being the isolated acts of a rogue minority, it is crucial to consider that the “*thugs*” possessed an extraordinarily large vocabulary of racist language inspired by the rhetoric of Enoch Powell, extreme right wing organizations like the National Front and popular television programs like “*Till Death Do Us Part*” and “*Love Thy Neighbour*” and the pervasive White

racism of *Jim Crow* in the United States.^{lxxxix} Benjamin Bowling, recounting his experience growing up in Britain, indicates that among his bullies “*repertoire*” were words like “*Sambo*” “*Coon*”, “*Boy*”, “*Wog*” and “*Nigger*”, with such verbal abuse being accompanied by “*kicks, jostles and punches*”.^{lxxx} He indicates that a “*core idea*” of the “*new right political discourse*” is that the British people “*constitute a race*” or “*ethnic group*” of which “*non White dark skinned people*” from “*Britain's former colonies and elsewhere*”, in this formulation, have no “*legitimate claim to belong to the island*” or to live on it.^{lxxxxi}

This mindset, which views “*racialism as patriotism*”, advocates the “*humane resettlement or repatriation*” of “*socially, culturally racially incompatible people*” to their countries of “*ethnic origin*”. This was hardly the prejudice of a rogue element but reflected the ethos of the wider White British society. Bowling asserts that the “*key race issue*” in the 1960s and 1970s was “*which political party was most likely to keep immigrants out*” and that, as late as 1978, one in five electors regarded immigration as “*one of the two most urgent problems*” in the country, with the “*adoption of a strong stance*” against immigration seen to be the “*main reason for the success of the Conservative Party from 1978 onwards*”.^{lxxxii} In the wake of the racial violence confronting Black people, their presence was viewed as “*the problem*”, and this desire for ethnic cleansing was evident in the repatriations after the 1919 racial terrorism inflicted on the Black community and was reflected in the enactment of restrictive immigration legislation, which placed severe limits of the flow of Black migration to the country. It has been argued that these enactments all sent a “*misleading message*” that Britain could not support any increase in the number of migrants, and that the “*indigenous population*” had to be protected from an “*imagined migrant threat*”.^{lxxxiii}

There is a growing body of research which demonstrates that successive governments have attempted to “*regulate and eventually halt*” the arrival of Black migrants through legislation and “*other means*”.^{lxxxiv} As we are advised by John Solomos, “*supposed problems*” created by the arrival of “*too many Black migrants*” have been used to “*legitimize*” legislative measures which have had the effect of “*institutionalizing controls*” on Black migrants, thereby excluding potential migrants on the basis of the colour of their skin.^{lxxxv} In the post-World War Two period, there was a relatively liberal attitude to the arrival of White European workers, which “*contrasted sharply*” with the arrival of Black colonial workers, who were “*British subjects*”, with both the Labour Government of 1945-1951 and the Conservative Governments throughout the 1950s considering various ways to “*stop or reduce*” the number of Black migrants arriving and settling in Britain.^{lxxxvi} In this regard, the period 1948-1962 involved the State in

“complex political and ideological racialization” of immigration policy.^{lxxxvii} As pointed out by Solomos:

“Although much publicity was given to the arrival of 437 Jamaicans on the Empire Windrush in May 1948, and subsequent arrival of large groups of West Indian workers, the focus on coloured immigration helped to obscure the fact that the majority of immigrants continued to come from the Irish Republic, from white Commonwealth countries and other European countries”.^{lxxxviii}

Race Relations became intricately linked with concerns about the migration of Black people to Britain. In this regard, it has been pointed out that the State “accepted responsibility” for “promoting the integration” of those already in the country, but only while moving towards a “stricter regime” to keep others out.^{lxxxix} This ethos is reflected in Roy Hattersley’s “infamous” declaration that “integration without control is impossible, but control without integration is indefensible”.^{xc} Immigration control was seen to be “essential to integration measures” and it was a move to “manage domestic race relations” while “legitimising the institutionalisation of racist restrictions” on entry and “vigorous efforts” to deport those who broke “conditions attached to their entry”.^{xc} This ethos underscores the ever evolving landscape of British immigration laws and the current “Windrush crisis”, in the scandal of the disenfranchisement and disempowerment of Black people by successive governments, in tandem with the discriminatory implementation and abuse of Immigration law, to deport and otherwise disadvantage many of the Windrush generation and their descendants.^{xcii}

In this context, the British Government instituted race relations legislation alongside immigration enactments, to “rectify the patent discrimination against Black migrants from the Caribbean, with the **The Race Relations Act 1965** being passed shortly after the **Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962**, the **Race Relations Act 1968**, passed alongside the **Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1968**, the **Race Relations Act 1976** in tandem with the **Immigration Act 1976** and the **Immigration (Variation of Leave) Order 1976**, the **Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000** with the **Immigration Act 2006** and the **Equality Act 2010** enacted shortly after the **Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008**. Despite this focus on race relations, race attacks, violence and harassment have persisted against Black people unabated to the present day.^{xciii}

Analysis by the Institute of Race Relations indicates that in 2013/14, there were 47,571 “*racist incidents*”, an average of 130 per day, recorded by the police in England and Wales.^{xciv} The statistics also show that, in the same period, there were 44,480 “*hate crimes*” recorded by police. Of these, 37,484 were recorded as “*race hate crime*” and 2,273 as religious hate crimes. Further, Home Office statistics, demonstrate that, from 2012-2015, there has been, on average, 106,000 racially motivated ‘hate crimes’ per year.^{xcv} Of concern, is the indication in the 2012/13 and 2014/15 Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) that victims of hate crime are “*less likely to think the police had treated them fairly or with respect*”, compared with victims of CSEW crime overall. Of hate crime incidents (*not exclusively those motivated by ‘race*) reported to the police, 59 per cent of victims “*believed the police treated them fairly*”, compared with 81 per cent of CSEW crime overall.^{xcvi}

The Institute of Race Relations research indicates that in the twenty years after April 1993 that there were at least 105 racially motivated murders in the UK. Of these, the vast majority (85) were in England, with five in Wales, 12 in Scotland and 3 in Northern Ireland. Within England, 28 murders took place in London. 20 people were killed whilst at work as taxi-drivers, as shopkeepers and at pubs or clubs. Whereas the majority of the murders that recorded by the Institute of Race Relations involved attacks in the street, 8 came from attacks on people in their homes. Of these, several were arson attacks.

According to the Home Office, the number of hate crimes reported to the police in England and Wales has more than doubled since 2013, with the majority of recorded hate crime offences being racial in nature, with 78,991 and an increase of 11 % in 2018. 47 % of religious hate crime offences (3,530) targeted Muslim people, with religious hate crimes against Jewish people doubling to 18 % (1,326).^{xcvii}

However, in independent research by faith and community groups, it has been indicated that the Home Office figures “*potentially showed only the tip of the iceberg*”, after 7 in 10 participants said “*they never reported hate crimes*” to the police.^{xcviii} The independent research indicates that, in 2018, there were 103,379 hate crime offences recorded by the police, the majority of which (76%) were race related. More than half (54%) of the hate crimes recorded by the police were for public order offences, a third (36%) involved violence, while 5% were recorded as criminal damage and arson.^{xcix}

Twelve per cent of hate crime offences were estimated to have more than one motivation, with the majority of these being both race and religion. In response to this alarming data, the executive director of Citizens UK, Matthew Bolton, stated that:

“Political, media and institutional decision-makers need an action plan to stop the toxic mix of scare stories on social media and a divisive political environment, which is providing a breeding ground for hate”.^c

Dr Farhan Samanani, an academic who oversaw the study, indicates that an example was the use of the word “*letterboxes*” by hate crime perpetrators after Boris Johnson had used it in a Daily Telegraph column to describe women wearing the burqa.^{ci} In his article, Johnson called the burqa “*oppressive*” and said that women who wore it looked like “*letterboxes and bank robbers*”. Despite the fact that this patently racist comment by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom has inspired and accentuated a spate of Islamophobia and hate crimes in the wider community and his being challenged in Parliament over the comments, prior to the general election, he has refused to apologize for his racially tinged injudicious language, declaring that “*So much of this stuff is disinterred with a view to distracting from the basic issues of this election*”.^{cii} Boris Johnson has made similar racist and sexist comments, including calling Black people “*piccaninnes*” with “*watermelon smiles*” and women being “*naturally fickle*” and portraying some as “*feeble*”, “*blubbing blonds*” and “*collapsing with emotion*”.^{ciii} Incredulously, Boris Johnson brushed aside his comments as “*wholly satirical*” and “*taken out of context*”.^{civ} These racist comments follow a pattern of racist language, as in 2004, when he published a novel entitled “*Seventy Two Virgins*”^{cv} in which he utilised a number of racist stereotypes including references to “*hooked nosed Kosovar Muslims*”, “*Jews who control the media*”, “*half caste characters*”, a “*Chinaman*”, “*hunter gatherer African immigrants*” and a number of other “*racist tropes*”.^{cvi}

This pattern of racist antecedents is again reflected when one of his advisers, Andrew Sabisky, was forced to resign after it was revealed that he had made past comments to the effect that Black people have a “*lower IQ than whites*”, and that “*enforced contraception could prevent creating a permanent underclass*”.^{cvi} Aggravating the situation, the British Prime Minister refused to indicate that he was against “*eugenics*”.^{cvi}

As the “*Grime star*” Stormzy has pointed out the UK is “*definitely racist*” and Boris Johnson has made it “*worse*”. He asserted that the Prime Minister was a

“figurehead” whose comments “encourage racism”. He declared that:

*“If the top person can openly say this racist thing – the ‘piccaninnes’ remarks, ‘watermelon smiles’ comparing Muslim women to a letterbox – if that is our figurehead, the top man, the leader we have to follow, and he openly says these things, he encourages hate among others....Since Mr Johnson entered Downing Street, racism in Britain was worse as people who hold racist views felt emboldened to express them...Before people had to hide their racism. If you felt something bad about Black people, about Muslims you had to shut up. Now these people have the confidence to come out in public to say everything. This is scary to me, that scares the s*** out of me”.^{cxix}*

In response to the comments, the then Chancellor, Sajid Javid, in a *“pithy reply”* stated on Twitter that *“the rapper is 100% wrong”*.^{cx} In similar damning comments, *“award winning rapper”* Dave has accused Boris Johnson of being a *“racist”* during a *“politically charged performance onstage”* at the 2020 Brit Awards. Performing a *“reworked song”* ‘Black’ from the album ‘Psychodrama’, which explores the experience of Black Britons *“while celebrating Black excellence”*, he chanted that *“it is racist whether or not it feels racist, the truth is our Prime Minister is a real racist”*.^{cx} He proceeded to *“highlight the disparity”* in the media’s treatment of the Duchess of Sussex and the Duchess of Cambridge, he declared that:

“Now if you don’t wanna get it, then you’re never going to get it. How the news treats Kate versus how they treat Meghan.....Equality is a right, it doesn’t deserve credit”.^{cxii}

He called for *“way less hatred, more conservation”* and criticising the Government’s handling of the *“Grenfell Tower Tragedy”* and the *“Windrush Scandal”*, declaring:

“We want rehabilitation, now that would be amazing, but Grenfell victims still need accommodation and we still need support for the Windrush generation “.^{cxiii}

In response to these damning comments, Home Secretary, Priti Patel, denied that Boris Johnson was a racist. In response to a question about Dave’s comments on Sky News, she asserted that:

“That’s utter nonsense, it really is. I don’t know what those comments are based on ... He is not a racist at all. I just think those comments are highly inappropriate”.^{cxiv}

However, Shadow Home Secretary, Diane Abbott, stated:

"I thought it was extraordinary how that resonated with so many people online and on social media. And coming days after the Government was embarrassed by recruiting a policy adviser who thought that Black people were less intelligent than white people, I think the Government has to be really careful how it's perceived by Black and minority ethnic people....I think that the Prime Minister needs to be much more careful about how he is seen by Black and minority ethnic voters. It's partly his record, the kind of things that he wrote in the past, but also the kind of things he's going forward to do....Being Prime Minister is about leadership and he needs to offer leadership on issues of social cohesion".^{cxv}

Similarly, the MP for Brent Central, Dawn Butler, made reference to the *"enormous responsibility of this Tory Government to stand up against racism and sort out their own party"*.^{cxvi} She asserted that:

"Sadly, the Tories are governing the country, which means they must set the highest of examples – yet Johnson and those defending him have failed this test with their own behaviour. The media also bear some responsibility too – and they, like Johnson and his party, are failing".^{cxvii}

As we are advised by Teun A. van Dijk, *"racism remains one of the most pernicious problems of white society"*.^{cxviii} Though often *"less blatantly and overtly"* than in the past, it continues to *"permeate"* racial and ethnic relations in Europe, North America and other westernized countries.^{cxix} Resistance and protests against this *"social, economic and cultural oppression"* of minorities have brought about *"limited civil rights gains"* during the past two decades, but the *"fundamental relations of inequality"* have hardly changed.^{cxx} van Dijk contends:

"Indeed, one of the main strategies of the ideological framework keeping white dominance in place is precisely to deny or to play down the prevalence of racism and to blame its victims for the persistent inequalities that are its outcome. Many white people may no longer believe in white racial supremacy. They may in principle even endorse values of social justice. However, massive legal and scholarly evidence, as well as the available accounts of the personal experiences of minorities, also show that white people and institutions still engage in the many daily practices that implement the system of white dominance, and seldom challenge its underlying beliefs and ideologies...This continued existence of the

ideological and structural dimensions of racism presupposes complex processes of reproduction...Discourse, language use and communication play a prominent part in this reproduction of the ethnic consensus of white groups. This is particularly true for all forms of elite discourse, including that of the mass media in general, and that of the daily press in particular....Ethnic and racial minority groups always have been, and continue to be, portrayed negatively or stereotypically by the press, for example, as a problem, if not as a threat. Similarly, ethnic minority group leaders and institutions are still considered less credible sources, while minority journalists are seriously discriminated against in hiring, promotion and story assignments. Again, in these respects the press is hardly different from most other institutions and organizations in white society".^{cxxi}

More crucially, it is important to consider that the official reaction in criminalising the Black victims as hooligans reflects the stereotyping of young Black men as criminals, which has been a defining feature of the British criminal justice system. It has been asserted that the “*underlying logic of control*” may explain why police powers were exempt from the Race Relations Act between 1965 and 2000. The British police were the “*de facto guarantors*” of the security of the general population in the face of what were perceived to be the dangers of post-war immigration. To make the police liable, in law, “*to be held to account*” for allegations of racism and racial discrimination might have undermined them in this role.^{cxxii} The “*exemption*” of policing illustrates the “*basic contradiction*” in the government’s race relations policy. On one hand, it “*accepted*” that racial prejudice and discrimination were “*social ills*” that had to be legislated against and that the “*exclusion*” of a large section of society from access to basic public services “*purely on the grounds of colour*” was unacceptable, while, on the other hand, the government continued to use “*racist criteria*” to police the entry of Commonwealth citizens into the country and relied upon the police to carry out immigration control on the “*basis of these criteria*”.^{cxxiii}

The “*effect of this contradiction*” has been instrumental in shaping the “*domestic policing of minority ethnic communities*”. Paul Gordon indicates that, ‘since it is impossible to tell a “*legal*” immigrant from an “*illegal*” one, the “*answer*” is to suspect all who “*appear*” to be immigrants. Therefore, the police, “*under the imperatives of the state*”, use their powers “*disproportionately*” to stop, search, question, and detain black people. In this frame of reference, Black people in Britain were not to be “*protected*” but ominously British society was to be “*protected from black people*”.^{cxxiv} It has been pointed out that:

“Using powers in the Immigration Act 1971 (which drew a distinction between those immigrants with a right to work but no right of settlement) to detain and question those suspected of breaching immigration law, the police carried out extensive ‘passport raid’ operations on workplaces, places of entertainment and homes in search of ‘illegal immigrants’ in the 1970s and 1980s. The level of harassment borne by the black community led the general secretaries of the Transport and General Workers’ Union and the General and Municipal Workers’ Union to compare life for black people in 1980s Britain with apartheid in South Africa. ‘Sus’, in its targeting of black youths, was an important part of the process by which the police criminalised black people through disproportionate use of these powers. In comparison with white people, black people are six times more likely to be stopped and searched while Asian people are twice as likely to be. PACE gives the police the power to stop and search but does not penalise actions taken without these powers (i.e. a stop without reasonable suspicion). While a person who refuses to submit to a stop and search commits a criminal offence (obstruction of a police officer in the course of his duty), the legislation does not penalise police officers who act without the law. The police exemption from the provisions of ‘race relations’ legislation meant that racially discriminatory acts could not be challenged on grounds of discrimination, and the use of stop and search to criminalise minority ethnic communities continued well after the passage of the first two Race Relations Acts. Figures presented to Parliament in 1980 indicated a rise in documented incidents of racist violence against black victims from 2690 in 1975 to 3827 in 1979.....real numbers are likely to be higher as research by the London Region of the West Indian Standing Conference and the Runnymede Trust noted the police tendency to play down attacks as mere delinquency, and to dismiss or deny the racist motives. The general picture of the police response to racist violence is a failure to provide adequate protection”.^{cxxv}

In 1978, a report by the Bethnal Green and Stepney Trades Council stated that Bengali victims of attacks “*frequently expressed no confidence*” in the police, considering them to be “*indifferent or actively prejudiced*”.^{cxxvi} A Home Office study of race attacks in 1981 revealed that Black people were “*between 50 and 60 times more likely*” than white people to be victims of racial attacks.^{cxxvii} Despite the alarming statistics in these reports, they had little, if any, “*demonstrable effect*”.^{cxxviii} In a survey by the Runnymede Trust a year after the Home Office study, to “*assess its impact*”, it was concluded that police forces had not yet shown that they “*fully understood the significance and seriousness of racial violence*”.^{cxxix}

Critically, It has been argued that it would be hard to “*overstate*” the effect of police “*action or inaction*” on relations between the police and Black people and that in the eyes of many Black people, the police have “*singularly failed*” to afford them the basic protection a police force is supposed to offer the public, while at the same time it has enforced the law in a biased manner against them.^{cxxx} In this respect, “*victims of racial attacks*”, as “*consumers*” of police services, continued to be less satisfied with the police response,^{cxxxix} with the “*most common complaints*” amongst those dissatisfied with police response being that the police “*did not do enough*”, “*failed to keep the victim informed*”, and “*seemed uninterested*”.^{cxxxix} Further, there were “*indications*” that many police officers were “*unsympathetic*” to the victims of racist violence, “*tended to blame them*” for their own “*misfortune*”, and “*minimised*” the role of racism in the violent attacks that targeted minority communities.^{cxxxiii}

Bowling, Iyer and Solanke point out that failure to bring police powers into the “*ambit*” of anti-discrimination legislation, between 1965 and 2000, allowed police the “*impunity to discriminate*”, with no law which required them to use their powers “*fairly*”, either in their response to racist violence or in the use of the power to stop and search.^{cxxxiv} Faced with this dire reality, “*Minority ethnic communities*” were forced to defend themselves against racist violence and were “*subjected to discriminatory treatment*” at the hands of authorities. Police failures to respond to victims from a “*minority ethnic background*” or to protect them from racist violence is a “*clear case of a failure in service provision*”, one that could not be “*remedied by law*” since they were “*excluded*” from the scope of race relations legislation.^{cxxxv}

The critical breaking point was the Lawrence Inquiry, chaired by Sir William Macpherson, into the racist killing of a Black teenager, Stephen Lawrence, by a racist mob in the Isle of Dogs in London. The report by Macpherson concluded that the investigation into the murder was “*marred*” by “*professional incompetence*”, “*institutional racism*” and a “*failure of leadership*”.^{cxxxvi} Institutional racism was reflected in the “*collective failure*” of an organization to provide an “*appropriate and professional service*” to people because of their “*colour, culture, or ethnic origin*”, which was seen in “*discriminatory attitudes and behavior*”, and in processes amounting to “*discrimination*” through “*prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping*”, which had the effect of “*disadvantaging minority ethnic people*”.^{cxxxvii} The inquiry recommended that the “*full force*” of Race Relations legislation should apply to all police officers, and that Chief Officers of Police should be made “*vicariously liable*” for the acts and omissions of their officers “*relevant to that legislation*”.^{cxxxviii}

The Government accepted this recommendation, bringing the police within the “*scope of anti-discrimination law*” with the **Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000**, which placed a “*general duty*” on “*specified public authorities*” to promote race equality, and, “*importantly*”, made Chief Officers of Police “*vicariously liable*” for acts of discrimination carried out by officers under their direction and control, providing for compensation, costs or expenses awarded as a result of a claim to be paid out from police funds. It placed a “*positive duty*” on Chief Officers of Police to ensure that officers under their direction and control did not racially discriminate.^{cxxxix} It has been pointed out that the development of anti-discrimination legislation and policies “*aimed at promoting greater equality of opportunity*” for all British citizens has been a “*contradictory process*”. At the outset, race relations’ legislation was part of a “*dual strategy*” that combined “*racist immigration laws*” with “*measures to reduce discrimination*”.^{cxl}

Consequently, the police found themselves in the “*paradoxical position*” of being required to enforce racist laws yet somehow expected to be “*guardians of fairness and equality*”.^{cxli} In this regard, Bowling, Iyer and Solanke contend that, that the police were “*exempt*” from anti-discrimination legislation for the first 35 years of the Race Relations Act. Much damage was done in the two generations between 1965 and 2000, and the legacy of impunity can be seen in “*persistent disproportionality*” in the use of police powers, “*criminalised minority ethnic communities*” and a “*troubling lack of confidence and trust*” in the police.^{cxlii} They point out that the Lawrence Inquiry may have “*set the context*” for policy change, and **The Race Relations (Amendment) Act (2000)** can be seen as “*an important step forward*” but there is as yet little evidence that this law has “*contributed to change much*”. Rather, it is “*cultural and political change*” that has “*slowly begun to alter the way*” the police service functions in our society.^{cxliii} They question whether the law is “*too little too late*”, to reverse the “*iniquitous effects*” of half a century of discriminatory policing? If the “*full force*” of anti-discrimination legislation is “*insufficient*” to bring about “*fundamental change in police practice*”, how can the government, police leaders, lawyers and activists ensure that the “*police act with fairness, justice and equality*”?^{cxliv}

In essence the Police force has in many ways represented one of the faces of racial terrorism for the Black community. This is reflected in the alarming rate of deaths of Black people in custody, with a disproportionate number dying in police custody and by police shootings, with as many as 183 since 1990.^{cxlv} In the period 2002–2012, the statistics are even “*more striking*”^{cxlvi}: of 380 deaths in police custody in England and Wales (or as a result of contact with the police), 69 were from BME communities – 18 %.

The Institute of Race Relations in an analysis from its database of cases indicated that of the 509 cases of BME deaths in custody in “suspicious circumstances”, between 1991 and 2014, the majority, 348, took place in prison, 137 in police custody and 24 in immigration detention.^{cxlvii} One in three of the total deaths was as a result of “*self-harm*”, and in 64 cases the person was known to have “*mental health problems*”. “*Medical neglect*” was a contributory factor in 49 cases, and in 48 the “*use of force*” appears to have contributed to a person’s death.^{cxlviii} According to the Institute of Race Relations, of the 137 deaths in police custody, 126 were male, 11 were female, 78 were Black or Black British, and 31 were Asian or Asian British. Sixty-one % of all such deaths occurred in the London area: 51 people died while in a police station or cell; 49 died on the street; and 17 died in their homes. In terms of contributory factors to deaths in police custody, only 61 people had actually been arrested before their death; 9 had been detained under the Mental Health Act; 34 died following a police chase; and 6 died after a stop and search. The use of force contributed to the deaths of 39 people, and 29 deaths were linked to the use of physical restraint; 7 deaths were linked to the use of CS gas; and in 10 cases people died after falling from balconies after police had called at their homes. One of the most disturbing findings is how “*lessons are not being learned*”. The same mistakes regarding “*dangerous restraint techniques*” or the “*detention of the mentally ill*” are repeated over and over again, despite repeated recommendations from coroners at inquests or from official bodies such as the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman or the Independent Police Complaints Commission.^{cxlix}

Harmit Athwal and Jenny Bourne point out that it is true that no police officer has been successfully prosecuted over a BAME death in custody, but the last six months have seen two (unsuccessful) prosecutions. The first prosecution, mentioned above, was over the death of Azelle Rodney. Then, at the end of 2014, three G4S guards were prosecuted for and subsequently cleared of the manslaughter of Jimmy Mubenga, who died on board a plane at Heathrow in October 2010.^{cl} But the families of Rodney and Mubenga had to fight “*tooth and nail*” to see that charges were brought – they lodged a number of legal challenges, participated in hearings at the European Court of Human Rights, and challenged the Crown Prosecution Service over its failure to prosecute at lengthy inquest proceedings where “*unlawful killing verdicts*” were returned.^{cli}

In this socio-legal, political, sociological and historical frame of reference, the violence, attacks and harassment engendered by the Coronavirus pandemic, is seen not to be isolated anomalies, but rather as part of an ongoing pattern of

racial terrorism by White racist and the organs and institutions of the State, that has characterised the lives of non-White peoples in British society and indeed, in the societies of the White western world, for over five hundred years and underscores the inherent persistence of endemic institutional and structural racism, floating in a sea of historical amnesia and cognitive dissonance. In an American context, but equally relevant to our present discourse, it has been pointed out that viruses don't tend to discriminate against "*people of certain racial backgrounds*" but that people "*obviously*" can.^{cliii} Bruce Y Lee (2020) indicates that racism is "*kind of like bad body odor*" and that people can hide both for a while with some "*political correctness*" or some "*deodorant*". However, these things only "*cover up racism or body odor*" and never really gets rid of either.^{cliii} Lee contends that, when "*anti-Asian attitudes*" remain, it can only take a little event, such as a "*politician's rhetoric*", a "*stressful situation*", or even just a TV show to bring "*bullying and harassment*" back out into the open and that you see "*people's true natures under times of duress*".^{cliv}

In a similar vein, it has been asserted that there are the "*more obvious*" racist incidents that take place but that there are "*hidden types such as micro-aggressions*", "*implicit bias and prejudice*". Which all act as "*proxies for race and class*".^{clv} Here, Hussain argues that structural racism is the "*exertion of power and privilege based on race and class*" and that, when power and privilege "*dominate the boardrooms and influential positions*", it has a "*huge impact*" on working culture and on working people's lives.^{clvi}

In an Italian frame of reference, but highly pertinent to our discussion, it has been asserted that Coronavirus has become a "*political instrument*" reproducing the idea of racism as "*prejudice*" and another opportunity to use racism as a "*political instrument*".^{clvii} In this respect, it is essential to consider that something was "*triggered*" by the pandemic that is always "*latently*" there, "*under the surface*", which is this "*fear of the other*" and the idea that "*bad things come from elsewhere*".^{clviii} It also echoes "*old prejudices*", such as when in the 10th century, Europeans feared a so-called "*yellow peril*", brought about by "*primitive*" people with "*emerging global power*".^{clix}

As Nancy Spiegel and Tam Huynh point out, the COVID-19 pandemic has placed "*our families, communities and the world in a state of uncertainty*" and that, during "*times like these*", we must be "*especially vigilant*" in combating the "*age-old viruses of hate and prejudice*", which "*reassert*" themselves throughout history in "*times of fear*".^{clx} We see them on "*display*" as the COVID-19 pandemic is "*racialized and weaponized*", with a "*glance*" at the news or social media, and

you will see how “*hate and prejudice creeps*” into our daily lives, oftentimes without us even noticing. The language we use and the actions we take during this crisis will have “*lasting impacts*”. History teaches us that pandemics bring out the “*worst in some people*”.^{clxi} As we have seen in our review, it also engages deep seated endemic structural and institutional racist tropes which underscore modern British and White western societies and exposes the essence of the racist foundations underscoring the neo-liberal myth of multiracial and multicultural societies and the illusion of equality of opportunity.

As we are poignantly reminded by Aniruddah Pathak:

*“Thinking was I of this newest scare
That has stolen away people's dare—
The deadly virus COVID nineteen
For which we may soon find a vaccine.*

*But doubt I've of racism virus,
That has been one of most vicious,
Nor is there a vaccine known to fight,
Nor may one sooner come to fair light.*

*Nor ever an antibiotic
To defeat the devil's lethal kick—
A virus that's proved as dangerous
As has been one of most infectious—*

*A virus that took its roots so firm,
Thanks our endemic indifference
To take a solid action at once,
This virus alas of racism!”*^{clxii}

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