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'Muslim is the New Black': New Ethnicities and New Essentialisms in the Prison

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## **Abstract**

Drawing from a recent qualitative study of identity, ethnicity and social relations in two English prisons the authors reflect on the Stuart Hall's formulation of a new ethnicities paradigm. Using a vignette case study and the comments of a range of prisoners they consider how persistent patterns of racism are reproduced and challenged in the prison and beyond. British and penal historical and cultural contexts are provided to facilitate an empirically informed discussion of plural and evolving racisms, new ethnicities and Islamophobia. An argument is presented that suggests a thinly theorised understanding of ethnicity is assuming the status of a falsely benign orthodoxy, one that shrouds the familiar and painful injuries of racism.

## **Keywords**

Muslims, Blacks, Islamophobia, Identity, New Ethnicities, Racism, Prison

I felt persecuted like most Muslims at the time. If you noticed back then cos of the stuff that was going on, on the outside, with all these, you know, the July 7/7 [terrorist bombings in London] and all that kind of stuff, you know, Muslims were getting their houses raided and, you know, getting pulled over by the police. And you know, they were going through what us black people have been through but except the difference was, you know, this was about terrorism, you know. Muslims had become the new black, you know. And I just felt like I could relate to them...(Samson, British black African Prisoner, Maidstone Prison, July 2007)

### **Introduction: A Short History of 'Political Blackness' in the UK**

There was a brief political moment in British post-war history in the 1970s and 1980s when black people of African and Caribbean origin, like Samson, alongside those of South Asian origin could uncontroversially refer to themselves as Black. Distinguished by not being white and English, those with origins in Britain's former colonial territories across the globe - from Antigua and Barbados in the West Indies, Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka in South East Asia, Cyprus in the Mediterranean to Nigeria and Uganda in Africa - asserted a positive and collective solidarity. This was not long after tens of thousands of Black people in Britain had faced calls for their repatriation, not just from the fascistic fringe of British politics but from within the Conservative party who were in Government throughout much of the 1960s and 1970s. Even sections of the Labour and trade union movement were complicit in, and actively supported, such calls. Political struggles against endemic, and openly violent, racism sought unity in defending a right of Black people to stay in Britain (Fryer, 2010). Black activists rephrased the colonial relationship with the postcolonial retort that 'we are here because you were there'. They embodied the colour Black, like those in the US Black Power movement, with pride, appropriating it from its racist moorings (Brah, 1996). Political blackness was also fuelled by the desire to connect risings against apartheid in South Africa and liberation struggles across the third world to domestic struggles against racist injustice (Sivanandan, 1982).

As Stuart Hall (1992), a leading British cultural theorist and sociologist, has acknowledged, the concept of political blackness was forged as a form of cultural and political resistance against the hegemony of whiteness and its associated racism. Formulated first in the sphere of culture and representation, but also borne from a common experience of extreme structural inequalities and discrimination, Britain's main minority ethnic groups came to share a politicised Black identity<sup>1</sup>, which acted as a powerful counter to the marginalisation and misrepresentation of racialized minorities in Britain. It was an identity even, somewhat tentatively, applied to some white groups, such as the Irish, owing to their particularly close and troubled relationship with British imperialism (Rolston, 1999). After all, the signs in shop windows advertising rooms to rent in the 1950s and 1960s were as likely to say 'No Irish' as they were to say 'No Niggers' (Daniel, 1968). Thus, for a time, and in its time, political blackness was not so much a signifier of skin colour, but a potent symbol of a binary and oppositional political identity which operated across diverse ethnicities, cultures, histories and traditions.

Several decades on though, as Alexander (2002 p. 552, p. 555) has remarked, this 'seemingly bizarre British anomaly' of Black political identification now seems 'naïve and anachronistic, at once idealistic and reductively undesirable'. It was, perhaps not surprisingly, a relatively short-lived political conjuncture. Its demise was considered a progressive step by Modood (1988) who claimed that the political position of Blackness obscured significant forms of cultural and religious discrimination and marginalised Asian<sup>2</sup> needs, experiences and identities within the colour-focused

race relations sphere (cf. Brah, 1996). Moreover, it was not an identity readily taken up among Asians (Modood, 1988).

The shift away from a unitary political blackness occurred first in popular and political cultures, and only somewhat later in the theoretical concerns of the academy (Modood, 1994). Its passing is associated with a period of intellectual development when postmodernist influences were reaching their zenith in the late 1980s and 1990s. Importantly, for Hall (1992, p. 254), it marked the end of a certain kind of political innocence where resistance was both facilitated and simplified by the binary of a negative essential whiteness and a positive essential blackness. In the move he sketched out from 'old ethnicities' to 'new ethnicities', identities came to be seen as fluid and negotiable, constantly being formed and reformed, rather than being expressions of some fixed, racial essence. Hall shrewdly anticipated a 'renewed contestation' of identities arising from this 'loss of innocence' because identities that are not, as he puts it, 'stabilised by Nature or by some other essential guarantee' are identities that are forged from struggles over history, culture and politics, they are contingent rather than fixed. The renewal takes many forms however and the hegemony of race that dominated 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century conceptualisations of identity and belonging are far from being completely displaced. Thus, just as Du Bois (1903:19) had warned as the century opened that the 'problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line', Hall (1992: 257) suggests, nearly one hundred years later as it closes, 'the coming question of the 21<sup>st</sup> century' will be 'the capacity to live with difference'. Nowhere is this question more starkly posed and sharply felt than within the crucible of the expanding prison populations of the UK.

### **Ethnic Monitoring in Prisons**

While other scholars have documented a shift towards diverse ethnicities in policy environments and employment settings (Ahmed, 2007; Wrench, 2005), consistent with Hall's (1992) predictions, the prison has its own particular historical context. It is the end point of a criminal justice system that persistently incarcerates black people at a rate massively disproportionate to their presence in the general population. It is rarely acknowledged that the rates of racial incarceration in the Anglo-Welsh prison system exceed even those of the extraordinary US penal system. Despite being at the forefront of developments in ethnic monitoring in England and Wales in the 1980s, prisons have faced criticism with regard to their treatment of minority ethnic prisoners and staff (for a review see Phillips 2012a). This was dramatically catapulted to the political centre stage in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Following the continued discriminatory treatment of a black prisoner officer, reports of racist brutality in three prisons, including one in which a young British Pakistani prisoner had been murdered by his white racist cell-mate, the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE)<sup>3</sup> mounted a formal investigation into Her Majesty's Prison Service (HMPS). Its findings were published in two long reports with damning conclusions (CRE 2003a; 2003b; see also Keith, 2006). They documented 14 areas of specific failure, which included poor institutional practices which negatively affected minority ethnic prisoners' treatment, access to goods, services and facilities, and experiences of the complaints system. In response, HMPS in conjunction with the CRE, developed a detailed action plan to respond to these wide-scale problems. It was underpinned by an approach to managing race equality through high-level management structures, a Prison Service Standard on race equality, and the development of a comprehensive ethnic monitoring tool SMART (Systematic Monitoring and Analysing of Race Equality Template) (NOMS, 2008). The SMART system allows for the continuous monitoring of decision-making and service delivery. Any disproportionate variance by ethnic group of prisoners in any monitored prison procedure or activity signals the possibilities of discrimination in consequential gravity (green/orange/red) which must be then subject to further investigation<sup>4</sup>. This promises, technically, to help prisons to fulfil their statutory responsibility, as set out in the

ground-breaking Race Relations Amendment Act 2000, which followed the 1999 Macpherson Inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence.

This Inquiry's exposure of institutional racism, and its adoption of a terminology first coined by the American Black Panthers, provided an ironic and destabilising reference back to those days of political innocence. It put racism firmly back on the agenda. Widely recognised as a significant watershed, the ensuing legislation re-established a positive duty to 'promote good relations between people of different racial groups'. However, these and other legislative and cultural manifestations of the movement toward equality, or against discrimination and prejudice, are more commonly caricatured as being not so much political innocence as 'political correctness'.

For minority ethnic campaign groups collecting and collating information on ethnic identity has often been seen as a means by which the state could further its aims of immigration control, and therefore, the collection of such data has been viewed suspiciously (see also Aspinall, 2009). The standard measure of ethnic diversity used across the British public sector, including prisons, is based on the 16-category 2001 census coding frame, which reflects a curious combination of racial markers, continental and national identifications, and proxies for ethnicity<sup>5</sup>. To its advocates, aggregating individuals into these broad categories offers the only means by which the state can at least begin to assess potentially discriminatory practices or processes (Prewitt, 2005). However, the inevitably crude categorisations constantly defy the possibility of capturing the shifting patterns of identity in late modernity. In attempting to do so they convey, albeit inadvertently, an impression of essential, fixed and inherent qualities that mark out individuals according to those groups. Such aggregations of identities are only distantly related to commonly held subjective and personally meaningful definitions people provide for themselves (Aspinall, 2009; Bonnett & Carrington, 2000). The reduction of diverse and dynamic ethnicities into static arbitrary groupings is antithetical to Taylor's (2003) claim that recognition is a vital human need and that it is incumbent on states to understand individuals' mode of being and sense of themselves. It fails to correspond with ethnic affirmation and expression of identity where individuals assert the right to be recognised by the state on their own terms, according to their own sense of identity (Fraser, 2000). The absence of robust and contemporary empirical studies of these senses of identity and how they are played out in ethnic relations in men's prisons prompted the research we draw from here.

At the time of our qualitative study of prisoner identities and social relations in two men's prisons in Kent, South-East England (2006-2008), 27% of male prisoners in England and Wales were of minority ethnic origin and 15% were foreign nationals (Ministry of Justice, 2007). Her Majesty's Prison (HMP) Maidstone and Her Majesty's Young Offenders Institution (HMYOI) Rochester were selected to reflect this because they had an ethnically mixed population of prisoners from both urban and semi-rural settings. Each of the prisons held approximately 400 men, mostly convicted in the Greater London area courts. In these London courts minority ethnic men are heavily over-represented, as they are in corresponding courts in the US and several other jurisdictions (Tonry, 1997). The prisons also received men from courts, or other prisons, in the neighbouring counties of Kent, Essex and Sussex where white ethnicities predominate.

### **Categorical Imperatives and Complex Identities**

Some prisoners in our study talked about ethnicity and race relations as an ill-fitting category into which they were invited to place themselves, mainly for the purposes of being counted. Adam, for example, described feeling 'forced to fit into an ethnic group', while seeing himself as White Scottish and most definitely not White British. Similarly, Nathan, a white British Maidstone prisoner insisted that, 'I'm a person, you know what I mean, I'm not a fucking sheep, I'm not a breed of sheep, I'm a person'. He went on to admit regularly refusing to identify his ethnic origin, feeling that the world had gone 'PC [politically correct] mad'. Barry too resisted the prison's monitoring of his ethnicity by

emphasising the contradiction in society urging its members to be colour-blind whilst also recording prisoners' 'ethnic codes':

It's a funny thing in here. It's a funny thing in society in general. Pure diversity and lack of racism involves not noticing the other person's diversity, the other person's race. It's irrelevant, it's irrelevant that you're black and I'm white, that you're from somewhere else to me. And yet the first thing they do when you come in here is what's your ethnic code. That's disgusting. How dare they. It's none of their business what my ethnic code is. I put myself down as a black Afro-Caribbean Chinese cross usually, just to piss them off. It is none of their business. (White British, No religion, Maidstone prisoner)

For Bernard a white British prisoner at Maidstone, a reserved, rather defensive stance could be discerned in which prejudice and discrimination were completely disavowed. Bernard professed to not thinking at all about prisoners' ethnicities '[u]nless somebody else thinks about it, brings it up I don't... never really think about it, you know. I look at a person as a person, not as what colour they are or what weaknesses and strengths they have.' Luke, a white British prisoner at Rochester, perceived the separation of individuals into different 'cultures' as divisive. The same sentiment was expressed by Philip who preferred to see himself and others as simply human. As we have discussed elsewhere (Earle and Phillips, 2009), drawing from Gilroy (2004), these sentiments are suggestive of a prison-conditioned con-viviality; a low key, somewhat dissolute identification with a kind of egalitarian humanism that implicitly challenges the crude dehumanising hierarchy of the prison. It is a recurring feature of white people's views about ethnicity, that, with reference to themselves especially, it does not exist (Garner, 2007; Nayak, 2003). As Frankenberg (1994) points out this represents more of an organised effort to be 'colour-blind' than the benign naturally occurring predisposition that it suggests. As with other vectors of identity vested with differential power, such as heterosexual masculinity, rendering itself invisible and 'out of the question' is a defining symbol of white privilege. Rather than being genuinely indifferent to racialized difference such comments represent a specific way of doing whiteness driven by a fear that to be 'caught in the act of seeing race [is] to be caught being prejudiced' (Frankenberg, 1994, p.145). This whiteness that refuses itself is also, however, conditioned by prisoner's vestigial sense of solidarity with each other in which being the same, implicitly equal as prisoners, derives from the simple 'prisoners' versus 'officers' group status (Earle, 2013).

However, such sceptical views on the nature and categorisation of ethnicity were not the exclusive preserve of the majority white population of prisoners. Vanni, a white Southern European prisoner was critical of ethnic monitoring, pointing out that 'there is no such a thing is 100% Irish or 100% British, because if you look back in your DNA you probably find you'd come from Romania or Slovakia'. Gamal, of white North African origin, viewed ethnic monitoring practices in Britain with incredulity, noting that 'in prison they look at you as an ethnic'. Neither were political activists concerns about state intentions to misuse the data completely absent from prisoners accounts, as this extract from an interview with Sami revealed:

To be honest with you when I first came to this country and you fill forms when you apply for some jobs or whatever, or some forms in your work, everything has 'ethnicity', 'ethnicity', 'pick out which one you are'. I see this like, we are like an animal the way I say it, they treat people like animals... The first thing I couldn't believe I am in a western democratic country but they are using this ethnicity, black, white, Asian, Pakistani, Indian, others, Caribbean, I don't know. What's that for? It can be used as an excuse for statistics but that's their excuse reason... The main reason is, it's another way of taking your data, your private data from you. I found that with the time everything here they have to know about you, wherever you go, wherever you apply to... 'what's your culture? I



leave it blank most of time, I don't like to answer this question...It's insulting to be honest really, these things are very insulting. (Western Asian Arab, Muslim, Maidstone prison)

Our research also discovered that the radical and uneven transformations of the late modern social world, aptly characterised as 'glocalisation', are as alive and kicking in the prison as they are in the rest of British society. It is the kind of messy, negotiated, contingent difference that Hall's (1992) account sketched out (see Phillips, 2012b). Complex and shifting patterns of ethnic identification were found which did not sit easily with the aggregated ethnic identities specified by the prison's ethnic monitoring system. Daniel, for example, another Maidstone prisoner, challenged it to find an ethnic group category that would properly accommodate his mixed race French and black African grandfather, a mixed race Spanish and black African grandmother, and an Irish German grandmother on the other side of his family. Bradley, a mixed race Muslim prisoner at Rochester, regarded himself as wholly and indivisibly English, although his parents came from West Africa and were, respectively, of Muslim faith and Southern European of Catholic faith. In his teenage years, Bradley chose Islam over Catholicism, and he continued to observe his faith in prison, despite the suspicion he found it attracted from prisoners and prison officers alike.

Bradley's identity as a Muslim reflects the heterogeneity of Muslim presence at both prisons in this study. Although white and white British Muslims were in a small minority, it included Jamaican, Black British, North African, West African, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Kosovan, Albanian, and prisoners from numerous other intersections of the national and global polity. Some prisoners noted the particular configurations of diversity in the prison's Muslim population. Abdullah, an East African black Muslim prisoner, for instance, remarked on the diverse composition of those attending Friday prayers in HMYOI Rochester compared to the those of his home mosque in London; 'the mix here, like, you tend to see more people from different backgrounds like. In my Mosque in [London Borough], you don't really see people, you see a certain race basically like, let's just say Arab or Asian'. Likewise, the Imam at Rochester expounded on the complexity of the interactions and diverse heritages he encountered there by remarking on how intersecting patterns of identification were simultaneously present in both individuals and groups attending Friday prayers:

Maybe they share a Bengali heritage, for example, but then also it will depend on where they are from - what town or area. Most are second generation and will have some, but looser, ties to that country. You may get an Algerian and a Moroccan, who are both Muslim, and Arab, but come from different parts of the country, or city, say London. If they come from North London or South London, or even within South London, if they come from Brixton or Peckham, then that may be important, a connection and a difference. It is complicated. (Fieldnote - 30<sup>th</sup> August 2006, unrecorded conversation)

Muslim prisoners provided accounts of a wide variety of degrees of commitment to Islam, and an awareness of how it is characterized by its recent rise to prominence, both in the prison and elsewhere. Bradley, for instance, was scathing about the trend toward conversion. He insisted that such people 'just do it because they think it's cool... the new phase going round London.' For Bradley, his paternal connection to Islam was the authenticating factor and distinguished him from others who were simply pursuing the latest 'fast fame religion', as he put it. Douglas, a White British Muslim at Maidstone, whose religious conversion outside prison on his commercial but largely illicit international business resulted in him sharing a cell with a devout Muslim. Don found that their patterns and habits of observance clashed awkwardly. He could not abide being woken by an alarm at 4am for prayers, saying it left him feeling 'bad tempered' all the time and desperate for a move out of the cell. Paul, a Black British Muslim of African heritage, accepted that some Muslims had a reputation for militancy but dismissed them as being 'just lost, they just want it... as just an excuse'. According to Paul, the existence of such characters was relatively normal and unremarkable: 'I don't know their reasons, but there is a lot of people like that'.

Some non-Muslim prisoners' and officers' concerns regarding Islamic observance focused on the suspicion of a collective presence operating with hidden agendas. It was felt that 'weaker' prisoners faced pressures to convert to Islam to secure the benefits of protection from a cohesive and self-organised Muslim block within the prison, clearly reminiscent of Jacobs' (1979) importation accounts of black collectivities in US prisons. Jonathon, for instance, a White British prisoner at Rochester was convinced that religion would trump race if he converted, insisting that 'if I'm vulnerable, [if] I'm white, doesn't matter my colour, it doesn't matter anything... [because] if I turn Muslim half of the population of the jail can't touch me because I've got half of the jail which are also Muslim on my side.'

The image of a protective and potentially coercive brotherhood with a network actively recruiting across the prison system appeals to a myth-making conspiratorial and paranoid imagination that is no stranger to the prison, or to prisoners (although see Liebling, Arnold & Straub, 2012; Phillips, 2012b for a discussion of Muslim prisoner solidarity). As with any myth there may be a seed of truth at its source but what emerged from the talk of prisoners in the two prisons of this study was that those with closer experience of conversion or longer experience of Islam often took a sanguine view in which Islam was regarded as a relatively mundane feature of prison life.

The Muslim presence was widely recognized as significant but was poorly understood and prone to stereotypical simplification. Jed, for example, a white British prisoner with no declared religious affiliation, was convinced that 'Muslims are the most powerful group apart from officers' in Maidstone prison. Adam, another white British prisoner at Maidstone, insisted that they could 'manipulate things for their own ends'. The image of a unitary, cohesive and separate block of Muslim prisoners tended to be expressed more vehemently by non-Muslims and prisoners of the White majority. For some, the replacement of one racialized other with another was self-evident. Abbott, a young white British prisoner at Rochester, tells a story of coexistence and realignment that echoes some of the sentiments expressed by Samson at the start of this article. Although glossed with the 'harmony discourse' we have analysed elsewhere (Earle and Phillips, 2009), he also appears to see 'Muslims as the new blacks':

I think it's sort of where black and whites, they get on fine. I'm saying controversial things here, but black and white people get on a lot better than Muslims and white people, because obviously what's happening all over the world and in the news, people see it, they can't get away from it. They see it in the newspapers when they read them, on the TV, everywhere, so gradually there's a big divide coming down between them.

### **New Ethnicities in Old Bottles: Samson – a vignette**

These diversities represent a challenging new ethnicities paradigm where 'we all speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, out of a particular experience, a particular culture, without being contained by that position' (Hall, 1992, p. 258). As such, they are not easily accommodated by an ethnic monitoring system designed to expose and remedy the prejudice and discrimination that continues to accompany their proliferating forms. Samson, quoted at the start of this article, provides a vivid account of the fluid complexity of ethnic identities in the late modern world, and the recurrent features of discrimination that still haunt his life. In interviews and conversations it emerged that he was raised as an evangelical Christian in London and his ethnic heritage was West African. His friendship group from nursery school to leaving secondary school was ethnically mixed, comprising mainly black and white friends, but also a small number of Asian and Chinese boys. In his young adult years, Samson's relationship with a white woman from a Northern European country developed to the point where they had a child together. In addition to English, Samson spoke the dialect of his ethnic group in West Africa and the Northern European language of his partner. His sense of being British and belonging in the country he had grown up in had been

profoundly destabilized by his recent conviction and imprisonment; Samson described his total loss of faith in the justice system. His talk was frequently punctuated by bursts of anger, expressions of distrust of the system, and an overriding feeling of injustice, prompted by questions about racial discrimination, both for himself and his son:

It must be because I'm not of pure... pure British blood that this sort of thing could happen, you know. Maybe it's because I have a foreign surname, you know, cos my name isn't Jones or Ward or Smith, you know. It doesn't fit into the Brit criteria, you know, it's got to be the only reason I keep having this bad luck, you know... I want to make sure he [Samson's son] has the best opportunities in life and that he does not go through what I went through, you know. I have seen the police in my life from the age of six. They used to come and raid my mum's house, accusing one of my elder brothers of harbouring stolen goods, and they never found anything, you know. They used to ransack the house...I've had to put up with that since the age of six, you know. Why I feel like a failure is because my son now, you know, already, he's seen the police attack me twice, you know, in his young life, twice...I don't want my son to grow up hating the police or to go through what I've been through.

Even after conviction, in prison, Samson recalled incidents involving himself or other black prisoners which seemed to indicate racial discrimination on the part of prison officers. He recounted the abiding perception that black prisoners only had access to the less favoured wing cleaner jobs, and wondered about his own sacking from his job, and his demotion in privilege status from Enhanced to Standard, as being motivated by his ethnicity. For Samson strong emotions were generated by a sense of being made to feel foreign, of the 'system' being against him, of the 'last bit of English in me...literally washed away...I just felt empty', disillusioned with 'hatred in his heart'. Like many long term prisoners Samson reflected at length and self-critically on his religious commitments, rejecting his Christianity and briefly seeking solace in Islam. After some time, Samson felt that his readings of the Koran and wider Islamic literature did not help to quell the disappointment or anger that he had inside him, and he returned to Christianity before a further religious reorientation.

At the time of interview, Samson was rethinking his future in Britain because of his negative experiences of the criminal justice system and his sense that Muslims were now the new target of the racism he had experienced:

The bottom line is, you know, do I really want to stay in a country that's now labelled me as a dangerous criminal, you know, and can pull me back into prison at any time, you know, for breach of probation or for breach of licence or just for because I've associated myself with somebody that's a known criminal. Do I really want to live on an island and feel like I'm a prisoner even though I'm on the outside? The answer's no. So the question I'm asking myself is do I have the courage to remain in this country now...I don't need to stand for this, I don't need to take this, why should I, you know.

As Samson's remarks that opened this article indicate, he has felt the persecution that he sees now being visited on Muslims, he recognises the feeling of arbitrary arrest, 'getting pulled over by the police', 'getting your houses raided' and then finding out it wasn't so random, so arbitrary, but was down to appearances, of appearing not to belong, of not being white.

### **Muslims is the new black: from 'Policing the Crisis' to Islamophobia**

Alexander (2002) has argued convincingly that the end of an inclusive political blackness was also accompanied by a more specific focus on African Caribbean experiences. Post 9/11 the erstwhile

exclusion of Asians has been replaced by an aggressive, hostile focus on the Muslim Other that has entered the political arena and provided, in Samson's words, the 'new black'. Samson's remark does not suggest a kind of universal positioning, an inclusive 'Muslim-ness', as political blackness had operated, but a new, albeit familiar, dimension of Othering in the prison and outside its walls. Samson's remark nods to the terminology of fashion, 'the new black', and cultural preoccupations with cosmetic, superficial appearances, that has accompanied the rise of Islam's popularity among a new generation (as Bradley, above, noted), but does not claim discovery of a new unifying identity. Rather, what Samson sees is that Muslims have now become the 'undesired, irredeemable, alien' (Alexander, 2000) in the prison environment, just as black prisoners with 'chips on their shoulders' and aggressive anti-authority stances were in the prisons of the 1980s (Genders & Player, 1989; Phillips & Bowling, 2002).

In the move toward new ethnicities the conceptual scaffolding of natural racial hierarchy has been discredited but the structures it established are not so completely destabilised or easily demolished. The reconceptualization involved in new ethnicities does not, in Hall's (1992) view, necessarily diminish the potential for conflict, division and tension that have historically gathered around race and found expression in racism. The warnings, caveats and theoretical consequences that Hall, and others, described on the emergence of new ethnicities around the 'epistemic violence' involved in racism have receded from view even as it has become the new orthodoxy. Hall spelled out the difficulties that anti-racist strategies would encounter on the collapse of the binary 'Manichean' construct of racism. For the plural and pliable model of ethnicities to be viable there needs to be a profound engagement with the legacies of colonial desire and envy that co-existed with its hierarchies of inferiorisation. These sustain the logic of racism which continues to construct 'impassable symbolic boundaries' in an attempt to 'fix and naturalise difference between belongingness and otherness' (Hall, 1992, p. 255).

Scholars, like Miles (2003), have long since noted the variability of racisms, their historically and spatially contingent nature (see for example Anthias, Yuval-Davis & Cain, 1992; Brah 1996; ; Gilroy, 1990), their different forms and origins. Yet, as Miles acknowledges, there are underlying continuous features which can be distinguished. Thus, de Gobineau's (1853-1855) pronouncements of the immorality of the black man who was 'marked by animality and limited intellect', but possessing great energy, desire and will...unaware of the distinctions between vice and virtue' (Biddiss, 1999 p. 51) was but a short distance from the specific particularities of 'the Muslim' deemed treacherous, hostile, strange and emotional (Goldberg, 2009). These stand in contradistinction to the rational, urbane, and superior intelligence of the white race according to de Gobineau in his *Essay on the Inequality of the Human Race*. In contemporary manifestations, according to Goldberg (2009) the Muslim has come to represent in their 'aggressive religiosity' the 'threat of death', both physically through the menace of terrorism, and culturally through the dangers of religious fundamentalism. The histories of racism which arise out of specific economic, political and cultural conditions, show how it repeatedly finds a human vessel for its fears. If we accept Garland's (2001 pp. 184-185) characterisation of Western cultures of control that render criminal offenders as 'intrinsically evil or wicked' or as part of 'an immoral underclass', then it is very easy to see how such individuals coincide with the human 'objects' of racism via the mechanism of criminal justice.

These are the experiences in common that Samson refers to between himself as black and Muslims as the new blacks. Such recognition of historical recurrence has deep implications for those concerned about the living conditions of black and minority ethnic prisoners, and the multicultural societies that so disproportionately fill their prisons with such prisoners. The recurrence suggests that taking the concept of ethnicity further, and making it do work other than racism's, remains outstanding, work unfinished and work undone. According to Hall (1992, p.257) it is the defining work of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and involves 'retheorizing the concept of *difference*'.

The familiar critical motifs of the racism Samson experienced are those theorised by Hall and his colleagues (Hall, S., Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke & Roberts, 1978) in the late 1970s in *Policing the Crisis*. Black people in 1970s Britain represented a certain colonial configuration of suppressed fear and anxious desire. These sentiments consolidated in the image of the black 'mugger', the street thief, who was, in the racial imaginary, the slave insurrection tipping society into terminal disorder, inherently lawless and unassimilable. The motifs of racism Samson recognises in the experiences of Muslims in contemporary Britain and in prison are less fully theorised but resonate strongly with Werbner's (2012, p.8) propositions on the continuities and ruptures between contemporary racisms and Islamophobia. Islamophobia is, according to Werbner, the ultimate 'postmodern kind of fear', the Muslim 'the folk devil par excellence of the postmodern age'.

The resurgence of Islam in the West, and for the West, is not a myth and nor is it reducible to simplistic fundamentalism. By challenging contemporary trends against essentialism and toward relativism, Islam *appears* to threaten the intellectual and cultural elites of western society. The perceived threat thus extends beyond the usual, disposable, suspects of the working class or petit bourgeoisie. On this basis, the cultural racism directed by the West against Muslims, Islamophobia constitutes a uniquely challenging configuration (Modood, 1997; Said, 1995/1978; Werbner, 2012). Islam, in the racist imaginary, questions the very identity of Europe and the Enlightenment – it is colonialism worst nightmare because it shares its ambitions and has stolen its hopes (Sayyidd, 2003). It is its mirror image and all the more terrifying for being so (cf. Fanon, 1963/2001).

Islamophobia is also, however, in itself a problematic construct that may do more to reinforce the object it seeks to challenge by fusing culture and ethnicity with religion. Rather than distinguishing religious faith as transcultural and inter-ethnic it presents them as co-terminous ((Roy, 1999). This cultural conflation is unhelpful because it simplifies the complexities of diverse Muslim experience of prejudice and discrimination into a singular religious origin. In doing so it decouples the phenomenon from its moorings in the changing configurations of racism. In a similar fashion, and with similar effect, the use of the psychological terminology of 'phobia' tends to situate the 'problem with Muslims' in the mind of individuals rather than in social relations and structures. Though the term Islamophobia also evokes the wider issue of xenophobia, an irrational fear of strangers, only the radical Institute of Race Relations (Fekete, 2001) has sustained a wider theoretical formulation from this through the portmanteau term of 'xeno-racism'. This firmly returns the issue to being one of racism rather than religion.

### **Conclusion: Making a difference or understanding it?**

Following Scott (1998) it sometimes seems as if the prison's relationship to social or personal identity is like that of a map's to the actual territory on the ground - it can never see everything and tends only to record what it thinks it needs to 'see'. In doing so, it can appear to force an image out of a person that is always more aligned with its own conflicting goals of punishment/degradation and rehabilitation/self-realisation than it is with the persons sense of themselves. The plans of the prison for diversity management via ethnic monitoring, like two dimensional maps, cannot easily account for four dimensional biographies or the lived realities of diversity. However, just because the spontaneous particularity of conviviality cannot be planned, it does not mean it cannot be planned for better or accommodated more creatively and sensitively, though the challenges are considerable. Perhaps referring to the process as anti-racist monitoring would more clearly signal its intentions.

Prisons are deliberately harsh and austere environments. Historically, they are places where uniformity is the norm and conformity the expectation. Prisons attempt to provide a model,

minimally social, environment in which individuals are punished, reshaped and reformed to render them fit to rejoin wider society. As the salience of ethnicity to the dynamics of social life in England, and the UK in general, has become more widely recognised so it has assumed greater significance in prison regimes. As with earlier regimes, prisoners do not always find the model intelligible or agreeable.

Our recent work in two men's prisons in England indicates complex and changing patterns of ethnic identification. Frequently the significance of locally specific patterns of identification was clearly evident and this suggests there is a need not only for wider work across differently located prisons, but also that 'global' views of ethnic identity can do injury, epistemic violence even, to the lived reality of a far more diverse and nuanced experience. Respecting locally specific ethnic histories means avoiding the homogenising of 'Black' and Asian diaspora experiences in Liverpool or Bradford, for example, with those of Bristol or South London. It means refusing essentialism, resisting the pull of old ethnicities and responding to the call of the new. It is the challenge of theorising and working with difference.

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### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup>This was an all-encompassing category marked by its 'non Anglo Saxon whiteness', but its largest constituents were those from the black Caribbean, Africa, and those of South Asian origin (primarily from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh).

<sup>1</sup> Primarily those of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin.

<sup>1</sup> This was established in the Race Relations Act 1976, tasked with assisting in the elimination of discrimination and the promotion of equality of opportunity, through training, research, and education. It was given powers to mount formal investigations into practices not in compliance with the Act.

<sup>1</sup> Including, for example, adjudications, segregation, the use of force, formal complaints, access to Home Detention Curfew, the Incentives and Earned Privileges Scheme, and security re-categorisation up and down.

<sup>1</sup> White: British; Irish; Other White; Mixed: White and Black Caribbean, White and Black African, White and Asian; Other Mixed; Asian/Asian British: Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Other; Black/Black British: Caribbean, African, Other; Chinese/Other: Chinese; Other.

<sup>6</sup> Jack was also less than sympathetic to a white prisoner who had incurred the wrath of black prisoners for alleged racist behaviour. He described the white prisoners as having 'the living hell kicked out of him', as he was repeatedly kicked in his cell and they tried to put his head down the toilet. Jack recalled that the 'the boy had like two black eyes, his nose was busted, like he had bruises all over his face'.

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