

Runnymede and CLASS report

# ‘We Are Ghosts’

Race, Class and Institutional Prejudice

# Runnymede: Intelligence for a Multi- ethnic Britain

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## Foreword

Dr Faiza Shaheen

One hundred and fifty years since the creation of the term 'working class', we are confronted with a new class reality. Rather than 'working class' being redundant, as Margaret Thatcher suggested 40 years ago, it has mutated from being a term used to foster solidarity and to describe those working in industrial jobs, to being a divisive concept within which the 'white working class' are pitted against immigrants and the minority ethnic population. A caricature of the working class – as male, white, racist, Brexit voting and residing only in the North of the country – has seeped into the public psyche, creating a phase of class politics that is both toxic and wholly divorced from reality.

These were our observations coming into this research. Tired of clichés and working-class myths, we wanted to inform the debate through the voices of the multi-ethnic working class themselves. Grounding our research in London, we sought to meet the class mythology built by a misinformed or indeed purposely misleading elite, with the truth of the intersectional nature of class and race.

Of course, it was never the case that the British working class was only white. The British Empire meant that a global working class was put to work. From the indentured labourers working in sugar cane fields in Fiji, to those working in the mills in Wigan, and all of those enslaved across the Empire – all contributed to the wealth of the landed gentry and indeed all were oppressed by a system of power that privileged a handful at the top. This erasure of history is in part why the term 'working class' has failed to be racially inclusive to date. It's not just that the term needs to be reinvented to include race because of the growing minority ethnic population in the UK: it is rather that since its inception, the 'working-class' narrative has too often been blind to the efforts and injustice faced by those who were not white. We need to correct for centuries of oversight.

It also needs to be noted that the original idea of 'working-class jobs' has shifted dramatically, and hence we need a new understanding of what it means to be working class. Working-class material conditions, with the help of unions, improved over much of the 20th century, but this trend has reversed in the past 40 years. Zero-hours contracts have grown exponentially, children growing up in poverty are now more likely to have a parent working than not, and housing is taking up an ever larger share of a smaller pay packet. Class prejudice also manifests through a class pay gap and class ceiling. Rather than the promised social mobility that 'hard work' and 'aspiration' are meant to bring, we have a system that maintains privilege at the top and leaves working-class people in low-paid, insecure work, often in social care or hospitality. The rhetoric of social mobility is simply not enough to fight the reality of class privilege.

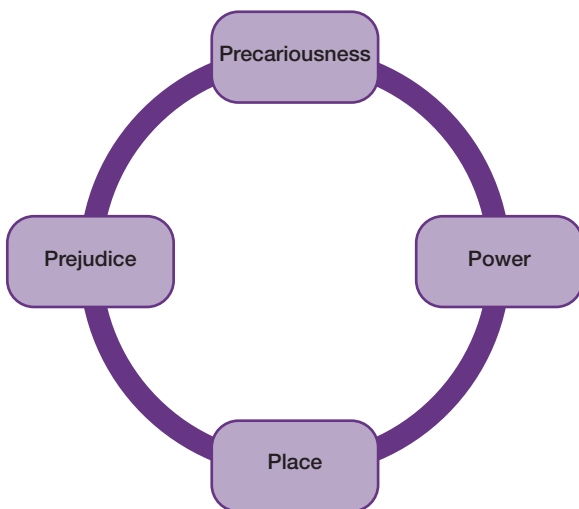
Brexit has further politicized and distorted the term 'working class'. We often hear about the 'betrayal of the working class' that not delivering Brexit would entail. Yet when you look at the figures, a higher proportion of the middle class voted for Brexit, and indeed many in the South East. The narrative of class in today's society and politics needs rewriting.

Our weak analysis of class structures in modern Britain has meant that we have slipped back, with a disproportionate number of our top jobs across law, media and politics and even the majority of professional sports being dominated by those with private education. Meanwhile, working-class communities are unable to live with dignity. The Grenfell Tower fire – which took the lives of 72 residents – was for many the outcome of a collision of class and race prejudice with public spending cuts and an unfit housing system. Being working class can be deadly.

Rather than get lost in definitions, in the Brexit spin or statistics, this study listens to working-class communities themselves. In these pages you will find stories of hardship and prejudice, but also of pride, solidarity and community. From this rich insight we can see that the working class is far from an artefact, but a living, breathing and contributing section of British society. We must take urgent steps to build a new inclusive and true-to-life narrative, while empowering our working-class communities to fight for the change they need and deserve.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*'We Are Ghosts': Race, Class and Institutional Prejudice* is the result of a year-long qualitative research project and collaboration between Runnymede and CLASS. In this executive summary, we outline our eight key findings and issue four related recommendations to improve our analysis of race and class inequality and – more importantly – the lives of working-class people across the UK. Conducted over 2018, interviews and focus groups with 78 people highlighted a growingly punitive culture of services experienced across working-class, BME and migrant communities, despite such groups being repeatedly pitched against each other in mainstream media and political discourse. Rather than the 'white working class' and 'ethnic or migrant working class' living different or separate lives, we found significant overlap in everyday lived experiences, which we analysed by using a '4P' framework: power, precariousness, place and prejudice.



## 1. Power and Voice

Interviewees' lived reality was typified by a shared experience of indifference and neglect from public authorities in the face of gentrification and social cleansing. Some participants talked about the slow-burn neglect and abandonment ('we are ghosts'), others about a 'ruthless' council ('let's see what we can get away with'). Whether in terms of representation in national debates, or in terms of influence over the public services that are

intended to support them, working-class people lack representation and voice. For many this leads to a sense of alienation, disillusionment and 'rational disengagement' from public authorities which appear to be working against their best interests.

## 2. Precariousness

Working-class people have a shared experience of precarity: no safety net to rely on in case of hardship. This starts in the labour market: most of our interviewees were in work, yet were still struggling to make ends meet. But the labour market is not where precarity ends. Welfare cuts have largely eroded the safety net of welfare and good public service provision. Precariousness of housing was a particularly recurring theme, with many people finding themselves waiting indefinitely to secure decent living conditions.

## 3. Prejudice

A shared experience of race and class prejudice and contempt shaped people's lives from school to the labour market, including when navigating public services. Interactions with local councils were also often experienced as discriminatory – in terms of race, class and migration status. Many interviewees spoke about such encounters as dehumanising: 'They don't see you as a person' / 'They don't treat you as a human being'.

## 4. Place

Place is a strong resource in people's lives, both in terms of identity and in terms of the networks and relationships that exist principally on a local scale. On the flip side, shared resentment and loss of community space in the face of gentrification are causing economic, social and psychological hardship. We need to focus on place both in terms of how people identify and in terms of the policy responses to race and class inequality. This 'local' aspect of class is often discussed outside of London, but too rarely in the capital. The city is often viewed as inhabited solely by 'cosmopolitan elites', a narrative that erases working-class communities in the city, and especially working-class people of colour.

# Findings and Recommendations

## 1. Change the narrative

The current conception of the working class in the public debate is often based on a mixture of misinformation and mythology, fails to recognise working-class voices and agency, increases division across racial lines, and is divorced from the lived realities of those experiencing race and class injustice. Working-class people are from every ethnic background, British born or migrants, are women as well as men, and live in every part of our country. We can and should build solidarity across such differences: shared identity can emerge from shared conditions but also from shared values, shared history of past struggles, willingness to support each other, and a sense of pride in and belonging to local neighbourhoods.

### Finding 1

A set of **shared conditions** shaped the experience of working-class people across all ages and ethnic groups:

- being held back from fulfilling their potential
- social alienation in institutional spaces
- feeling discriminated against in the labour market
- experiencing indignity and neglect when navigating public services
- shared resentment and loss of community space in the face of gentrification

### Finding 2

Interviewees' local neighbourhoods were a main point of reference when discussing race and class dynamics: Ladbroke Grove and the Mangrove, the New Cross fire, and the Brixton uprisings would inform the conversations. Most interviewees displayed **a great deal of pride in and commitment to their community, describing local values of solidarity and camaraderie as an integral part of their identity.**

### Finding 3

**Despite this set of shared conditions, 'class' was discussed with much ambivalence and confusion** by interviewees. The question: 'Would you call yourself working class?' was a source of contention and debate. **Older, male and white interviewees were usually the most confident in asserting their working-class identity**, while other interviewees were more likely to be indifferent towards the term, to perceive it as only applying to white British people, or to reject it as a stigmatizing caricature.

### Recommendation 1

- **Stop counterposing race and class.** Analysis of – and the policy response to – both race and class should focus on material conditions as well as on prejudice and discrimination. How we talk about working-class, BME and migrant communities currently legitimizes and institutionalizes their disadvantage.
- **Root our understanding of the working class in people's current conditions** (4Ps: power, place, precariousness, prejudice), rather than top-down assumptions.
- **Recognize the role of place** in shaping how people interact and identify locally. National discussion and debates about inequality or community cohesion are often too distant from people's experiences and needs.
- We need **a conception of the working class that doesn't pitch working-class people against each other** along the lines of deserving/undeserving, white/BME, British/migrants: such divides have justified policies that make all groups worse off.
- Our conception of the working class must **acknowledge the legacy of empire**: the injustice faced by workers in and from British colonies, and those workers' tremendous contribution to British economy and society over the centuries (*Our Migration Story*).
- **Build on existing 'framing' work**, notably JRF's work on poverty, to outline the strengths of working-class communities and the current barriers that prevent them from securing better lives for themselves.

## 2. Rebuild the safety net, at work and through public services

A narrative by itself won't change the conditions of working-class people in Britain. Our interviewees were usually more interested in discussing the current injustice and challenges they faced than how they identified or the national narrative on class. Rebuilding the safety net will require undoing years of benefit cuts, while also widening that net to respond to the new forms of precarity identified below (Finding 4 and Finding 5). This will involve improving the rights and outcomes of people in the labour market, but also expanding the services and benefits that are necessary to provide an adequate safety net for the 21st century.

### Finding 4

Rather than a strong sense of 'working-class' identity, **what came out more concretely through focus groups was when and where interviewees' backgrounds were experienced as resulting in a lack of 'safety net'**, particularly in times of transition, ill health and crisis. It was in those moments that working-class people were most vulnerable, as they lacked financial safety, institutional support and networks in comparison with more privileged peers. This was accentuated by general housing precariousness: without medium- to long-term stability of housing, interviewees found it more difficult to access local services effectively, and to develop and tap into formal and informal networks of personal support.

### Finding 5

**The changing face of contemporary work was a factor in blurring the lines of working-class affiliation.** Traditionally, work has been the anchor for working-class identity. However, with the growth of the gig economy, work has become more precarious and atomized. As new forms of low-income work do not provide the same sense of identity and common cause for mobilization, 'working class' as a badge of honour seems to have lost its resonance for many people.

### Recommendation 2

- **A genuine living wage.** The current national living wage (for those over 25) is £8.21, £0.79 less than a genuine living wage. In London, the living wage needs to be £10.55.
- **Adopt the Institute of Employment Rights' 'Manifesto for Labour Law'** to improve the security, pay, conditions and bargaining power of workers (IER 2018). This includes **establishing a Ministry for Labour** to rebuild and promote collective bargaining structures.
- **Reinvest in public services** to bring spending back towards pre-2010 levels.
- Different regions or **localities will have different priorities**, but these should all focus on tackling whatever inequalities need the most extensive focus at the local level (transport, labour market, housing, etc.).
- **Stop the sell-off of public land.** Local authorities should be encouraged not to sell land to private developers where they are failing to provide affordable or social housing (Wheatley 2019).
- **Improve the security of housing tenure.** As well as building more social housing, this will require providing more long-term, low-cost secure private accommodation (e.g. five-year leases with inflation-protected rental rises).
- **Implement the idea of 'universal basic services'**, expanding the welfare state to include housing, food, transport and internet access (Portes, Reed and Percy, 2017).
- **Lift the ban: give people seeking asylum the right to work**, so that they can use their skills and live in dignity. Everyone deserves a chance to contribute to the economy and to integrate into our communities.'



- **Re-introduce birth right citizenship** as part of a wider review into race, immigration and citizenship law and policy.
- **Relink benefits and inflation**, and ensure benefits more closely correspond to the relative poverty line.
- **Re-establish child poverty targets**, including a specific target to reduce disproportionately high BME child poverty.

### 3. Strengthen voice and participation

Improving working-class people's lives will require involving them more in decision-making and improving representation across institutions – in the media, in government, in arts, in the professions and universities. There are various ways of achieving these goals. The key point is that every public, private and charitable organization needs to develop ways of strengthening working-class voices and power.

#### Finding 6

**The lived reality of being working class in London was typified by a shared experience of indifference and neglect from the state and public authorities.** Interactions with local councils were often experienced as discriminatory, or complacent about residents' needs and difficulties. Some participants talked about slow-burn neglect and abandonment ('we are ghosts'), others about a 'ruthless' council ('let's see what we can get away with'). As a result, people were deterred from trusting and seeking to access statutory services, and relied instead on local networks and friends – as a lifeline or first port of call when facing injustice and hardship. Despite the proven benefits of strong communities, many interviewees expressed frustration at the lack of recognition for their efforts and contributions locally, within communities that are chronically under-resourced, overstretched and dispersed by cuts to services.

#### Recommendation 3

- **Services should be co-produced**, so that people are involved not just as recipients of public services but as shapers of how those services are better delivered.
- **Devolve power, decision-making and resources locally.** Invest in local community organizations and networks, especially those that engage and involve working-class and ethnic minority people. Democracy requires a stronger civil society voice locally, and such organizations can also serve as intermediaries between the state and citizens.
- Ensure not only that **housing management organizations include working-class voices**, but that those voices **have real power over decision-making**.
- **Introduce the socioeconomic duty**, making class an 'equality ground'. This will allow for positive action measures to be taken on grounds of class as well as race.
- Organizations should set **targets to improve ethnic minority and working-class representation in the workplace**. This includes tackling discrimination in the labour market. Mandate equal pay audits and enforce tougher sanctions on companies who break the law.

## 4. Re-embed shared values at the core of policy

Research shows that values such as dignity, freedom and equality are widely held. We must urgently re-embed such an ethos in public services, which will take investment, rolling back harmful policies, and implementing a wider cultural change to avoid further dehumanization of working-class, BME and migrant communities.

Hostile environment policies and welfare reforms have been underpinned and justified by wider public discourse targeting and pathologizing working-class, migrant and BME people. As a result, public officials have often found themselves with workplans and targets that fail to centre the dignity of such groups. But these are false narratives: cuts to public services and the housing crisis are the result of political choices, and are not inevitable. The UK is the fifth largest economy in the world and is able to provide the public services required for everyone to live in dignity.

### Finding 7

**Most interviewees reported experiencing daily encounters with public services as punitive and disempowering** – whether this was with the police, job centres, social services, housing offices – to the extent that many discerned an active conflict of interest between services’ targets on the one hand and the wellbeing of working-class families on the other. **Many interviewees talked about dehumanisation** (‘They don’t see you as a person’/‘They don’t treat you as a human being’). They also highlighted how racism or xenophobia exacerbated their ill-treatment. Wider public narratives around who is ‘deserving’ and who is ‘undeserving’ and **the impact of the ‘hostile environment’ made engaging with public services an even more dispiriting experience.** The gap between professional intervention and the intuitive knowledge of and challenges faced by communities was also experienced as a great barrier to trust and engagement.

### Finding 8

**A shared impression that local services and support have been designed to be out of reach** further entrenches poor esteem of and confidence in services. The current experience of local services cements the belief that the levers of justice are not working for working-class people, and that their rights are ultimately unenforceable. As a result, people step away from support, often out of exhaustion and disillusionment with the support on offer and the way in which it is – or is not – provided. Services become another obstacle to navigate on top of other life stresses.

### Recommendation 4

- **Foster equality and dignity across all public services**, embedding inclusion, equality, cohesion in, for example, procurement and planning decision-making processes, and considering social value clauses to enable community participation and control of services.
- **End the hostile-environment immigration policies**, and issue a thorough review of the Home Office’s policies, including whether those policies are in line with human rights and race discrimination legislation
- **End data-sharing between public services for the purpose of immigration enforcement.** This destroys trust between communities and services and undermines the duty of care.
- There needs to be **a cultural shift in how local services relate to working-class, migrant and BME people** who use their services. This requires a new public service values framework, as well as training for all staff, from the front line to senior management, on how to ensure working-class, migrant and BME people are treated with dignity and respect when approaching services.
- **Ensure equality law and the socioeconomic duty are taken seriously**, respected and applied in relation to all policy, strengthening the ‘due regard’ clause in the public sector equality duty.
- In response to the extensive inequalities outlined in the government’s Race Disparity Audit, the government should adopt a **race equality strategy across all public policy areas. This strategy should be led by a minister who regularly attends and reports directly to the Cabinet.**

## Introduction

London is one of the most diverse cities in the world. It is also one of the most unequal – a place where some of the country's richest and poorest areas and communities exist alongside each other. Yet mainstream conversations about the working class often draw a divide between London – home of a diverse cosmopolitan elite – and the North of the country – where an authentic left-behind working class lives.

The horrific events of 14 June 2017 were a flagrant reminder that such simplifications don't live up to reality. Despite Grenfell Tower being only 4.3 miles away from Westminster, it might as well have been on the moon. It is very easy to view the night of the Grenfell fire as an aberration, a one-off event that shocked us all. Yet the starker reality is that it was a disaster years in the making. It is the story of a society that dismisses working-class voices, prioritizes profit over people, and creates institutions that are inaccessible and indifferent to those who most need them.

Working-class people from North Kensington to Dewsbury have been vilified and disempowered in the public imagination. The dominant frames through which they are discussed are those of charity and rescue (e.g. 'broadening their horizons'), but also increasingly of a zero-tolerance and 'tough-love' attitude. These attitudes have been enshrined and used to justify recent policy developments, including embedding sanctions at the core of the welfare system. On the other hand, the Windrush scandal has symbolised a shift towards an ever more restrictionist immigration discourse and enforcement, justified by the idea that the (white) working class is to be prioritised against the arrival of undeserving (multi-ethnic) newcomers scrounging on Britain's hard-achieved prosperity.

This discourse is profoundly, and perhaps wilfully, ignorant of Britain's colonial past. It is best encapsulated by Theresa May's emphatic statement: 'The aim is to create here in Britain a really hostile environment for illegal migration'. Many going through the benefits assessment process will recognise parallels between the 'deport first, appeal later' principle for immigrants and the 'remove people's income first, appeal later' approach of the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP).

Yet the figures of the 'migrant', on the one hand, and the 'working class', on the other, are framed within mainstream political debate as separate or conflicting, rather than as profoundly interrelated. The focus moves from the economic or structural conditions that shape working-class and ethnic minority lives to a narrow culturalist account that erases questions of inequality and discrimination. This has allowed public policy to punish 'poverty' by pathologizing and blaming working-class families for their supposed lifestyles and social positions, while concomitantly developing hostile policing and immigration policies penalizing a racialized 'other' blamed for disrupting the nation's cohesion.

These parallel policy and framing developments have embedded prejudice within British institutions and public services against both working-class people and ethnic minorities, while at the same time carefully fuelling barriers and conflict between groups that, in reality, have many more overlaps, shared identities and common interests than public discourse suggests.

Rooted in the context of London, we explore how to talk about race and class differently – not as separate concepts that occasionally overlap but as structural challenges that diverse communities navigate together. It is not one or the other, but both 'race' and 'class' which have been used historically as means to justify inequality, and as tools to assert power and domination over the many, by the few. In this context, we should avoid narratives of a resurgent 'white working class' constituted as the deserving recipients of mainstream policy attention. What we risk, beyond erasing the diversity of the working classes, is reinforcing the divide between deserving and undeserving poor, which has been at the core of justifying the austerity policies that affect everyone.

In this context, we must connect the dots of race and class analysis, so that we can open up avenues for solidarity and build futures in which every citizen, regardless of their background, enjoys equal voice and dignity. Beyond debating how disadvantaged groups compete for scarce resources, we must look at how unequal power relations shape scarcity in the first place.

Another reason for us to 'connect the dots' is that not only Brexit but also Windrush and Grenfell gave

us much-needed hints of the need to reflect on the deep and growing gulf between the mainstream political debate and the lived reality of those affected on the front line of public policy. This report thus aims to recentre people's voices in our analysis of 'race' and 'class', with a specific emphasis on those who have been excluded from the typical narrative of the working class, and yet who navigate classist (and racist) injustice on a daily basis.

We start from the basic premise that as workers, carers and community members, migrants or British-born, the working-class people we have interviewed are best placed to offer insights into the challenges they face. This report is also a reminder that policy should be working in their interests. It is thus an attempt to speak not just about the working class but alongside people whose voices have too often been ignored or marginalized in the mainstream public debate on 'class' on the one hand, and 'race' on the other.

Drawing on examples from school, the labour market, housing and the general experience of navigating the city, **Chapter 1** analyses how race and class inequality have held interviewees back from accessing resources, space and opportunities in comparison with more privileged peers. A shared positionality also came into view through respondents' sense of being 'priced out' of London as a result of gentrification and the rising cost of living.

**Chapter 2** then moves on to analyse another aspect of interviewees' shared experience: navigating the punitive culture of enforcement increasingly pervading public services. Participants reported countless negative and antagonistic encounters with agencies such as the police, job centres, councils and housing offices, on a routine basis. Most of them identified interaction with public services as punitive and disempowering, to the extent that many discerned an active conflict of interest between services' targets on the one hand and the wellbeing of families on the other. Several interviewees reported disengaging from public services out of fear or hopelessness, renouncing their rights and entitlement to support.

**Chapter 3** then addresses the question of identity. We explore interviewees' understanding of 'class', and specifically 'working class' and their own sense of affiliation to the term. Younger and BME (black and minority ethnic) people appeared to feel lower levels of attachment to and belonging

within the concept of 'working class' than their white and older counterparts, despite facing similar experiences of class injustice. We explore why this is, by analysing this pattern in light of recent shifts in the labour market, as well as mainstream narratives of the 'white working class', which has been both a term of abuse and a source of nostalgic pride. We unpack the divisiveness at the core of deserving/undeserving, white/migrant or working class/underclass distinctions and highlight instead avenues for reclaiming a solidarity that resists such division without erasing difference. We draw from interviewees' own narratives to highlight how pride in and commitment to their local community is a strength of working-class communities worth investing in.

The '4Ps' framework introduced in the executive summary is useful to help us understand and summarize our analysis across these three chapters. Precariousness, prejudice, power and place appeared as core themes which were intertwined with each other and shaped the experiences and conditions of our interviewees. We believe that they can provide us with a new starting point on how to understand working-class challenges in contemporary Britain, at the intersection of both race and class.

## Methodology

Dhelia Snoussi, primary author of this report, conducted interviews with a total of 78 people,<sup>1</sup> mostly within the borough of Kensington and Chelsea, over 12 months of qualitative research.

The report draws directly from the stories and narratives she collected, mostly from people from low-income backgrounds coming from various walks of life: BME migrants, white British Londoners, younger and older people, social housing tenants, and front-line community services staff.

We conducted semi-structured interviews with a total of 10 focus groups, gathering a total of 63 people. We also conducted 15 further one-to-one interviews with community workers and front-line services staff.

We asked interviewees about whether, how, where and when they felt their social background impacted their lives, and in which spaces they felt comfortable or uncomfortable. We also questioned them about class as a concept, what it meant for them and if

<sup>1</sup> To protect privacy, interviewees' names have been anonymized throughout the report.

they perceived it to be a salient part of their identity. These themes were used to guide interviews, but the process mostly consisted in letting interviewees lead discussions.

In addition to questions during interviews, we asked participants to fill in monitoring forms which included information about their self-affiliated class, income bracket, area/borough and ethnicity. Although some forms were left incomplete by participants, we were able to draw out the information below.

Out of 78 interviewees, 44 identified as 'working class' (56%) and seven as 'middle class' (9%), although the overwhelming majority came from low-income backgrounds. A significant proportion within our sample – 18 people (23%) – did not answer the question or created their own term to define their 'class'. Finally, due to the unpredictable nature of the data collection process, information about 'class identification' could not be collected for another nine people in the sample (11%).

Only 32 interviewees (41%) disclosed their income bracket, with 21 of them reporting annual incomes below £15,000 and only two reporting annual incomes above £20,000.

Just over half (41) of the interviewees were from the borough of Kensington and Chelsea. Another 37 interviewees were based in different boroughs across London (see Table 1).

In terms of ethnicity, roughly two-thirds of our interviewees identified as black and minority ethnic (57 people or 69% of our sample), with the rest identifying as white (21 people or 31% of the sample).<sup>2</sup> Due to the specificities of North London, where most interviews took place, a significant proportion of BME interviewees were from Black African, Black Caribbean and North African backgrounds, reflecting the history and composition of the area.

When it came to analysing interviews, we operated from the assumption that participants mobilize certain forms of knowledge to navigate their social environment and that such knowledge, when communicated, can map out social dynamics that have historically remained unaccounted for. Hence, we treated those who participated in this research as not only interviewees but also knowledge producers, who do not simply share stories and experiences, but also generate specific meanings around them.

Lastly, due to the specificities of where most interviews took place, our findings may be shaped by certain characteristics specific to this area of London. However, the narratives emerging through interviews will resonate with the wider context of London, as they touch on vastly documented patterns of race and class inequality in the capital, and in the UK as a whole.

**Table 1. Area breakdown of interviewees**

Area	Number of interviewees
Kensington & Chelsea	41
Southwark	9
Hackney	5
Barking & Dagenham	4
Hammersmith & Fulham	3
Brent	3
Westminster	3
Tower Hamlets	2
Newham	2
Ealing	1
Greenwich	1
Haringey	1
Harrow	1
Camden	1
Outside of London	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>78</b>

<sup>2</sup> Detailed ethnicity breakdown available in Appendix.

# Chapter 1. Setting the scene: Structural challenges in the midst of social cleansing

This chapter sets the scene of the structural conditions shaping working-class life in London. Drawing on examples from schools, the labour market, housing and the general experience of navigating the city, we analyse how both race and class inequality have held interviewees' back from accessing resources, space and opportunities in comparison with more-privileged peers. Despite an ambivalent sense of 'working-class identity' among participants, shared material conditions came into view: facing structural disadvantage, race and class stigma and the pressures engendered by gentrification.

## 1.1 Race, class and social (im)mobility

The popular conversation around class has long revolved around notions of social mobility, aspiration and individual responsibility as the cornerstone of a fair society. The reality is that social mobility continues to be low. Those from working-class backgrounds remain more than twice as likely to end up in working-class occupations as those from professional backgrounds (Social Mobility Commission, 2019: 105–128). At the opposite end of the spectrum, those who are born at the top are even more likely to stay there than they were in 1990 (CLASS, 2018a).

Hence, while the myth of British meritocracy lionizes individual success stories and 'hard-working families', social mobility has failed to transform whole communities. This has led – at best – to a few successful working-class people, who leave behind otherwise depleted working-class communities. This failure has been exposed by the government's own commission on the subject, highlighting how entrenched class privilege remains across society (Social Mobility Commission, 2017). While the question 'Would you call yourself working-class?' was a source of contention and debate among the people we interviewed (see Chapter 3), most of them personally identified how their social backgrounds shaped their lives and prospects:

*Because of where you live, because of people you're surrounded by, there's a bracket. The government will see you as a specific class and that does affect the school you go to and the opportunities that you*

*have. Whether you can break through that, it takes a lot of tenacity and perseverance. **Channara, 20s, Black Caribbean, Hackney***

Yet current policy interventions have focused exclusively on the behaviour of the poor, and uneven outcomes have been reduced to 'a mentality of entrapment':

*[T]he inner city wasn't a place; it was a state of mind – there is a mentality of entrapment, where aspiration and hope are for other people, who live in another place. (Duncan Smith, 2007: 4–5)*

This argument suggests that if people are poor, it is because of their own poor 'state of mind', poor attitude to work and poor life decisions. The implication is that, by contrast, middle-class people have earned their position because of their own hard work and merit. Drawing on their own experiences, the people we interviewed expressed how, instead, race and class disadvantage had held them back in comparison with more privileged peers:

*Once you step into school [...] you start getting into sets based on your ability and you'll notice some people in the top sets have extracurricular help, and you don't. **David, 20s, Black Caribbean, Kensington***

*I went to a primary school in Earl's Court and it was very middle-, upper-class kind of children. A lot of them have American parents and they're getting tutors from the age of three and four, they're learning things way before their time so when they get into school, even if they're not necessarily intelligent, they get a head start. **Dalaeja, 20s, Black Caribbean, Kensington***

*When you're in primary school, you're all doing swimming classes, when you get to secondary school and your parents need to start paying for things, then that's maybe when people from working classes can look back and say, well I can't afford that. **Daniela, 30s, Hispanic, Kensington***

If poor life decisions were the sole cause of disadvantage, research suggests that many more children born middle class would be having a harder time. Robert Putnam argues that even when middle-class children drink more and take more drugs,

their families are like 'airbags' that can cushion them against the repercussions (Putnam, 2015). Meanwhile, BME children as young as 10 are having their applications for British citizenship denied on the grounds of failing the 'good character' test.<sup>3</sup> This illustrates the role of race and class in determining which actions are dismissed as 'just a phase' and which are read as 'bad character', when performed by certain people, or certain children. The same pattern underlies this story from Aisha:

*I used to go Holland Park School and my friend got caught with drugs. He was in the lower set and he got permanently excluded. And then when this other guy in the higher set, very very affluent, got caught selling drugs he was back the next week [...] It's because our parents can't speak English, cannot defend their children or generally don't have time to go down to the school, whereas [wealthier parents] can get someone else, like a nanny, to go into the school and persuade them to take their child back.*

**Aisha, 18, North African, Kensington**

While risk-taking behaviour is recognized as an ordinary part of adolescence, Aisha's example highlights significantly more-serious ramifications for working-class and BME people, who can ill afford to make mistakes. This is reflected in the evidence analysed by the Youth Justice Board: BME children are entering the criminal justice system at a younger age than their white counterparts. BME children committing less-serious crimes are also still receiving custodial sentences at higher rates than their white counterparts (Lammy Review, 2017: 60).

Beyond interactions with the criminal justice system, Aisha's testimony shows the multifaceted nature of disadvantage for youth like her. Not only being working class and BME but also having English as a second or other language implies that Aisha's parents are likely to be racialized as 'foreigners' or 'migrants'. This is a further obstacle when navigating a school system pervaded by structural racism. Although in London some progress has been made in closing gaps in educational attainment between different ethnic groups, the persistence of racial stereotyping, racist bullying and high levels of school exclusion for BME groups remain entrenched features within schools (Runnymede Trust, 2015; Runnymede Trust and NASUWT, 2017; Akala, 2018: 65–88; Marsh and

Mohdin, 2018). As a result, children who are BME as well as working class face specific challenges.

The saying 'Working twice as hard to get half as far' encapsulates this reality that, regardless of talent, aspiration and effort, structural conditions provide particular groups with a head start. Whether it is through living in better areas (usually equipped with better schools), hiring private tutors, the choice of private schooling, mobilizing well-placed social contacts, or even a more confident navigation of the school system, children from more-privileged backgrounds find themselves with a much stronger safety net that helps to foster success (Bottero, 2009). Several parents shared their awareness and resentment in regard to educational segregation – for instance:

*I'd say the working-class community and those who have bought property in the area don't mix often, as adults and the children of those adults will often go to different secondary schools. If they were to go to a state school, it might be like London Nautical, for example. It's very unlikely to be Regent's High or Maria Fidelis. **Joel, 30s, White, youth programme manager, Camden***

*About rich and poor, it's like Thomas Jones School [...] My daughter is in Year 5 now, she's been on the waiting list for five years and she's not going nowhere. As residents, we see it. After [rich people's] children get a place, they move to Shepherd's Bush, some of them far away, because they have the ability to move in and do things but people in the area, we've been ignored, that's it. **Ama, 30s, Black African, Kensington***

As a result of race and class inequality from school to the labour market, privilege can be passed on from one generation to the next. Children whose fathers are in higher professional or managerial positions are on average 20 times more likely to end up in a similar position than children whose fathers are working class (Oxford University, 2017). As a result, most people in high-status and high-income occupations come from privileged families: 96 per cent of doctors, 94 per cent of barristers and 89 per cent of journalists are from middle- or upper-class backgrounds (Social Mobility Commission, 2016), although only about a third of all British people come from these backgrounds (Friedman and Laurison, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> Between 2006 and 2018, at least 400 children were denied citizenship based on failing the 'good character test'. This test applies to children aged 10 and over (as this is the age of criminal responsibility), when they apply for naturalization as British citizens. This implies that children who are born in the UK can be refused access to nationality if they fail the assessment of their 'good character' by the independent chief inspector of UK borders and UK immigration. Reasons for failing the test can include having committed any offence after the age of 10, including minor ones such as shoplifting or cautions resulting from fights at school (Richmond Chambers, 2019). See also PRCBC, Amnesty Runnymede joint briefing: [https://prcbc.files.wordpress.com/2019/01/briefing\\_good-character\\_updated-17-jan-2019.pdf](https://prcbc.files.wordpress.com/2019/01/briefing_good-character_updated-17-jan-2019.pdf)

Beyond the impact of parental income on children's upbringing, interviewees reflected on what it meant for them to be brought up within working-class environments. An interviewee described 'middle class' in those terms:

*[Middle-class] parents have jobs associated with academia, so anything like a lawyer, doctor ... something that you would have to have studied to get those jobs [...] the academic pathway to that employment creates a culture of learning and focus on academia that doesn't exist in lots of working-class families. **Joel, 30s, White, youth programme manager, Camden***

Rather than normalizing the idea that middle-class parents are simply better at fostering learning, Joel drew attention to the material condition stretching working-class communities by describing his own experience of being working-class:

*For me, [being working class] was mum working 11–12 hours a day, single parent, which meant lots of independence for the child. **Joel, 30s, White, youth programme manager, Camden***

His outlook resonated with this discussion in a focus group composed of BME youth:

**David:** *It's not to say either way is right or wrong, but middle-class people are taught to socialize their kids in a certain way. Working-class parents aren't taught to socialize their kids in any sort of way.*

**Dalaeja:** *But I don't think they have the time to ...*

**David:** *No, you're right, because they're working all the time!*

**Dalaeja:** *I mean, if you're a single mum, or two parents but you're not earning enough, you don't have time for all of that. **Focus group with BME youth, Kensington***

This suggests that some working-class carers lack not only the resources but also the time and energy to invest in their children's education, especially if they work 11 hours a day or if they are worried about insufficient earnings. Rising in-work poverty and insecurity on the labour market<sup>4</sup> is thus a concerning reality that affects not only workers but also their children. Today, most children living in poverty have a working parent. Despite a rise in employment in the UK, the number of workers who are struggling to make ends meet has increased

even faster than employment itself (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2019). Today, more than one-third of workers are struggling to keep up with the basic cost of living. This proportion nears half for those living in London, although it is the fifth-richest city in the world (Forbes, 2019).

The effects of rising precariousness on the labour market are combined with the ongoing effects of welfare cuts for working-class communities. Extensive evidence has demonstrated the acutely adverse effects of austerity on lone parents, BME women and disabled people, as well as low-income communities across the board (EHRC, 2018a; 2018b: 241–242; Runnymede Trust, 2018c).

One of the most recent features of austerity is 'Universal Credit', a new benefit system announced in 2010. The new system merges six separate benefits into a single payment, supposedly to simplify the claims process and to reduce benefits gradually as people earn more from work. But research has found that the new system has created situations of extreme hardship, with use of food banks increasing much more in areas where the new system was in place than in areas where it was not (Trussell Trust, 2018). Austerity policies have also had wider indirect effects – for example on higher education: many previously free further education courses were made chargeable in 2013/14. In the following year, student numbers fell by 30 per cent, as fewer and fewer people could afford to study (Women's Budget Group, 2019). From 2010/11 to 2016/17, there was also a 49 per cent reduction in government funding for local youth justice services, a 51 per cent reduction in community safety services and a 46 per cent reduction in location recreation and sports initiatives (Women's Budget Group, 2019). Such cuts have dismantled community safeguards for many working-class youths, who find themselves with barely any access to free or affordable opportunities for self-development, recreation and release.

Despite such evidence, the political response to what are perceived as 'working-class problems' has usually been a two-pronged approach: 'raising aspirations' strategies or, now more commonly, tough-love tactics. Most acutely after the 2011 riots, then-Prime Minister David Cameron's emphatic speech 'on the fightback after the riots' was quick to undermine and suppress structural explanations: 'These riots were not about government cuts: they were directed at high street stores, not Parliament.'

<sup>4</sup> Insecure employment now touches one in nine workers in the UK, either because they are deprived of key employment rights or because they are in low paid self-employment (TUC, 2018a). We discuss this further in Chapter 3, Section 3.1.



He finished with a promise: 'We will turn around the lives of the 120,000 most troubled families in the country' (Cameron, 2011). And soon after, the Troubled Families Programme was launched – spearheaded by Louise Casey. Casey had previously been the head of the 'Respect' agenda announced by then-Prime Minister Tony Blair, which similarly focused on the attitudes or culture of working-class families rather than on their socioeconomic circumstances (and similarly had nothing to say about ethnic inequality).

In the end, the Troubled Families Programme had no discernible impact on the key outcomes it was supposed to improve: it didn't make people any more (or less) likely to come off benefits or to get jobs, or make them likely to commit fewer crimes, for instance (Portes, 2016). Without undermining the stories of families whose lives *may* have been positively impacted by the programme, it hung cynically on 'turning families around' and, in so doing, legitimized narratives of 'troubled' families and 'cultures of worklessness', which were foundational to the programme's theory of change. Scrutiny by independent academics showed that the government largely misrepresented data by taking a set of families who were undeniably poor and disadvantaged and redefining them – without a shred of evidence – as dysfunctional and antisocial (Crossley, 2015; Portes, 2016). Yet the dispiriting language of 'hard-to-reach' and troubled families representing a 'high cost to the taxpayer' is now deeply ingrained when talking about working-class and BME people – including at times in progressive spaces, which can guiltily perpetuate these damaging stereotypes, despite good intentions.

In summary, despite media and political discourse insisting on meritocracy and the possibility for everyone to raise their living standards if they adopt the 'right attitude', evidence shows that structural conditions rather crystallize the reproduction of inequality from one generation to the next.<sup>5</sup> The people we interviewed were very aware of the disadvantage they faced in comparison with more privileged peers, on the grounds of both race and class. This section has also discussed how rising precariousness in working-class communities – due to welfare cuts and growing insecurity in the labour market – entrenches social immobility even further in today's Britain, as the most disadvantaged groups are hardest hit. In this context, the political failure

to understand and address structural disadvantage and the tendency to blame instead working-class 'behaviour' has not only had damaging consequences, but has normalized prejudice. The following section focuses on interviewees' experience of such prejudice, and how it has impacted their lives and prospects.

## 1.2 'They see you as below them': Navigating social stigma

Beyond being limited by their background in terms of material resources and opportunities, many interviewees shared their experience of having to navigate social stigma based on their ethnicity or perceived social background. They appeared most likely to experience such stigma when moving outside of their neighbourhoods or comfort zones, for instance when going to school in a new area or leaving home for university. One participant initially denied being working class:

*I can't identify as working class, I don't feel like working class can be identified here.*

It was only when we asked interviewees where they felt uncomfortable that she was able to draw out how her social background had caused her to feel alienated from other students from as early as her schooling experience:

*In Sacred Heart [Secondary School], I did notice [class segregation] but that's because I wasn't in my ends<sup>6</sup> any more. I started identifying that, wow, people from Barnes and Roehampton were all white and they were in my school. Whereas all the people from Westbourne Park and Ladbroke Grove, they were all mixed. We were all ethnic. I was like, that's weird, because even their interaction with us was a bit like 'Oh, the ghettos', but it was like, we did the same tests to get into the school, you know?*

**Daniela, 30s, Hispanic, Kensington**

Her testimony resonated with other young people's narratives:

*When I was in secondary school, everybody was mostly free school meals and you couldn't tell because there was a fingerprint system. Then I went to sixth form, it was mostly white, middle-class people and it was really embarrassing going to lunch*

<sup>5</sup> We are discussing here the intersection of race and class in fostering structural disadvantage, but many other factors are at play, among which are gender, sexuality and disability.

<sup>6</sup> A way of referring to someone's local area/where they are from.

*because I felt that people could tell, so I would wait for everyone to be finished to get my lunch or I'd get it before everybody else, because that's like, defining you, 'Oh she's on free school meals'. **Joy, 20s, Black African, Southwark***

*I went to UAL London College of Fashion and Central Saint Martins and in both of them, I felt super out of place because there was no 'working class', it's just mummies that sent their kids there. At first, I was like, none of these people did a cleaning job [...] So university was a bit of a shock for me. **Daniela, 30s, Hispanic, Kensington***

Both Daniela and Joy express how profoundly interrelated race and class have been in shaping their experience of 'unbelonging' at school and university. They identified feeling othered on grounds of race (moving from racially mixed to more homogeneous environments) but this alienation was very 'classed' and shaped by an overall feeling of stigma and disadvantage also rooted in their working-class background: having to work to afford university or being on free school meals, for instance. A general awareness of being 'other' (Daniela being perceived as 'ghetto') and the feelings of inferiority this generates add onto daily micro-aggressions, reminding BME and working-class people of the structural barriers limiting their prospects, including in the labour market:

*A few [job] interviews that I went to, I mentioned the area I live in and instantly I saw a change in their demeanour. But I could definitely feel they were judging me because maybe they thought 'Oh, because you're from this area, we aren't able to trust you' or they didn't see me as a capable person. **William, 20s, Mixed White and Black Caribbean, Kensington***

*I remember one time I had to write a letter and my manager asked me 'Did you write this?' He was like, 'Not to be rude, but I just didn't know that you were so well-spoken'. I couldn't believe it. Did I write this? What do you think, that I got a youth worker to do it for me? And I get that a lot. **David, 20s, Black Caribbean, Kensington***

*One time I was applying for jobs and my friend told me, you know what, you should change your first name, because you have such an English last name. If you changed your first name, then you're more likely to get a job because they won't see your first name and turn you down. **Ifeyani, 20s, Black African, Barking and Dagenham***

*You see, if you have an accent, if you're articulate or the way you come across, whether that's class, they patronize you. They see you as below them. It comes*

*under many guises though, mental health, race, how you come across. **Gary, 50s, Black Caribbean, Kensington***

These testimonies depict the interconnection of race and class – among other social determinants such as address, accent or mental health – in shaping how individuals are perceived by their peers. Such perceptions have very real effects for BME and working-class people on the labour market, regardless of talent, effort or merit. In the UK, ethnic minorities have to send out 50 per cent more job applications than their white counterparts to get invited to the same number of job interviews, even when they are equally qualified (Zschirnt and Ruedin, 2016). While rates of academic attainment are higher among most BME groups than for their white British peers, we also know that 40 per cent of African and 39 per cent of Bangladeshi graduates end up overqualified for their roles (Weekes-Bernard, 2017). On the other hand, even when people from working-class backgrounds attend top universities, and even when they receive the highest degree grades, they are still less likely than those from privileged origins (with the same credentials) to be found in top jobs (Friedman and Laurison, 2019: 21). Race and class effects, then, reinforce each other for working-class BME people: Bangladeshi people from working-class backgrounds are only half as likely as working-class white people to make it into top jobs, despite attending university at much higher rates (Friedman and Laurison, 2019: 21).

A range of mechanisms is at play here, from direct discrimination (classism, racism, sexism) to the subtler and more insidious effects of stereotyping, micro-aggressions, tokenism and homophily – the tendency among decision-makers to favour those who are, in various ways, like them (Friedman and Laurison, 2019). This story from Michael illustrates how this can play out in people's lives:

*One of the guys working with me, I trained him up, he came from a good background, impeccably dressed, posh accent. And they kept him and let me go. It's all about how you speak and how you fit in as opposed to [the rest], because I didn't have the right accent and that, even though I trained him. **Michael, 60s, White, Southwark***

Friedman and Laurison have pointed out how field-specific codes in the UK labour market underpin notions of fit, and set shared norms and expectations in the workplace – around dress, accent, taste and etiquette – that are then routinely misrecognized as markers of 'objective' skill, talent and ability

(Friedman and Laurison, 2019: 25–26). In the above story, Michael's trainee being 'impeccably dressed' and having a 'posh accent' contributed to making him a more desirable employee than his own trainer.

While certain traits and attributes get to be naturally associated with elitism – whiteness, maleness and 'posh' accents, for instance – working-class and non-white identities are usually a source of suspicion (Puwar, 2004). Highly editorialized shows such as *Benefits Street* and the wider genre of 'poverty porn television' have, for instance, spread and naturalized the association of attributes of laziness and disaffection with working-class communities (Jensen, 2014). Similarly, mainstream representations of blackness in the UK and the US have naturalized the association of black bodies with crime, violence, primitivism or hyper-sexuality (hooks, 1992; Akala, 2019: 89–122). Working-class and BME people have to bear such stereotypes as they navigate their lives. When it comes to crime, the focus on 'black youth' in British political discourse has been very visible, especially after the 2011 riots. Just after a riots, an existing discussion about social housing transformed overnight into a 'race' debate, underpinned by highly racialized and alarmist language about 'gangs' and 'gang nominals' (Pereira, 2019: 6).

In the most recent years, racialized discourse demonizing 'migrants' has also had key effects on most BME groups, regardless of their actual immigration status. Although working-class people all share a common experience of class disadvantage and oppression, BME people and migrants have been specifically pointed at and blamed for socioeconomic failures and evils. Such blame, orchestrated by politicians over the decades, has led to divisive narratives of the working-class on the one hand, and the strengthening of existing structural racial disadvantage and prejudice in our society on the other.

*Because I'm fully veiled, as soon as [the housing officers] see me, they think I can't speak [English], I can't understand. They think, let's see what we can get away with. I went to school here! I went Holland Park School, I went Avondale Park [laughs]. They've never met you, but automatically, [they think] she can't speak English and when they hear you, they're shocked!* **Fatima, 40s, North African, Kensington**

Alongside their experience of class marginalization, certain interviewees mentioned their experience of racism within institutions and how their migration status held them back in life:

*Once they just see my surname, [estate agents] ask 'OK, so what status do you have? Are you British?' And automatically, the house we've asked for, that's been advertised, [they say] 'No ... this wouldn't be your price range', and so we kind of hesitate when we're looking for houses to tell landlords our true backgrounds. It's mainly accommodation and housing that we've suffered from.* **Denise, 20s, Black African, Barking and Dagenham**

*I remember a time when five, six of us were planning a holiday in sixth form [...] It came to crunch time and we had to provide passports, and my friend chased me for my passport for such a long time and I was making up excuses [...] I think I delayed it for like two weeks. It was the most I've ever felt it, being a migrant. Even after everything that we'd been through. Because that, for me, was our first independence of going on holiday together as a group of friends. We were taking mini-steps into adulthood and I felt like I was missing out because of my status. I'd never felt so migrant.* **Mariam, 20s, Black African, Barking and Dagenham**

Here, it is important to note how classed the anti-immigration sentiment is in the UK, as highlighted by Grace:

*[T]he type of wealthy immigrant, that's the right king of immigrant [the government] wants. If they get people who are just normal, they'll put a bad connotation on it, like we're coming here to take your job, but you won't say that the guy that owns Chelsea [Football Club] – Abramovich – he's an immigrant, not even EU, he's from Russia. But because he's wealthy, they don't really say anything bad. So yeah, I don't think we have much in common [with wealthy immigrants] because they're having it easier, and we get the brunt of the government and the society's hate, and they just get 'They're really good for the economy!' and that kind of praising.* **Grace, 19, Black African, Southwark**

Stigma was also referred to through its visual component – being perceived as an outsider in the public space:

*It's the looks, fam. The looks that I get. There's one road, Blenheim Crescent [...] I can bop down there, I don't care, but you do get these people watching you. You walk past a car and you might look at it because it looks nice and people looking at you like you're gonna steal it.* **Dalaeja, 20s, Black Caribbean, Kensington**

This example from Dalaeja is an illustration of how the ongoing association of black youth with crime

(Pereira, 2019: 21) impacts the ways in which she is perceived in the public space. The looks that she gets on Blenheim Crescent can be felt as a reminder that she does not belong in this area. This experience of being the ‘other’ in certain spaces resonated with most interviewees. According to Nirmal Puwar and Sara Ahmed, social spaces are indeed not blank and open for anybody to occupy, as a connection has historically been built and repeated over time between spaces and the bodies which inhabit them (Puwar, 2004; Ahmed, 2007). Hence, even when in theory all can access the public space (and go to Blenheim Crescent), certain bodies keep appearing as its ideal occupants while others are made to feel uncomfortable, exposed, visible, policed and different when they try to enter (Ahmed, 2007):

*I might walk around Portobello in a shop or something and I've got someone looking at me, I have to turn around and say 'Do I know you?', and they're not even from London [...] I could throw a stone to my home from Westfield and I've got people looking at me like I shouldn't be in Westfield or I shouldn't be in the Village, but where did you come from? I've lived here all my life, I've seen the building go up, I've seen what used to be here before the Westfield. **David, 20s, Black Caribbean, Kensington***

In summary, structural disadvantage is not just a matter of socioeconomic conditions; it is also nourished and reproduced by forms of prejudice that working-class and BME people must contend with as they navigate their lives. This can take the form of micro-aggressions (‘I didn’t know that you were so well-spoken’), or overt discrimination (‘they didn’t see me as a capable person’). Media, mainstream representations and political discourse have played a key role in sustaining damaging stereotypes of the working class, but also of BME people and migrants. As a result, these groups find themselves being repeatedly reminded, directly or indirectly, that they do not belong in certain institutions, occupations or spaces. This has strong psychological effects on people (‘university was a bit of a shock for me’) and it eventually hinders their capacity to progress in the workplace (‘they kept him and let me go’). A general sense of being unwanted or unwelcome in certain spaces was often discussed in direct association with gentrification, a commonly recurring theme across interviewees – old and young, white and BME alike. We explore this theme in the following section, as another key feature shaping the prospects of working-class Londoners.

### 1.3 ‘They’re pricing us out’: Gentrification, pride and loss of community space

Despite a strong sense of pride about the contribution of working-class and BME cultures to the vibrancy and diversity of London, interviewees shared a considerable sense of loss at its dilution and displacement outside of the capital.

*We're not against urbanizing, we're against gentrification. Don't drive us out to put new housing and new people in. Drive things alongside with us.*

**Aisha, 18, North African, Kensington**

*What's happening in France is you've got all the horrible yellow buildings outside of Paris, that's the working class. So that's how London's gonna be, how Paris is now. We move out and they come in.*

**Richard, 60s, White English, Southwark**

As Aisha and Richard highlight, gentrification was resented not as urban change per se, but as a process taking ‘London space’ away from the working-class communities that have constituted the long-standing social fabric of its neighbourhoods, to the benefit of wealthier newcomers. A recent report from the Institute of Race Relations has highlighted how a complex cocktail of housing and policing policies and legislation has over the years fostered dynamics of social cleansing in the capital, with working-class and BME Londoners on the front line of what can be called ‘London Clearances’ (Elmer and Denning, 2016; Pereira, 2019).

Austerity measures have indeed put strong financial pressures on local councils, creating growing incentives for them to attract wealthier and middle-class residents: a way to generate higher council tax income while reducing demands on public services. Financial pressures also create the incentive to sell any council-owned land or social housing estates to private companies, as these assets become ever more profitable on London’s real-estate market. This political terrain has allowed private investors, with an interest in maximizing profits rather than providing homes for those in need, to determine London’s housing policy (Pereira, 2019: 15).

*Slowly, slowly the luxury flats are being built and the social housing is kind of slowly sold off, bit by bit, so I feel like it's kind of pushing us out. **Anong, 30s, South East Asian, Kensington***

Such dynamics have been eased by changes to welfare and housing legislation. For instance, the Housing and Planning Act 2016 abolished secure

and assured tenancies for new social housing tenants, making it easier for local authorities to evict individuals and families from properties after two or three years (Pereira, 2019: 16). Between 2012 and 2015 over 50,000 families – that is, upwards of 150,000 people – were evicted from London boroughs (Elmer and Denning, 2016).

In some cases and when possible, local residents have organized to resist such dynamics. The Focus E15 Campaign was born in September 2013 when a group of young mothers were given eviction notices by East Thames Housing Association. When they approached the council for help, the mothers were advised that, due to cuts to housing benefit and the lack of affordable housing in London, they would have to accept private rented accommodation as far away as Manchester, Hastings and Birmingham if they wanted to be rehoused. This prompted the mothers to get organized and demand 'social housing, not social cleansing!' (Focus E15 Campaign, 2019<sup>7</sup>).

But beyond direct evictions, wider structural forces are at play to orchestrate the large-scale removal of the lower classes from areas where they are seen as undesirable or without enough financial value to society or 'the market' (Pereira, 2019: 11). As the price of rent is constantly rising, whole swathes of Londoners are being slowly 'priced out' of their neighbourhoods, simply because they can no longer afford the exorbitant cost of living:

*It's only a matter of time, we're the last generation here. If you're on the bottom of the ladder, you can't even afford to live in social housing because if you're on a low-paid job, you can't even afford social housing. **Richard, 60s, White English, Southwark***

High costs of living combined with insufficient income had disastrous effects for Dhalia, a social housing tenant who was struggling to make ends meet, despite working:

*I was pushed to get a job since my son got into nursery. I got a job and now half of my salary goes to paying my rent. From the 16th of the month, I start asking my friends for loans to just get by until the end of the month. How is it social housing, if I can't survive on a teaching assistant salary? I can't afford the rent now, because it's so high. Council tax is so high, so I don't know why they call it social housing because in the end I have to move out. **Dhalia, 40s, Black African, Kensington***

Many interviewees also shared their concerns that their children could not afford to stay in their neighbourhoods after moving out of their parents' home:

*If there's kids that are older, then where are they gonna live? [...] When the teenagers need to move on, that will break up the community because they won't be able to afford to live around here. **Vanessa, 60s, White English, Kensington***

*They're building up the area so they can chuck people out. The rents are going high, the council tax is going high, so people won't be able to afford, you will have to get out [...] They want to divert everybody so there's no community anymore. **Fatima, 40s, North African, Kensington***

Fatima's and Vanessa's comments show the erosive that impact gentrification is having on London's working-class families. To get a sense of how many people are affected, let us remember that 27 per cent of the capital's total population lives in poverty, and that the main factor explaining such a high rate is London's exorbitant housing prices (Trust for London, 2017). Yet despite the government's promise to build more social housing, the few dozen or so council estates that have been demolished and regenerated to date have rehoused neither all prior residents nor the hundreds of thousands of people still waiting on council housing registers (Pereira, 2019: 11). This speaks to a growing scarcity of social and *genuinely* affordable housing in the capital (Booth, 2017), while demand and needs are as high as ever.

We have highlighted, in Section 1.1 the highly classed and racialized impact of welfare reforms. This also applies to housing benefits, with the 'bedroom tax' (2012) and 'two-child limit' (2017) having a particularly large impact on black and Asian households (EHRC, 2018a). Combined with Universal Credit, this has pushed many families into debt and rent arrears: a Freedom of Information request conducted in early 2018 showed that an average of 73 per cent of council tenants who were on Universal Credit were in rent arrears across London (BBC News, 2018).

But there are also more insidious processes through which working-class and BME communities are made to feel undesirable in their own neighbourhoods. For those we interviewed, the process of being 'priced out' was combined with a general shift in the urban landscape, less and less

<sup>7</sup> Read more about the campaign at <https://focuse15.org>.

affordable as it increasingly caters for middle- and upper-class newcomers. The production of 'gentrified urban space' tends indeed to exclude the existing local community, as it engenders a standardized, consumer-centred local culture which necessitates the expulsion, directly or indirectly, of anyone whose presence is deemed undesirable (Pereira, 2019: 24). This created strong feelings of alienation and disorientation among interviewees:

*There's million-pound houses, even the shops, it's all posh boutiques. It's not like how it used to be, they're catering for a different class of people. **Fatima, 40s, North African, Kensington***

Many testimonies like this one showed working-class residents' concerns and resentment about gentrification. This was exacerbated by a sense that wealthier newcomers did not understand, were not aware or did not care about the contribution of working-class and BME communities to the history of their neighbourhoods. Two BME young women from West London remarked:

**Dalaeja:** *When I walk down this area, Portobello especially, I see a new coffee shop or whatever, but when you see the people in them, they're the middle-class mothers that got nothing to do ... It's not for the area, I feel like it's too much and I feel like they don't know the history of the area ...*

**Aisha:** *They don't care for the history of this area.*

**Dalaeja:** *But they should! When the Caribbean community moved here in the 50s, it was slums, no one wanted to live here, and the roads were mash-up ...*

**Aisha:** *They called it 'Browntown'.*

**Dalaeja:** *The British Empire, or whatever you want to call it, asked the people from the Caribbean to come here to build it up, then we've done all of this, we've had our carnival, been through our troubles with the police ... we finally get to this place, and then we get looked down on by people who've been living here for all of 2 months. **Focus group with BME youth, Kensington***

Likewise, a very different group, of older white men aged 55 and over, from Rotherhithe:

**Richard:** *The younger people, they go to the Greg. I go into the Greg – there's a few local people, but most of the people in there are young, upper-class or*

*more middle-class people. St James' Tavern is even worse, so I don't feel comfortable in those places. I used to go St James' Tavern, I had my wedding reception in there. But as the generations go on, it's changed, changed, changed. For me to go to St James' Tavern, it's like going into a different world.*

**Henry:** *The yuppies who live now in Canada Water, they go to the West End, they don't stay around here to drink, because [Rotherhithe] is not upper class, no cocktail bars and restaurants here for them. They live here and they go away. It's only 20 minutes to Green Park from here by tube.*

**Andrew:** *People are only here for a certain amount of time and they move on – they don't really care about the area.*

**Andrew:** *No, no, they're not interested in the history – not like us. **Focus group with older white men, Southwark***

The two groups, although on one level very different and unlikely to interact, were both proud of their area and its heritage: local pubs and carnival. Both groups made recurring distinctions between the residents – people 'like us', 'community people', 'the real community' – and more 'middle-class' professional newcomers, often dwelling there temporarily. A community leader from a front-line organization<sup>8</sup> in Ladbroke Grove said to us:

*All these new people who came here, volunteered [for the Grenfell recovery], they've moved here and they've got the money and the jobs, whereas the real people who live here, when all of these people are gone, we're still going to be here. And we are the neighbourhood.*

Residents did not resent privileged newcomers because they were new or foreign to the area. Indeed, interviewees appeared to be very proud of the diversity of their neighbourhoods (see Section 3.4). What they resented was the power relations at play in the ability of privileged newcomers to benefit from the area's resources ('the money and the jobs') with greater ease than local working-class communities.

Besides, gentrification is not only pushing poorer people out of their neighbourhoods; it also dispossesses working-class communities of their social networks and sense of belonging to a local community:

<sup>8</sup> The author of this quote was not an official interviewee of this research, therefore demographic information was not recorded.

*I live in Peckham, [but] I don't go to any of the pubs round there because I don't really know anybody round there now [...] a lot of my mates have moved away and a lot of the pubs have closed down, or it's too expensive and they want £5–6 for a pint, they're pricing you out.* **Andrew, 60s, White English, Southwark**

*I was speaking to someone and they just moved into Rotherhithe. So I say, 'Oh you've just moved into Rotherhithe' [pronounced Rover'ive], and they go 'No, we've moved into Rotherhithe' [pronounced in 'posh' accent]. It ain't Rover'ive no more, it's Rotherhithe [laughs].* **Richard, 60s, White English, Southwark**

Yet, social networks have been instrumental in building political movements that have made history in London: from the Battle of Cable Street (1936) to the struggle of the British Black Panthers (1968–72) and protests for workers' rights such as the Dagenham women's strike (1968–84). All of these movements were key in fostering equality legislation or advancing values that most people are proud of today: anti-fascism, racial equality and gender pay equality.

The intangible consequences of gentrification are thus a general loss of potential for such resistance, as BME and working-class community ties are dispersed and dismantled across space and over time. Some local residents we spoke to came up with their own solutions as a result. Leslie and Dee founded Granville Community Kitchen, a local initiative aimed at empowering the community through food-centred gatherings and activities. By providing 'free community meals', the initiative provides a space for community socializing, while offering an alternative to food banks for those who most need it. Leslie reflected on the loss of community space and its impact on working-class residents:

*What we're seeing increasingly is that enclosure of community and public spaces, it's getting narrower and narrower where people can go. So they're going to private spaces like McDonalds, but you still have to buy something, they have to buy a cup of coffee or something, and they have the right to throw you out. I know a few people who come to us use McDonald's. People don't sleep, a lot of people we see have trouble sleeping, so they roam around, or they ride the buses.* **Leslie, Granville Community Kitchen founder**

In summary, the privatization and de-regulation of social housing, welfare reforms and 'urban regeneration' agendas have fostered dynamics of social cleansing in London that are highly classed and racialized. With over a quarter of the city's total population living in poverty, and most of its BME population concentrated in social housing, many working-class and BME families simply cannot afford to live in London any more. When they are not directly evicted from their accommodation, or unable to pay due to the adverse impact of welfare reforms, working-class families are slowly priced out of their neighbourhoods as rents and costs of living keep on increasing. Such pressures dismantle access to community space and working-class networks which have been key in fostering London's proud history of political resistance. This hostile context adds onto the structural disadvantage discussed in Section 1.1, and the forms of prejudice discussed in Section 1.2, as 'gentrified urban space' does not cater to the needs of working-class communities or acknowledge their historical presence and contribution to London's diverse neighbourhoods.

All in all, we have seen that access to good-quality education, well-paid jobs and secure housing is linked to race and class privilege in London (as well as elsewhere in the UK). We have drawn on interviewees' stories to highlight how widespread race and class prejudice has caused interviewees to feel 'other' when entering certain schools, workplaces or urban spaces – and how it has impacted their trajectories despite their best efforts to 'get on'. Interviewees' experiences of social alienation ('I felt super out of place') have been exacerbated by London's rampant gentrification ('it's pushing us out'), which is transforming the landscape of working-class communities while slowly pricing them out of their neighbourhoods. This hostile environment has been exacerbated by the adverse effects of rising precariousness in the labour market and welfare reforms, which have hit the most disadvantaged groups hardest. Such structural challenges are being brought to bear on a new generation of working-class and BME Londoners.

Outlining this context is key to setting the scene for the topic that found most convergence across interviewees: their shared experience of a punitive culture of services. It is a shared position as working-class (and in many cases also BME and/or migrants) that shaped people's interactions with public services. We explore this theme in the following chapter.

## Chapter 2. Navigating (and resisting) a punitive culture of services

This chapter accounts for the punitive culture of enforcement that increasingly pervades our public services and its effects on working-class families, migrants and BME Londoners. Interviewees were most able to speak about race and class injustice when describing their interactions with public services such as the local council, the police, the NHS, social services, job centres or the benefit system. For many participants, negative encounters with public agencies that are supposed to provide support and protection were experienced not as isolated incidents, but as routine instances of indignity, disempowerment and indifference which culminated – in the very worst cases – in disasters like the Grenfell Tower fire.

### 2.1 Beyond Grenfell: Surviving institutional indifference

The Grenfell Tower fire – as an event – represents the sharp edge of discrimination and state collapse, but those affected spoke about the *culture* of Grenfell, meaning every negative, discriminatory or complacent interaction with the council that preceded the fire and every neglectful decision that failed to stop it from happening.

*[The council] treats the poor as the poor and the rich as the rich. Because we are poor, they treat us poorly.* **Adiba, 50s, Black African, Kensington**

A local resident displaced by the Grenfell Tower fire in 2017 summarized her experience since the fire: 'I've never felt so unprotected.' She described a dizzying number of personnel changes, from key workers to public lawyers to physicians for an ongoing health issue. Eighteen months later, she was still in a hotel. This case was not isolated: the EHRC investigated the experiences of a group of people displaced by the fire who all reported similar experiences: no one had moved into longer-term accommodation, even one year after the tragedy (EHRC, 2019).

What our findings show is that such situations of distress are far from restricted to crisis cases such as the Grenfell tragedy. Rather, they are symptoms of under-resourced local authorities routinely missing the mark of decent and affordable housing provision (Pereira, 2019; Women's Budget Group, 2019). As highlighted by the UN Committee on Economic,

Social and Cultural Rights, adequate housing is not simply the shelter provided by having a roof over your head, but is somewhere you can live in security, peace and dignity (EHRC, 2019: 11).

The reality is that cuts in public expenditure have fostered systemic complacency among housing authorities: hardly anything is a big enough priority in the face of lacking resources, regardless of how distressing or precarious people's situations may be. As a result, local residents can be left waiting for months, if not years, for basic needs to be addressed:

*We know [the council] are absolutely useless, you call them, it takes two to three weeks, if not months, to get things repaired, so you do it yourself. Where I live, we are ghosts, they don't do any maintenance, nothing at all.* **Henry, 60s, White French, Southwark**

*In my house, half my wall has mould from the winter. That still hasn't been addressed.* **William, 20s, Mixed White and Black Caribbean, Kensington**

In its in-depth study of social cleansing in London, the Institute of Race Relations has highlighted local councils' vested interest in deliberately letting some council estates fall into disrepair, as this enables them to adopt a policy of 'constructive eviction' (Pereira, 2019: 18–19). Once estates appear to be too damaged to be sustained ('sink estates'), it is easier to argue for demolition and to sell the assets to private companies who seldom rehouse prior residents (see our earlier discussion on gentrification). This dynamic can hardly be regarded as a colour-blind project when the largest proportion of London's BME population is concentrated in social housing (Kaye, 2013). But as Henry's testimony shows, this issue affects all social housing tenants, white and BME alike. As local authorities allow the exterior and interior of estate buildings to fall into disrepair, families endure hardly habitable living conditions. This adds onto the adversity of overcrowding:

*We work and earn money and pay rent but it feels like we are let down. Every time I ask the council, I am told I am not a priority. I don't know what a priority means for them [...] I have got four children in one bedroom. And we are not seen as a priority. After years on the waiting list, I am still in temporary accommodation.* **Ama, 30s, Black African, Kensington**



*They always put you on the list but you are far down and they say you are not a priority and you are not overcrowded enough. Four children in one bedroom, how can you live? You need space, you can't take them outside every day, sometimes you have to stay at home, teach them things, drawing ... I know the borough is crowded but sometimes they answer you really badly and you feel that gap but you are paying your taxes, you are paying your rent and everything. Olivia, 40s, ethnicity not recorded, Kensington*

*My friend lives in a two-bedroom flat with four children: 13-year-old twins, one is 19 and the girl is 17. And she's crying every day, she wants the council to move her but they said there's no point. Hanin, 40s, Arab, Kensington*

*When you are overcrowded, this impacts on the children's learning, I know this as a parent myself [...] I don't see why, as hard-working parents paying our way in this society and having a positive impact in the area since last year after the tragedy of Grenfell, we are still not entitled to even the basics, to keep going and paving our way to rebuild this society and to enable our children to carry on what we have started. I don't think it's fair. Siham, 40s, Black African, community leader, Kensington*

Here, it is important to note how structural racism impacts housing provision in London: all ethnic groups are more likely to live in overcrowded housing when compared with the White British population. Around two in five Black African (40%) and Bangladeshi (36%) people lived in overcrowded housing according to the latest Census (Runnymede Trust, 2016).

But overcrowding is only one of many features of a wider pattern of institutional indifference towards all social housing residents. Jessica Pereira has highlighted that the slow-burn neglect of council estates functions as a form of slow violence, a 'destruction that is dispersed across time' while not typically being seen as violence at all (Nixon, 2011; Pereira, 2019). Daily reiterations of indifference from housing authorities were indeed experienced as violent by interviewees, who also spoke about authorities' quick switch of attitude from indifferent to punitive at the first occasion or the slightest mistake from social housing tenants or applicants:

*Two, three years have passed and the repair hasn't been done. One pound rent less you didn't pay, they're sending letters to you – but when you have a repair that needs doing? That money you're spending on letters, [telling them to] come and fix the bloody ceiling, it's such a waste. Fatima, 40s, North African, Kensington*

The case study below is an example of how a punitive culture of services can unfold throughout people's experience of social housing.

*I got my first flat when my son was five, my daughter was four and before that Jesus Christ, I was in so many B&Bs ... cockroaches, the lot. I mean it was five years I waited [for social housing] and for five years I was staying here, there, with friends, in hostels and all through this time, I was going to the housing to inquire and they just fobbed me off. And it was too much and I exploded and they took me to court [because I damaged the flat] but the judge had sympathy for me, once he had seen how I had been passed around. I was with the kids, on my own, some places they put me was like in Neverland and I thought: where am I? And with my two young babies. I was so depressed. It was the judge that took sympathy – if it was up to the housing, I'd be moving still, my kids would be in care, I'd be cast as some violent woman or something. It had to come out of their hands.*

**Interviewer:** *How did that make you feel?*

*I was just exhausted all the time, like my mum was really ill so I was my mum's carer as much as possible. It was horrible, [I was] in hostels where it was all men, and my daughter, I couldn't even let her go to the toilet, because – God knows – so I'd have to go to the toilet with her. Everything was hard and yeah, I just exploded. It was too much. Helen, 40s, Mixed White and Black Caribbean, Kensington*

Helen argued that the council was indifferent to her situation until she had to go to court, once her situation had already reached an acute point and her children were in danger of being taken into care – most parents' worst fear. As a consequence, Helen suspects that housing officials are working against her best interests: 'if it was up to the housing [...] my kids would be in care'. She notes that the council 'fobbed her off' until she became ill and damaged the flat. While public services appeared to be very indifferent to her situation when she was seeking help, the council was by contrast very quick to clamp down. Yet Helen was offered little support to prevent her from reaching a point of utter distress.

Helen identified how her reaction to the situation – damaging her flat – would be understood as another poor, irresponsible decision, and she was aware of the labels professionals would likely ascribe to her ('some violent woman') and knew that this was common for working-class mothers. However, Helen's situation highlights the experience of overload over five years of successive poor interactions with the housing department, culminating in the point

of crisis and ill health, as well as the intersecting pressures of being a carer, a single parent, with young children, experiencing homelessness and displacement. She expressed despair at the lack of acknowledgement of the circumstances in which she became unwell and the likelihood that she would be smeared by authorities as a bad parent.

Researchers, policymakers and journalists often ask what class is, how to define it and how it shapes identities. In contrast, what comes out through Helen's case is *where* and *when* class is experienced as lack of protection and security – particularly in times of transition, ill health and crisis for working-class people who do not have the same networks and cannot as easily rely on institutional support as more privileged peers.

In summary, this section has highlighted a culture of institutional indifference which goes far beyond Grenfell, pervading the management of social housing as a whole. Interviewees reported numerous basic housing needs which repeatedly went unaddressed (extensive mould, severe overcrowding, no housing maintenance, etc.). Interviewees pointed out how their position as working class shaped their interactions with housing authorities ('because we are poor, they treat us poorly'), and the shift from complacent to punitive attitudes at the slightest fault from their side. Interviewees also insisted on the unfairness of their situation: finding themselves working, paying taxes, and yet having their housing needs unmet and disregarded. Experiencing institutional indifference left people feeling neglected and depressed ('she's crying every day') and invisible ('we are ghosts'). Alongside the experience of such institutional indifference towards their needs and voices, interviewees also reported feeling policed and surveilled by public services which are meant to provide care, support and protection. We explore this pattern and how it impacted people's lives in the following section.

## 2.2 Living in fear: Racialized policing, state sanctions and immigration enforcement

Many people we interviewed were living in fear, in the anticipation of severe, life-changing circumstances such as children, housing, citizenship or benefits being taken away. Cumulative negative and adversarial interactions with public services have created an 'us versus them' dynamic and a perception – drawn from working-class people's lived experience – that services work against their best interests.

*I feel out of place in the places of authority, like the Citizens Advice Bureau. Anywhere that you go to seek help, to help you ... I don't feel comfortable there.* **Daniela, 30s, Hispanic, Kensington**

While different public services and their policies tend to be discussed separately, from the perspective of working-class families they are part of an overall system creating not only distrust, but a general sense of threat. We have indeed seen the rise of a culture of enforcement, surveillance and zero tolerance across public services. This comes in many guises: stop and search, benefits sanctions, data sharing across public agencies, or random house raids. Unsurprisingly, many of these measures have been experienced as discriminatory and disempowering by interviewees, starting with interactions with the police:

*A lot of my friends, their houses have been raided and when they find nothing, that's a major violation. You've come to their home, their private sphere, and then you've penetrated that to find nothing ... That's why I feel like we have nothing in common with [the police], because they don't want to see us as individuals, as different from the stereotypes. Don't put me in boxes and stereotypes and make me feel uncomfortable where you should be enforcing protection and safety.* **Aisha, 18, North African, Kensington**

The Lammy Review (2017) and the Race Disparity Audit (2018) confirmed that ethnic minorities are much more likely to experience disadvantage in the criminal justice system: for example, young black men are over-represented on the Gangs Matrix and disproportionately subject to stop and search and use of force by the Metropolitan police. Interviews highlighted how 'violating' this felt for those most affected:

*My first encounter with the police was when I was 15, Brixton in Morleys [a 'chicken shop' chain in South London]. I was there with two of my friends and my friend's little brother, he was no more than five at the time. We're just standing there, ordering food. All I heard behind me is a voice saying 'Can you come out of the shop, please?' [...] They've taken us out the shop, they've searched us, all they've seen in my bag is school books and then they asked have I got concealed weapons. By the end of it, they said 'Well, there's some gang violence and you lot all happen to be wearing something brown', that's why they said they searched us.* **David, 20s, Black Caribbean, Kensington**

*It's a violation of your personal space and you feel so belittled after it. Anyone who walks past is watching you be stopped.* **Dalaeja, 20s, Black Caribbean, Kensington**

The Lammy Review also accounted for 'the trust deficit' between BME individuals and the criminal justice system, and its foundation in tremendous racial disparity at every stage, from stop and search to judicial processes and verdicts. This trust deficit was perceptible in interviews we conducted.

*Working-class people don't aspire to become police, I mean there are people who do, but you'd get a lot of looks from your bredrins, like 'Rah ... you're becoming one of them?'* So you kind of end up isolating yourself from your people, your community, your friends and family. **Ella, 20s, Black Caribbean, Kensington**

Here too, race and class intersected in shaping the lack of protection and antagonism felt by BME people in relation to the police. Ella speaks of 'working-class' people in the above quote: this resonated with the discussion below in another focus group:

**Dalaeja, 10-year-old boys walking on the street, from young you're already getting harassed [by the police] and you've got no one around to protect you, and you don't even know your rights. It's really bad. They just try to grill you because they think you don't know nothing, you're not with anyone ...**

**Aisha: But also because you're not of an affluent class they think they can take the mick. Focus group with BME youth, Kensington**

The gulf of trust between working-class residents and public services extended well beyond the experience of policing. A recurring theme in interviews, for instance, was parents' fear of their children being taken into care, and the general distrust of social services. Two professionals working respectively with mothers in precarious housing situations and working-class youth commented:

*[It's] people thinking that [police] can just come and take your passport and deport you, they can take your children away. If I go to the food bank, my children will be taken away. If I go to social services, my children will be taken away. If I ask for mental health support, my children will be taken away. It's just this thing we hear over and over again. It's like the Boogeyman.* **Lisa, founder of a service supporting mothers and children in temporary accommodation**

*It's about how social services are perceived in working-class communities. That's not just in white communities, this goes across white, black and Asian, they don't see social services as a support network. They see them as a punishment, something you have to go through, something that will take your*

*children away, a watchdog, an eye on you, rather than a support service.* **Joel, 30s, White, youth programme manager, Camden**

Those we interviewed who had interacted with social services resented the lack of support and of understanding of their circumstances, and felt policed and looked down upon by 'experts' who knew little about their lives and problems. Here is a case study drawn from a conversation with a family from Hackney:

**Mother:** *[Social services] just make it seem like they know everything and they make it seem like you're doing a really bad job ... there's no support.*

**Daughter:** *Like you're the worst parent ...*

**Mother:** *You just feel like you're constantly being watched, and you're always being judged by what you're doing or what you're saying, but I just don't feel that there's a lot of support. It's like a checklist and they have to go by what is on that checklist, it doesn't matter what the feelings are of the children. It's like, 'We've been called here because something's gone wrong and we're here to help you'. How are you gonna help me? Because you don't know what we have to do, you don't know what we do day-to-day, or our routine, so how are you gonna come in and 'help'?* **Danielle, 50s, and Stella, 18, Black Caribbean, Hackney**

Her daughter observed:

*Every time they came to visit, they wrote down everything, from body language to what I said, to me picking my nails. This was when I was going through my GCSEs so I was at the point of popping off at anyone and everyone. I told her 'You're part of the problem and I'm not a snitch' and she wrote it down and told me I could be obstructing an investigation. I told her: 'You're obstructing me from living my life'.*

This case study resonates with the situation of Helen in relation to housing (see Section 2.1) as it is set up in the context of parents' most vulnerable moment: when a child is at risk of being taken away from their care. In both situations, social services and housing intervened at the edge of crisis, which only worked to further antagonize and unsettle families at a challenging point in their lives, rather than providing support when they needed it.

This same case study also highlights a gap between the professional expertise of social workers and the lived experience and intuitive knowledge of families. This is not to undermine the hard work of social workers (many of whom are also working class)

within a widely under-resourced sector (Murray, 2015), but to highlight a wider culture of prejudice which shapes how working-class and BME people are perceived and addressed by social services. In the above scenario, the mother identified that social services looked down on her as a working-class black mother whose parenting style was being judged as inadequate. Joanna, a social worker for a youth safety organization, reflected on a wider pattern of prejudice within services, which consists in blaming and pathologizing clients rather than assessing genuine barriers to engagement and the source of people's distrust:

*I think no matter how hard services try, [professionals] are very reactionary and very judgemental, they just are. So if a young person doesn't want to speak to the police, then they're seen as being a bad witness, or young people already have a distrust of police and services, because of the communities that they've grown up in. So then we're just another service presented to them, and I think that's where a lot of barriers come from. And sometimes it's communicated by social workers really badly: it's like 'Oh, you need to stop doing this, so that this person can help you'. It's very victim-blaming, rather than understanding that the young person is a victim in this [process]. I think that some of the language that can be used insinuates that young people are complicit in their own abuse: saying things like 'She's putting herself at risk' or 'She's very promiscuous', or one that we get a lot is: 'She's manipulative'. Quite a few of our young people are from the care system and I think if you've been in the care system from a very young age, it isn't about you being manipulative. It's about you struggling for survival any way you can and I think that is glossed over and it's easier to call a difficult young person 'manipulative' than to say: 'This young person has been repeatedly failed by society and that's why they're acting the way they are'. **Joanna, social worker for a youth safety organization***

In this context, more care and support, but also less judgement and a genuine understanding of families' social and cultural specificities, was regarded as crucial to rebuild trust between families and public services:

*When [families] see that you care, that's what brings down the defensiveness. Maybe that's when you might find that people would start speaking to the police [...] In these kinds of situations, you cannot*

*have a corporate, business face on. You have to have a human and caring face. **Stella, 18, Black Caribbean, Hackney***

For BME people and Muslim communities, a sense of being policed rather than supported by public services is compounded by hostile-environment policies and the Prevent strategy, which introduce bordering processes in ordinary spaces like health, education and housing. Growing evidence documents overlaps between policing and immigration enforcement practice on the one hand (Bradley, 2018; LAWRS and Step Up Migrant Women, 2018), and essential service provision on the other. In October 2018, it was learned that uniformed Home Office workers were embedded in local councils, including attending child poverty assessment interviews with families seeking support.<sup>9</sup> Given the hostile environment, families with migration backgrounds are inevitably frightened by Home Office workers, whom they reasonably perceive to have the authority to deport them or remove their children from their care. Bethan Lant, head of casework at Praxis, highlighted in 2018 how social workers who requested Home Office support in these assessments regularly threatened to separate families, using their worst fears against them and creating a cliff-edge for vulnerable people (Siddons and McIntyre, 2018). This directly resonated with another professional's account of the tactics employed by certain housing officers in their interactions with social housing residents:

*Housing officers and so on do use [parent's fears of their children being taken away] to call mum's bluff and to create a cliff-edge for them. They say, 'Oh well we can't house you, but we can house your children'. But imagine using that as a threat, it's just awful. 'If you ask for a house, we'll take your children', or 'If you insist on staying here rather than moving to Manchester, then we'll take your children'. It's a massive barrier to people finding the help that they need and that they are entitled to. **Lisa, founder of a service supporting mothers and children in temporary accommodation***

The use of families' fear of being separated for the sake of immigration or housing policy enforcement exemplifies a punitive culture of services and its ramifications across working-class and BME communities. In this context, people from such communities are discouraged from seeking support altogether. A professional working with mothers in

<sup>9</sup> Councils interview families in child poverty assessments to determine their eligibility for Section 17 support. This section of the Children Act 1989 defines the duties of a local authority in safeguarding and promoting the general welfare of a child in need and her/his family within their area. Assistance given to families under S17 includes financial assistance.

situations of precarious housing recounted a story illustrating this pattern:

*[One of the mothers] was living in a house, her husband had left and he was the one with the immigration status. So then she was put into a situation where she had three children under five and no immigration status, because it was a spousal visa that she was staying on ... She had put in a leave to remain request with the Home Office, so she wasn't 'illegal' [but] she's in limbo. She's not allowed to work, she's got no recourse to housing benefits, to child support, to any of the benefits, so she's in this enforced destitution. She'd fallen behind with her rent, the landlord comes and knocks on her door and says, 'I'm just going to come in and take your TV'. She says, 'No, you can't do that', and the landlord says, 'Who are you going to talk to? The police? If you call the police, they're going to be looking at your passport, not mine.' She just felt like, 'If I call the police, I'll get into trouble because of my immigration status', so she felt like she didn't have the right to be protected by the police. **Lisa, founder of a service supporting mothers and children in temporary accommodation***

This story is not an isolated case: it resonates directly with extensive findings from other organizations such as Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS), King's College London (KCL) and Liberty. KCL and LAWRS conducted a survey with 50 migrant women which showed that two-thirds felt they would not be supported by the police due to their immigration status (LAWRS and Step Up Migrant Women, 2018). Migrants' assumption that they will not be protected by the police proves to be perfectly realistic: Freedom of Information requests in May 2018 showed that 27 out of 45 police forces (60%) in England and Wales still shared victims' details with the Home Office for immigration control purposes (LAWRS and Step Up Migrant Women, 2018). Perpetrators of crime and abuse are aware of the vulnerability of migrants – especially women – due to their status, which can then be taken advantage of to assert coercive control (LAWRS and Step Up Migrant Women, 2018). This is exemplified by Lisa's testimony: a landlord threatening their tenant with impunity.

In the context of the wider hostile environment, there are serious grounds for concern that statutory agencies (including the police) currently prioritize immigration enforcement over the protection of victims (LAWRS and Step Up Migrant Women, 2018; Bradley, 2018). At the moment, no one can access free healthcare, lawful employment, rented accommodation or a bank account without their status being checked for immigration enforcement

purposes, as a direct result of hostile-environment policies (Bradley, 2018). In this way, front-line workers providing essential public services, such as doctors and teachers, have been transformed into border guards, often against their will and sometimes without their knowledge (Bradley, 2018). More worryingly, secret data-sharing deals between key government departments and the Home Office have been used to locate and target people for deportation (Bradley, 2018).

As Liberty highlights, if people know that seeking support from their doctor, their child's school or the police may lead to their deportation, they will likely be deterred from doing so. Liberty documents, for example, that in 2017 a woman who was five months pregnant reported to the police that she had been repeatedly raped, but was subsequently arrested at a rape crisis centre on immigration grounds (Bradley, 2018). Secret data-sharing thus worsens existing patterns of distrust between essential public services and those who need them. It is crucial that a firewall is put in place: the promise that data collected by essential services will not be used for immigration control, so that people do not renounce access to help simply because they do not have the right paperwork. Safe reporting pathways should be established to allow all members of society to feel safe, respected and supported when they seek support or are escaping from violent situations. The statement 'Ask me if I'm safe, not where I come from', made by the coalition Step Up Migrant Women, encapsulates this aim. When perpetrators of crime and abuse are emboldened by the fact that their victims have no means of protection, our whole communities become less safe.

In summary, this section has drawn attention to the gulf of trust between public services and working-class communities in London. Interviews have shown that many people live in constant fear of various forms of enforcement: the fear of being stopped and searched, of having one's house raided, of one's children being taken away, of facing deportation or immigration detention. Such fears are founded in actual patterns of punitive behaviour by public services. Interviews showed that immigration enforcement and housing officials at times directly use such fears to help them to meet their goals and targets. This can take the form of exploiting families' fears of being separated in order to facilitate social housing evictions, or arresting people on immigration grounds when they report a crime. This punitive culture of services creates an environment in which vulnerable people are more likely to be scared of the police, housing and social services than they are to perceive them as sources of support and protection.

Interviewees' awareness of the institutional prejudice towards them as working-class and/or BME people when navigating interactions with services appeared to be a further barrier to their feeling safe in accessing the help and support they need. In the following section, we explore participants' recurring assertion that they felt not only discriminated against but effectively dehumanized when interacting with certain public services. As a result, many people ended up voluntarily stepping away from support, discouraged by a sense that their rights are ultimately unenforceable.

## 2.3 Dehumanized by bureaucracy and unable to activate rights

Many interviewees reported feeling discriminated against or mistreated when interacting with public services. This reflects the ways in which institutionalized race and class prejudice can trickle down to the front line of service delivery, causing routine experiences of indignity and disrespect for certain groups:

*Any office I go to, or any person I meet, to my surgery, my GP. I always feel mistreated. I feel like I am not acceptable, they don't say it verbally, but the body language, I understand it. So now I am getting a little bit scared because I have had bad experiences and that affects me. Now, I always feel hopeless. Maybe I'm not lucky and I met the wrong professionals. They don't treat you as a human being. **Ibrahim, 50s, White British, Kensington***

Several other interviewees – like Ibrahim – described feeling dehumanized in direct interactions with services but also by a broader sense that their lives did not count within bureaucratic systems which place targets and efficiency above people's rights and wellbeing:

*Over the last year or so, the services I regularly use, whether it be housing or GP, services are a lot more corporate now and they think about all the numbers rather than the people. **William, 20s, Mixed White and Black Caribbean, Kensington***

*The council are ruthless, the housing people are ruthless. They don't care. They don't see you as a person in my opinion. You're just another number, another case. **Fatima, 40s, North African, Kensington***

Here, it is important to highlight that responsibility for such negative encounters with public services

cannot be merely dropped onto the shoulders of front-line workers (many of whom are working class too). Without erasing the possibility that some such workers may behave in discriminatory and unfair ways, we should also be pointing to the structural conditions that have shaped such patterns. The normalization of prejudice against working-class and BME people is one factor (see Sections 1.2 and 2.4), but so is the pervasive effect of austerity on the social fabric of public services. Based on a survey of over 21,000 local authority employees, UNISON has shown that many front-line workers are themselves worried that funding cuts mean they are less and less able to do their jobs properly (UNISON, 2018). A facilities worker from North East England gave this enlightening testimony:

*Lack of resources has meant that we deliver a reduced service. We are doing our best to deliver a quality service. However, lack of budget means cutting corners ... We are losing more and more experienced staff due to constant restructuring. Myself and many others are near breaking point! The public are demanding more, and government cuts mean we can't achieve what we believe to be great services. We all have had to reduce our standards and when you have a great work ethic, this is demoralizing. I know I am doing my best with what I have but what I have is reducing year on year and it is not good enough for our local communities. (UNISON, 2018)*

The same survey showed that as many as 67 per cent of local council employees did not think that local residents were receiving the help and support they needed at the right time; only 14 per cent were confident that vulnerable local residents were safe and cared for (UNISON, 2018). In other words, those residents who are already vulnerable because of the challenges they face in their lives are made even more so due to local authorities failing to address their needs:

*When such important decisions about your life, like health and mental health and physical health and people's actual humanity and dignity are in the hands of housing officers and the local council, all these people, and you're waiting for A to make a decision about B ... The way that your life is fragmented out, that is I think a routine form of disempowerment [...] It's the fact that your life can be in this bureaucratic system and that you are part of that in really fragile times. If you think about people who are engaging with the state and state services, these are people who are also vulnerable to it, and who don't have the means to protect themselves. **Jamila, 20s, South Asian, Tower Hamlets***

This quote highlights how public services' bureaucratic procedures can deprive people of dignity and agency over welfare decisions that have tremendous impact on their lives. On top of this, vulnerable residents have little means to protect themselves against such decisions, especially when they are infringing on their rights. A sense of hopelessness in the face of unfair bureaucratic decisions was expressed in these terms:

*They had taken me off the [housing] list, but there was no explanation, I couldn't fight against it [...] So you feel like you don't have a voice to fight back, because that's the decision they've made. What can I do as a council tenant? That's exactly how I felt – what can I do? Because I'm just a council tenant.*

**Carol, 40s, Mixed White and Black African, Kensington**

Further illustrating this dynamic, some interviewees spoke of a double harm in relation to the criminal justice system: being first harmed as the victim of crime or abuse, and then doubly punished 'when you go to somebody to talk to them' and report the incident, and it isn't dealt with properly. In such situations, dehumanization was felt by interviewees as the infringement of freedoms and rights:

*I think it's in situations of violation where you feel dehumanized, but the part that makes me feel powerless is when you go to somebody to talk to them about it and if you don't get that accountability and validation, that is when you feel most powerless. It's like you have no agency and nothing can be done. Like if people who are stopped and searched by the police, if they do know their rights, and they're still stopped, you feel even more powerless.* **Farah, 20s, Mixed Black African, Greenwich**

Participants also reflected on the lack of communication about available support – for example, hardship funds or Discretionary Housing Payments. Many did not know about such resources or whether they had the right to access them. On the contrary, several interviewees found that support was purposefully made difficult to access: 'they don't want us to know', said one of them. A shared impression that services and support have been designed to be out of reach further entrenches poor esteem and confidence in services. This cements the belief that levers of justice are not working for working-class people, and that their rights are ultimately unenforceable. In such instances, the most vulnerable (often at the intersection of race and class) go without their full rights, expressing the fatalist view – drawn from lived experience – that the system is, and will always be, rigged against their best interests.

Those interviewees who most needed public support often experienced long drawn-out interactions with services, with simple issues taking months if not years to resolve. This had damaging consequences for people's morale and motivation, as it generated cycles of disempowerment, exhaustion and hopelessness. Residents also complained about services being one-size-fits-all, inflexible to the specific needs of clients. Ibrahim (introduced above) had issues with medical assessment, for instance. He had been repeatedly asked to go to a medical centre despite the fact that his doctor had been clear about the need for him to stay at home. He spoke about the impact of this on his health and wellbeing:

*I already have sharp pains from an accident and from my health issues, and they [medical staff] are saying you have to come, but the doctor wrote to them and they are saying they didn't receive it. Until now they haven't come. I feel terrible, like, system crashed [...] When we get this type of treatment when we approach [services], that affects us. It affects our health. When I went to the hospital to check my veins in my legs, the doctor noticed I had hypertension and I didn't know. He said you are close to experiencing angina, you must take capsules to reduce your hypertension. This is all from the stress.* **Ibrahim, 50s, White British, Kensington**

Similarly, another interviewee reported his experience of waiting years to receive Carer's Allowance and support from social workers to help him care for his son, who had ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorder):

*I've been waiting for Carer's Allowance for three and a half years – I'm chasing and chasing and chasing and literally you don't go anywhere. My son was autistic, he was assigned a social worker from quite young and he saw that social worker maybe twice in his entire life. No help from the council, no advice. After he left school, there's no support at all in helping him find work, or helping him get by in life, or whatever. My son died last year from an embolism, but his entire life basically, we were the only support he ever got.* **Michael, 50s, White English, Southwark**

Such accounts as Michael's and Ibrahim's are further examples of the institutional indifference discussed in Section 2.1, and the feelings of disempowerment it fosters within working-class communities. In this context, several interviewees suggested that public services should be less fragmented, to avoid repetitive instances of rejection which further discourage those trying to access support:

*There are lots of facilities and agencies, but when you go to them, the system is not good. You can't get*

*exactly what you need, and then they translate you to another agency, and to another agency, so you don't know how to access the support. [They say] 'go there, go there, go there', what we need is everything in one place, one agent that can solve your problem, not going around in circles, telling you to go all over. You are left alone, you are unwanted, nobody's gonna help you – that's how you feel. In the end, you give up without solving your problem. **Adiba, 50s, Black African, Kensington***

A recurring theme was that people we spoke to experienced problems in more than one area of their lives, suggesting that their issues should be considered in conjunction rather than separately, especially if they are mutually reinforcing or experienced simultaneously – for instance, experiencing a health issue related to a precarious housing situation.

*You go round and round in circles. They put things in place and you never solve your problem. You just repeat your story again and again and in the end, they don't know any of what you're saying and so you repeat, and it's passed along, and usually, I give up. **Anong, 30s, Asian, Kensington***

As exemplified above, a clear effect of institutional indifference and a generally punitive culture of services is that many working-class people prefer to disengage from services altogether.

Such disengagement becomes a conscious and appropriate decision to avoid experiences of harm, danger (see Section 2.2) and indifference. Several interviewees reported stepping away from support voluntarily, out of exhaustion, hopelessness, fear or disillusionment with the support on offer. To overcome this, rather than bashing working-class people for being 'hard to reach', there needs to be a better assessment of why and where barriers exist.

In summary, in this section, we have seen that engaging with punitive and under-resourced public services was experienced as dehumanizing by interviewees. Bureaucratic procedures for accessing support often felt long, discouraging and inefficient. For many people, this ended up being another obstacle to navigate on top of other life stresses, as they found themselves rotating between agencies, stuck for years on the council housing register, waiting indefinitely for a medical visit or Carer's Allowance, and navigating (often unsuccessfully) the labyrinthine processes of appeals. It was when sharing such experiences that there was most convergence across interviewees of all ages and ethnic groups.

We have also seen how negative interactions with public services result in a cumulative wearing down of the health and motivation of affected people, who are left feeling more isolated, demotivated and hopeless. In such a context, the push for more aspiration and resilience ('dust yourself off and try again') reveals a deeply rooted ignorance of (and indifference to) the extent of structural disadvantage for people living it first-hand. A professional from a front-line organization in Kensington commented on this pattern:

*If they've got poor health then their attendance might suffer because they've got an appointment or counselling or they're being evicted and we're constantly getting ridiculed by the borough saying: 'Oh, your attendance is low'. But actually, if you come here, on the front line, you'll get to see what some of the issues are. These people are not making it up, they'd love to come to class, but they've got real problems. These people have responsibilities and if they don't go to work, they won't be able to pay the bills, they're going to be evicted. It's basic textbook stuff. If you look at hierarchy of needs, they're not gonna get to education, before they get a roof over their head. **Sumanah, adult learning manager in Kensington***

This testimony shows how front-line staff find themselves witnessing the contradictions between the pressures of delivering on targets received from above, and the lived reality of struggling families. In the following section, we explore how institutionalized forms of prejudice against working-class people, BME people and migrants shape the policy response to such communities. We assess how the failure to address structural race and class disadvantage leads to misinformed policies and interventions that focus on correcting 'behaviours' and 'attitudes'. We assess this approach as inefficient, unrealistic and damaging, normalizing stereotypes about certain communities being 'deficient' while distracting us from the root causes of disadvantage.

## 2.4 Hostile policy environment: Tough love or institutional prejudice?

A growing policy enthusiasm for more-aggressive, zero-tolerance approaches has been demonstrated over the past few years by hostile-environment immigration policies and reforms to welfare, including the stubborn commitment to Universal Credit despite its so-far grievous effects on vulnerable claimants.

MPs on the Public Accounts Select Committee have accused the DWP of having a 'fortress mentality',



whereby it is failing claimants through a systemic culture of denial and defensiveness in the face of any evidence of adverse impact. The committee's report accuses the DWP of persistently dismissing evidence that Universal Credit is causing hardship for claimants and 'refuses to measure what it does not want to see' (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2018). Such examples depict a level of 'institutional ignorance' at the core of policymaking that does stem not from blissful unawareness but rather from conscious choice. Why is there such stubborn disinclination to innovate better, more humane solutions in the face of inefficient systems harming claimants? Tough-love tactics have become a 'common-sense' response to working-class people, rather than one based on evidence. This suggests that the issue lies in the fact that working-class and BME people are still viewed as problem groups by policymakers.

Between attacking 'migrant hordes' who exploit our public services and undercut wages, and 'benefit cheats' who are too idle to work, sneering shows like *Benefits Street* and *Immigration Street* expose a generalized level of contempt and scaremongering. *Benefits Street* participants were subjected to death threats after the show went on air, and many claimed they had been bribed and encouraged by Channel 4 bosses to exaggerate their lives to make 'good TV'. However, more adversely, politicians also use incendiary and adversarial language such as 'skivers' and 'scroungers' (Hills, 2014), which has negatively contributed towards a culture of shame and demonization. Contrary to the narrative of a 'culture of worklessness', most people are on benefits for a short amount of time as they get back on their feet (Hills, 2014). In this context, the 'never-worked' family and scrounger narratives are damaging and incendiary, turning the population against some of Britain's most vulnerable people.

Terminology such as 'skiver versus striver' and 'good versus bad immigration' is part of an assault on the welfare state. These narratives have knock-on effects on all those at the margins of society, including disabled people. In a survey published by the Disability Hate Crime Network in 2015, 'scrounger rhetoric' was highlighted in the testimonies of around one in six of 61 disabled people, who described being verbally or physically assaulted in disability hate crimes (Burnett, 2017).

To illustrate the ramifications of a hostile policy environment for working-class and BME communities, let us take another example. In June 2018, Home Office minister Victoria Atkins argued

that social housing should be taken away from families of gang members and other criminals so that people 'understand the consequences of their criminal behaviour' (Pereira, 2019 : 31). The enforcement of such a proposal would effectively criminalize innocent family members.

Because of structural racism within the criminal justice system (Lammy Review, 2017), those family members most likely to be affected by Atkins' proposals are in fact black working-class people. Such policies not only reflect but also compound the disproportionality already entrenched within the criminal justice system (see Section 2.2).

To stop youth and 'gang' violence, Atkins also advised parents 'just to look in your kitchen drawer and count your knives and make sure you know where the knives are'. This not only demeans parents, who know their children and households best of all, but also naively underestimates the complex, multiple and interlocking factors involved in a young person's involvement in 'gang violence'. Atkins' comment contributes to a trend of blaming mostly black working-class mothers for their parenting styles, while absolving the state of responsibility for the structural conditions that often correlate with high crime areas – for example, poor housing and poor employment opportunities.

Another element fostering discriminatory policy-making is the presence of administratively unnecessary and unjust targets. For example in early 2018 it was revealed, despite initial denial, that the Home Office had set strict local targets for deportation. This led to the targeting of 'low-hanging fruit', such as Windrush victims (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2019). Pressure to meet targets meant that raids were taking place, arbitrarily and on the basis of limited intelligence reports, in areas with high BME concentration in the hope of picking up some 'undocumented' people. The practice of target-setting and the lengths to which enforcement agents will go to meet those targets create a culture of fear (see Section 2.2), which is experienced not only by a narrow group of undocumented people, but also by many more of us: neighbours, friends and communities perceived to be 'immigrant'.

Already in 2014, a report cautioned against targeted policing and arbitrary quotas for arrests and stop and search, which created a bullying 'culture of fear' within the Metropolitan police (Walker, 2014). The report's findings were denied by the police, despite officers' testimonies of being 'almost continually

under threat of being blamed and subsequently punished for failing to hit targets' and the likelihood of this encouraging unethical and baseless arrests. The report further insisted that there was a contradiction between principles enshrined in key policing strategies – in particular, Total Victim Care – and the use of performance targets. Yet again, recommendations based on evidence were ignored.

The assumption, based on no evidence, that communities need surveillance and enforcement rather than care and support is one that we must urgently question. This is crucial in order to avoid the ongoing erosion of our public services, and to continue to uphold hard-fought principles such as social security, welfare, the duty of care, and the right to equality and dignity of treatment from public authorities. These principles are already a distant abstraction for many working-class and BME people and, as Angela Davis' famous quote highlights, 'If they come for me in the morning, they will come for you in the afternoon'.

The consequence of a punitive culture of services is at best a general decline in the quality of services on offer, and at worst severe dehumanization of entire communities – a dynamic into which many public service officials do not want to be co-opted.<sup>10</sup> We already have chilling examples of such dehumanization within the immigration system. As a professional working on the front-line, Lisa reflected on the contradiction between the aim of fostering a cohesive society and a system that deprives asylum seekers of the means to survive and effectively participate in such a society:

*What do we want from them? How do we expect them to integrate when they don't have any of the means by which to do so? We're robbing them of the means by which to do it, especially people who are have no recourse to public funds, we're not even letting them work. A lot of them have to find their way*

*through the black economy, one of the mums said to me 'They've taken everything from me, I've only got my body left, what do they want me to do? Do they want me to sell that too?' How would you suggest someone who is living on £37 a week in a one-bedroom place with a shared kitchen and a shared toilet, how would you suggest they integrate? Isn't it our responsibility as people who have somewhere to live or who make policy, to make it possible? **Lisa, founder of a service supporting mothers and children in temporary accommodation***

To conclude, public policy has punished 'poverty' by pathologizing and blaming working-class families for their perceived lifestyles and social positions, while concomitantly developing hostile policing and immigration policies punishing a racialized 'other' blamed for disrupting the nation's cohesion. These parallel policy developments have embedded prejudice against both working-class people and ethnic minorities within British institutions and public services, while at the same time carefully fuelling separation and conflict between groups that have many more overlapping experiences, shared identities and common interests than public discourse suggests.

This chapter has explored some of those overlapping experiences across working-class and BME communities: facing institutional indifference yet living in constant fear of enforcement, as well as feeling dehumanized by bureaucracy and unable to activate rights. Such experiences have led many interviewees to distrust public services and eventually to disengage and renounce to access support out of fear of facing further harm. This bears witness to an increasingly punitive culture of services in the UK, as a result of years of welfare cuts, as well as the institutional race and class prejudice underpinning policymaking. These developments are an area of critical concern and are incompatible with the aspiration to foster shared values such as dignity, equality and human rights.

<sup>10</sup> The 'Docs Not Cops' campaign (read more at [www.docsnotcops.co.uk](http://www.docsnotcops.co.uk)) is one example among others that many public service staff do not want to be co-opted into the policing and mistreatment of their service users, including migrants.

## Chapter 3. Divided and conquered?

This chapter relates the question of identity to the shared conditions discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. We unpack the fact that despite facing significant class disadvantage, many interviewees effectively did not identify as working-class. We analyse how an atomized labour market combines with polarizing narratives along the lines of 'white working class vs migrants', or 'working-class vs underclass' to create effective divides between people who in reality share common interests and material conditions. A polarizing discourse that draws the line between deserving and undeserving working-class people, often along racial and national lines, must be rejected. Such divisive narratives, orchestrated from above rather than below, have been deployed to justify policies that make all disadvantaged groups worse off. The last section of this chapter draws from interviews to highlight avenues for reclaiming solidarity that resist division without erasing difference.

### 3.1 Who is (the) working class? Ambivalent affiliations within a shifting class system

The question 'Would you call yourself working class?' was a source of contention and debate among interviewees. They often disagreed on what the term meant and on whether it applied to their lived experience. Several of them also questioned whether 'working class' and the usual class divides could capture contemporary labour market realities:

*I can't identify as working-class. I think now the way things are, working class is sort of a dated term, there's so much more to it now. You don't just have your working class, your middle class, your upper class any more. There's so many levels to it because of the way things have changed. There's almost like an in-between working class and middle class. I guess it doesn't have a name. **Emily, 20s, White, Kensington***

*I just think you've got the lower working class and the higher working class and then you've got the middle*

*class, and I would put myself in the higher working class. **Natalia, 40s, White, nursery manager, Kensington***

Such quotes directly resonate with the findings of much recent research on class. Emily's and Natalia's references to an 'in-between working class and middle class' or a 'higher working class' show why the academic shifts in classification make sense: the class system is much more complex and multilayered than the mainstream working/middle/upper-class division that people most commonly use (Savage, 2015). There is not only a traditional working class (which has acquired some level of stability) and a precariat (those struggling the most to get by): there are also younger generations whose positions are more ambiguous. Some may have incomes above the national average but generally low levels of access to institutions and social mobility. By contrast, there are also people who are very educated and have similar cultural and social capital to the established middle class, but who also have low incomes and savings.<sup>11</sup> All in all, assessing who is working class today is much more complex than it was 50 years ago:

*It's more of a generational thing, especially in the industrial period, it was more clear – there were certain roles ... but now, I don't really feel like [working class] fits into this day and age. **Dalaeja, 20s, Black Caribbean, Kensington***

So what happened? As Dalaeja suggested, as we moved into the 21st century, the closure of industrial and manufacturing industries – which once dominated the professional landscape of working-class communities – and the wider restructuring of the labour market – have led to a concomitant shift in the composition of the working classes (Bottero, 2009). In London, while the manufacturing industries employed about 1,500,000 people in 1960, this number is now down to 250,000 despite a much larger population (UNCSBRP, 2019). Match factories have been replaced by Amazon fulfilment centres and dockers with Uber drivers as London's service industry has expanded.

<sup>11</sup> Ethnic minorities are over-represented among this very group, which was identified as 'emerging service workers'. Ethnic minorities in this group enjoy considerable amounts of cultural capital but have not been able to translate this into economic capital in the same way that white Britons have (Savage, 2015: 173). This makes sense given well-documented patterns of racial discrimination in the labour market (Zschiirt and Ruedin, 2016; Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2017).

In the decade since the financial crisis, political decisions, including austerity, attacks on trade unions, and a refusal by government to rein in employers' attempts to push new risks onto workers, have also significantly hit the quality of jobs available to the working class (TUC, 2018b). This implies that younger generations from working-class backgrounds do not face the same prospects as their parents did: they are, for instance, much more likely to work as part-time call centre operators or outsourced cleaners than as factory workers. This is to say not that some jobs are better than others, but rather that the benefits and rights attached to such jobs do matter in terms of their role in fostering stability and workers' wellbeing – or not doing so.

Some working-class people will experience social mobility but, as we have seen in Chapter 1, this remains the exception rather than the norm.<sup>12</sup> Class inequality continues to shape the very fabric of the labour market, even as it shifted away from industrial and manufactural labour. While in 1978 the top 5 per cent of households had an income four times higher than that of the bottom 5 per cent, today they earn 10 times more than the bottom 5 per cent (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2015).

This interviewee spoke about the effects of a shifting labour market on today's working classes and the ambivalence it generates in terms of class identity:

*There aren't the jobs. They are basically in service industries and I think it's unclear whether that's a working-class job because the whole model of class was built up around the industrial economic structure and that's gone. We are now in some weird post-industrial, gig economy. You have a huge amount of the population who are quite well educated, because the education system has been reasonable, so they are in some ways quite middle class in their culture. But they're working poor ... They're non-working poor ... they're struggling poor. **Leslie, Granville Community Kitchen founder***

As Leslie highlights, decline in industrial and manual labour went hand in hand with the rise of more-precarious forms of employment, such as low-paid, part-time, casual and flexible jobs, self-employment, and zero-hours contracts, predominantly in the service industry (Bottero, 2009). Insecure

employment now touches one in nine workers in the UK, because they are either deprived of decent employment rights<sup>13</sup> or in low-paid self-employment<sup>14</sup> (TUC, 2018a). Such work is not only negative on its own terms, but offers little prospect for progression or pay rises: people become permanently locked in such roles, labouring away simply to meet their basic needs, with the prospect of old-age poverty when they retire.

Rising work insecurity implies a disappearing safety net for anyone enjoying little class privilege or savings to rely on in case of hardship. Precariousness is thus a strong feature of contemporary working-class life, as a result of the combined effects of work and housing insecurity on the one hand, and welfare cutbacks on the other. The disappearance of this safety net does not hit as hard, if at all, those who have been raised in more economically and socially privileged households. Despite a strong ambivalence around what 'working class' means, most interviewees shared an understanding of the 'middle class' as having access to stability and security: disposable income, secure housing, nuclear family, holidays. They then clearly identified that this wasn't their experience:

*I think middle class is you've got your own house, you've got a bit of money in the bank and you're not struggling. And you've got your wife and two kids. You have holidays two or three times a year. **Andrew, 60s, White English, Southwark***

*Middle class means you can cope. You don't have to be rich to be middle class, but you can cope. Got your own house, own garden. **Steve, 50s, White, Hertfordshire***

Another feature of the shifting labour market is a more atomized and isolating experience of work. The rise in self-employment, outsourcing and freelancing, combined with the decline in trade-unionism and the fracturing of traditional working-class industries, have been key factors in this transition. In today's fragmented and largely de-unionized labour market, there are fewer opportunities for workers to share physical space and build a collective sense of identity or common ground for mobilization. As a result, working-class consciousness has lost resonance for many people:

<sup>12</sup> The situation of ethnic minorities is here ambiguous, because the relative progress of racial inclusion in the UK labour market has allowed more and more BME people to access employment and social mobility compared with previous generations. Younger BME generations are less disadvantaged economically than their parents compared with their white peers (Savage, 2015: 176). But this does not mean that they are better off overall: BME people remain more likely to be on low incomes than their white British counterparts (Cabinet Office, 2018).

<sup>13</sup> This includes zero-hours contracts and agency and casual work where key rights are not guaranteed, including the rights to be represented by a trade union; to maternity, paternity and adoption leave; to an itemised pay slip; and to protection from unfair dismissal.

<sup>14</sup> Defined as those earning less than the government's National Living Wage.

*It's more psychological than anything. It's how you see yourself in society, but it's fading out. I come from a working-class background, and it was more of a thing then than now. Whether I still see myself as working class, it's perception [...] It's a terminology that trade unions used to use back in the day, but Thatcher phased them out and so now you don't really hear about class so much. **Gary, Black Caribbean, 50s, Kensington***

It appears that the link between the experience of class disadvantage on the one hand, and a strong sense of working-class identity on the other, has been weakened. When asked about what 'working class' meant to them, many participants discussed stereotypical features rather than the experiences of inequality that we have described in previous chapters. For instance, there was a shared perception of certain sectors, such as construction or social care, which would always be 'working class', regardless of individual earnings.<sup>15</sup>

*If you have an industrial job, like if you own a construction company, and you're making a lot of money – and a lot of them do – they'd still be very much working class. At the end of the day, they go down and have their shepherd's pie and their pint. That's the culture. **Daniela, 30s, Hispanic, Kensington***

*I think it's the sector I'm working in, because it's the childcare industry, it's really hard to get a massive pay rise that will potentially make me middle class because I'm working in a sector that would be perceived as more of a working-class sector anyway. **Natalia, 40s, White, nursery manager, Kensington***

'Grafting', which often has connotations of industrial and manufacturing labour, was also often expressed as a defining and staple part of working-class identity. This was often in reference to a particular working-class 'lifestyle'.

*Working class as far as I look at it, is the way of life – you just had to get on with it. You done your work, paid your way, it was what was expected of you, and if you were lucky enough to move up to management, if you worked hard, you got appreciated and that. At the end, you vote for Labour, because Labour is the working man's party and that's the way it's always been as far*

*as I'm concerned. **Andrew, 60s, White English, Southwark***

So who is working class today? If we take it as a labour market category, at least one in five Londoner is working class; over a million people<sup>16</sup> essential for the city to run like clockwork, or even run at all: cleaners, drivers, nurses, retail cashiers, social care workers, security guards – and the list goes on. If we include the unemployed (whose ranks are drawn disproportionately from semi-routine and routine workers with lower employment security), then about a quarter of the city's population is working class. This is a very large section of the capital, and one marked by considerable diversity, not just along ethnic lines but also in internal hierarchies of skill, pay, employment security or status. The category is so varied that it is perhaps more accurate to talk about the 'working classes' (Bottero, 2009).

Then there are all those who experience class disadvantage because they come from working-class backgrounds and who therefore, regardless of occupation and earnings, face greater insecurity and inequality in the labour market.<sup>17</sup> Many working-class Londoners, disproportionately women, also care for children and family outside of employment, and their contribution to working-class communities is just as crucial as that of employed workers. Lastly, many working-class people are not in work for various other reasons, such as disability, long-term illness or mental health conditions. When talking about *the* working class, there is a tendency to assume rather than interrogate who 'properly' belongs to this category.

This section has explored how recent shifts in the labour market, such as de-industrialization, de-regulation and de-unionization, have blurred the lines of the usual class divides, and how this complicates our understanding of 'working-class' identity. Yet class injustice remains at the core of our society, and tremendous challenges lie ahead for all those who do not enjoy the safety net of stable job, secure housing, financial stability or a privileged family to fall back on in case of hardship. Race and class prejudice also persist in society, meaning that many people's efforts do not pay off because of where they come from, how they talk or which family they were born into. On top of a shifting labour market, the following section

<sup>15</sup> The contemporary reality of low pay does not always reflect the sectors typically considered to be 'working class'. For instance, although there is a lot of precarity within the arts sector, it hasn't historically been thought of as a working-class industry.

<sup>16</sup> Working in routine and semi-routine employment according to the 2011 Census (Manley and Johnston, 2014: 635).

<sup>17</sup> In high-status occupations, people from working-class backgrounds earn on average 17% less than individuals from middle- and upper-class backgrounds (Laurison and Friedman, 2016). Being from a working-class background also means less (if any) financial support from family members, and potentially having to financially support *them* instead.

turns to how the racialization of working-class identity has fuelled further division among people who share similar challenges and interests at the bottom of race and class hierarchies.

### 3.2 Badge of pride and marker of shame: The effects of racialized narratives

Despite having similar experiences of class disadvantage – as explored in Chapters 1 and 2 – white and older interviewees appeared to be the most confident and assured about their working-class identity, even when they had experienced significant upward social mobility.

*I consider myself working class and I always have done. I've probably got a different lifestyle than the people I grew up with and I've also got quite a lot of education, but I consider myself working class and I think I always will. Steve, 50s, White, Hertfordshire*

By contrast, ethnic minorities and younger people were overall more apprehensive or hesitant in claiming the term, even while also rejecting the idea of being 'middle class'. In monitoring forms, BME interviewees were also more likely to opt out of the class affiliation question by responding 'other' or 'N/A' or qualifying their answers with further detail. Some responded 'in-between' or created their own class descriptions.

For example, when we asked participants of a focus group composed of white English men in their 50s and 60s to introduce themselves, they all began with their occupations and working-class credentials without prompting:

*My name's Michael, my first job was in a printer's shop when I was a kid, my first full time job was working as a trainee accountant.*

*My name's Clive, I've lived in the area for 18 years now. I joined the army at 15, over 12 years in the army, worked in the printing industry for the rest of my life.*

*My name's Henry, I've been in the catering business all my life, as a waiter, and I've been living in Southwark since 1994.*

*My name's Richard, I've lived in Rotherhithe and Bermondsey all my life. I'm now 68 years old, my first job was in construction, my father got me a job as an apprentice.*

*I don't come from this area, but my first job was as a van boy in the Evening Standard at 15. I come from London, but not this area, I'm from Camden, Kentish Town and I worked in local government.*

*Hi, I'm Andrew, my first job was an apprentice butcher, and I live in Peckham now.*

#### **Focus group with older white men, Southwark**

It is little surprise that all of them ticked the box 'working class' on their monitoring forms.<sup>18</sup> When we asked another focus group – predominantly composed of BME women – to introduce themselves, they were more likely to talk about their families and their community:

*My name's Fatima, I have three children, I was born in Morocco, but I've been here since 1975 so I've been here all my life, 42 years now, in this area.*

*I've worked at [workplace] for 10 years, I was born and brought up in this area. Mixed background, so my dad's African, my mum's white Irish. I've got two children.*

*Hello, I'm Angela, I'm a widow, I've got a son the age of 40.*

*Hi, I'm Dimitri, I'm 57, I've lived here all of my life, I have one daughter.*

*Hi, I'm Michelle, I love helping people, I have three beautiful children.*

*I come from Eritrea, I've been here nearly eight years and I have two children aged seven and twelve.*

#### **Focus group with BME parents, Kensington**

During this focus group, participants mostly shared their negative experiences of social housing, financial insecurity and the related issues they encountered with childcare. The issues they centred in their interview were in many ways similar to those mentioned by the first group.<sup>19</sup> Yet when we asked them what class meant to them and which class they would identify with, we got a very mixed reception:

<sup>18</sup> Six out of eight participants in this focus group revealed their income on the monitoring form: two indicated annual earnings between £5,000 and £10,000; two reported earnings between £10,000 and £15,000; and one earned between £15,000 and £20,000.

<sup>19</sup> With the exception of the fact that the second group, which had slightly younger people and more women, spoke much more about childcare.

**Fatima:** *It doesn't mean nothing to me, to be honest. I think we're working class?*

**Angela:** *Does it matter?*

In this group, six participants out of eight earned less than £5,000 annual income and they all earned less than £20,000. Yet only one of them ticked 'working class' on the monitoring form. Two out of eight participants ticked 'middle class', one identified their class as 'me', another one replied 'other' and someone else wrote 'human class'. Three participants left the question unanswered. This pattern, reproduced in other focus groups with majority BME participants, shows that many people at the bottom of class hierarchies do not self-describe as 'working class', or certainly do not claim the term as a salient part of their identity. This resonates once again with the findings of the British class survey, which showed generally less engagement and enthusiasm for questions of class among ethnic minorities than among their white British counterparts.<sup>20</sup> Why is this so?

In industries that have been traditionally considered working class, the work was tough but also nourished gratifying images of men's manual labour (Bottero, 2009). In the first focus group, although interviewees did not work in industrial occupations – many were employed in the service industry – it seems that the traditional image of the 'working man' or 'grafter' remained something they could associate with their experience, and from which they could draw self-respect and a shared sense of identity, regardless of income and acquired status.

For other groups of people – women, younger people, ethnic minorities – there is by contrast relatively less sense of pride to be derived from a term that has connotations of past times, masculine labour and whiteness. Historically, working-class self-respect was indeed not available to working-class women – who have had to contend with stigmatized and highly sexualized labels (Skeggs, 1997) – or to ethnic minorities, who have been written out of British working-class narratives (Virdee, 2017). Several interviewees directly mentioned how their association of 'working class' with 'whiteness' prevented them from identifying with the term. Many of them, although clearly identifying that they were not 'middle-' or 'upper class', simply did not conceive the term as representing them:

*I don't think it's just about money, though. It's also values, I never thought of class applying to black people [...] I feel like the word 'white' has been attached to working class so much that, nah, I can't identify with it. **Joy, 20s, Black African, Southwark***

*It's just not something I identify with. I care how people bracket me, but it's not something I feel. **Channara, 20s, Caribbean, Hackney***

*When I was young, I didn't think class was a real thing, I thought it was on TV, in the Victorian times, and then in sociology we were talking about class, and working-class people, you think of coal-miner, white people. **Grace, 19, Black African, Southwark***

This last quote from Grace points to an important paradox: while workers from all over the British Empire, including enslaved people in the Caribbean, contributed to building the British economy as we know it today (Danewid, 2017 ; Akala, 2018), the national memory of working-class struggle centres white British workers ('coal-miner, white people' in Grace's quote). The idea of 'working class' not applying to ethnic minorities, or to white migrants, was expressed by another interviewee in these terms:

*It's not even about colour, like I can't see Polish people as working class. If you come here as an immigrant, I feel like you still don't fall straight into working class. I feel like that has its own bracket. Until you're second generation, I don't feel like you can be 'the working class'. **Daniela, 30s, Hispanic, Kensington***

Research has highlighted how immigration has historically operated as a dividing line within working classes (Virdee, 2017). The above testimony depicts the impact this can have on people's sense of self, as it hinders their ability to claim the term if they are from minority ethnic or migrant backgrounds.

As a result, working-class identity remains more likely to be mobilized as a badge of pride by some groups than by others, reflecting the ways in which an exclusionary working-class narrative has narrowly defined who can claim it as a positive feature of their identity:

*Alan Sugar goes 'I'm from a working-class background', and he's one of the billionaires [...]*

<sup>20</sup> Despite the wide enthusiasm surrounding the survey, ethnic minorities were significantly under-represented among respondents (Savage, 2011: 14).

*English people can become really rich and still say 'I come from a working-class background', they're proud of it, whereas ethnic people are like 'We came from nothing, but I'm not working class no more, my kids go to good schools'. Whereas the English are like, 'Nah, we grafted, look at our history'. Daniela, 30s, Hispanic, Kensington*

An intersecting factor explaining why the BME people we interviewed did not strongly affiliate with any class was that race overshadowed class in their perception of disadvantage and sense of self. For example one focus group had 10 young migrants, four of whom ticked 'working class' on their monitoring form, six of whom replied 'N/A', mostly earning below £20,000 annually. In this group, interviewees were more able to speak at length about barriers they perceived on the grounds of their race/ethnicity – everyday exposure to stop and search, employment discrimination, ongoing issues with immigration status, etc. – than about the ways in which they perceived their 'class' background to affect their life outcomes. When we asked them to tell us how they identified or describe themselves, they replied:

*A black person*

*A black woman*

*A Christian black woman*

*A black individual*

*A sister, a daughter, a friend*

*A young person*

*A young black man trying to find his place in this crazy world*

**Focus group with young BME migrants from across London**

Despite an ambivalent sense of working-class identity in the focus group discussion, they all also clearly identified that they were not middle-class and pointed to the difference in social privilege between them and migrants from wealthier backgrounds.

In summary, our interviews showed that the label 'working class' is easier to mobilize as a badge of pride for white British and older individuals who fit into the mainstream narrative associated with the term. By contrast, other groups who experience as much – if not more – class injustice are either indifferent to or uncomfortable with the term. The racialization of 'working class' to mean 'White British' was clearly identified as a source of alienation for BME people specifically. If we are going to reclaim or reaffirm a working-class identity, we need to think

about whether we therefore need to 'unpick' or undo some of these connotations, and the likely tension this may create.

Another element discouraging people from identifying with the term was their awareness of the stigma and demonization surrounding working-class communities. In the following section, we discuss how such demonization can be internalized by people, and the consequent threat this poses to working-class solidarity.

### 3.3 'Class is of the mind': Internalizing or rejecting working-class demonization?

Many interviewees appeared to have internalized negative associations of 'working-class' identity with laziness, disaffection, lack of aspiration or dependency, as depicted by mainstream media (Jones, 2011).

*[Being working-class] is that paycheque-to-paycheque lifestyle. My dad used to call it 'living for Saturday'. You'd work week on week, you'd go paint your walls, lay your floors, get your cash in hand, spend it all Saturday night and then do the whole thing over again. It means that whole week, you don't mind going broke because you're living for Saturday. Emily, 20s, White, Kensington*

*You've got our generation, between 20 and 30 and we're about having our own businesses, not supporting someone else's dream. It's about where you're putting your money. I feel like for the working class, they're happy to work and spend and that's the pattern. Josh, 20s, Black Caribbean, Tower Hamlets*

*Working class has such a negative stigma attached to it. When you say working class you think of people on council estates, drinking that cheap Ace cider. Dalaeja, 20s, Black Caribbean, Kensington*

Such testimonies, often from younger people, implicitly referenced a stereotypical 'white working-class' culture that has been demonized and pathologized in the media. Wendy Bottero has drawn attention to the damaging framing of the 'white working class' in ethnic terms, as yet another cultural minority in a (dysfunctional) 'multicultural Britain'. She argues that such discourse – insisting on distinctive cultural features instead of looking at the bigger picture of how inequality generates disadvantage – has produced stereotypes about a supposedly deficient 'social type': a council-estate-dwelling, single-parenting, low-achieving cultural minority



whose poverty, it is hinted, is the result of their own poor choices (Bottero, 2009: 7). Other commentators such as Lisa McKenzie and Owen Jones have shed light on the normalization of such widespread stereotypes in contemporary Britain (Jones, 2011; McKenzie, 2017).

Our interviews suggested that such stereotypes have been internalized by working-class youth of all ethnic backgrounds, thus discouraging some of them from identifying with the term. While white and older respondents who had worked in typically working-class sectors could reminisce proudly about working-class struggle and heritage, others could not mobilize such a sense of pride to counteract a concomitant sense of stigma associated with working-class identity. This can explain why so many respondents resisted self-affiliating to any class, although they clearly did not belong to the 'middle' or 'upper' class.

The demonization of the working class is not only misleading, essentializing and reductionist; it has also become the justification for discriminatory attitudes towards anyone perceived to be 'working class', whether they are white or BME. Between the 1970s and the 2000s, stigmatizing discourse on the 'underclass' eased the implementation of welfare cutbacks, for instance (see Hills (2014) on 'skivers versus strivers' discourse). On the other hand, aspiration and hard work were presented as the means of individual salvation: that is, everyone's aim in life should be to become middle class (Jones, 2011: 250). We found this ethos among a few interviewees, who insisted that anyone could manifest their own class, and that it was all a matter of perception and self-assertion. The opinion that class was less significant than the possibility for everyone to 'manifest their own destiny' came up especially among young BME people and migrants. This belief in social mobility often belied interviewees' own experiences with institutions and public services – which, as described in previous chapters, were usually quite discouraging.

*I think that [class] is of the mind, like if you classify yourself as working class, you're working class.*

**Mariam, 19, Black African, Barking and Dagenham**

In one conversation, a man in his 50s reported numerous negative encounters with public services and professionals. A young man in the group rebutted:

*We're in a group of people predominantly of working-class background or from difficult backgrounds mentally, who are inclined to perceive the world negatively because of our experiences, that doesn't necessitate the world is actually negative, we just perceive it that way.* **Abdel, 30s, Arab, Kensington**<sup>21</sup>

Some referred to examples of exceptions (Alan Sugar coming up more than once):

*Why do some people who are from working-class backgrounds make it and become middle class? Because they see and identify themselves in a different way and they don't let that oppression come upon them. People do place things on you, but are you strong enough to say this is my identity and this is what I know I am?* **Mariam, 20s, Black African, Barking and Dagenham**

This was, of course, a point of contention and met with resistance in the same focus group:

*Alan Sugar who came from nothing and became something, you can't apply his philosophy to everyone else, because I think externally those forces [of race and class] are quite strong.* **Channara, 20s, Black Caribbean, Hackney**

While Channara draws attention to structural disadvantage, Mariam's argument ties in to the idea of class as a choice of identity which can be enacted: a sort of inner 'quality' or worth to be revealed through hard work and social mobility. For instance, when asked about class in another focus group, one interviewee insisted that they were of 'high class', despite facing disadvantage.

Both Thatcherism and New Labour advocated and normalized the idea that everyone can 'pull themselves by the bootstraps' and climb the social ladder. In the face of structural inequality, such discourse promotes individual detachment from a disadvantaged community, rather than a collective form of aspiration aimed at improving the conditions of such a community as a whole. It also allows the stigma attached to disadvantaged communities to remain, as everyone – even within such communities – ends up taking it for granted.

Holding on to a belief in social mobility and sustaining a feeling of hope also appear to be strategies of

<sup>21</sup> On his monitoring form, Abdel responded 'aristocratic' to the class affiliation question, despite earning below £5,000.

self-preservation. This is what the quote below expresses, from someone who replied that they were part of the ‘human class’ in their monitoring form:

*I encourage my kids to read and educate themselves, because when you're reading you can take your eyes off the fact that you're on top of me and we're overcrowded, kind of thing. I try and spin it and say education is the way out. **Michelle, 40s, Black Caribbean, Kensington***

Such strategies allow individuals to stay determined to improve their living standards despite serious structural challenges, but this can also result in them detaching themselves from a ‘working-class’ position perceived to be degrading. This was very clear especially from migrants we spoke to:

*My mum always told us, if you portray yourself and act like you're middle class, then people are going to treat you as middle class. **Mariam, 19, Black African, Barking and Dagenham***

Today, ongoing prejudice about working-class people coexists with the resurgence of media and political discourse centring an ordinary ‘white working class’ deserving urgent policy attention. This has been the case especially since the Brexit referendum campaign. In describing what she envisaged to be Britain’s post-EU ‘shared society’, Theresa May placed the ‘ordinary working class’ as its prime deserving constituency. But this deserving working class, often overtly asserted as white and British, was also set against less-deserving ‘migrants’ throughout the Brexit campaign.

Robbie Shilliam’s book *Race and the Undeserving Poor: From Abolition to Brexit* shows that such distinctions are not new. The distinction between those deserving or undeserving of social security and welfare was at the core of colonial discourse after the abolition of slavery: with white British workers being pitched against workers in the colonies. Such distinctions have also always been racialized, with Irish, South Asian and even white subjects at times being ‘blackened’ as they were made to collectively bear undeserving status or the stain of disorder (Shilliam, 2018). The demonization of the undeserving poor was also at the core of the working class/underclass divide initiated under Thatcher.

But most importantly, Shilliam shows that it was never primarily the working classes who created these distinctions or modified them (even if elements of such groups sometimes oriented their interests vis-à-vis racialized distinctions). Historically, an elite of state functionaries, politicians, power brokers,

pundits and intellectuals have been the ultimate architects of distinctions of ‘deservedness’, in alignment with their own vision and class interests (Shilliam, 2018). Taking this history seriously implies that reasserting migrant and ethnic minorities as ‘deserving’ and hard-working in opposition to a deficient white working class cannot, in any case, bring about equality. Instead, the very distinction between deserving and undeserving poor must be dismantled.

Recent political discourse targeting ‘welfare scroungers’, the ‘work-shy’, ‘chavs’ and the like has been central in justifying welfare cuts and the erosion of social housing and employment security. Such erosions, which have harmed all working-class people, have enabled neoliberalism to expand into the British economy, through austerity, housing privatization and de-regulation of the real-estate and labour markets. Similarly, the demonization and racialization of migrants has justified the first legislation reintroducing conditionality into welfare provision. While it initially applied only to asylum seekers, welfare is now conditional for all (Shilliam, 2018: 185–182).

In summary, the interviews have shown that many people from working-class backgrounds have internalized ideals of social mobility, often as a means of sustaining hope. This is even more likely among those who cannot rely on a sense of working-class pride to counteract the sense of stigma associated with working-class identity (as a result of decades of bashing from the media and the political elite). We must be extremely careful not to reproduce divides between deserving and undeserving working-class people, because they have been at the core of justifying race and class oppression for centuries.

In the following section, we explore avenues for reclaiming solidarity that resist division without erasing difference among working classes. We draw on interviewees’ own sense of how cohesion works in their communities to envision forms of race and class solidarity that embrace community politics and the role of local neighbourhoods in fostering collective identities.

### 3.4 Avenues for reclaiming solidarity: ‘Salad bowl’ and community politics

Class-based movements of the past principally focused on the workplace, and this is still extremely important given rising insecurity and ongoing inequality in the labour market, as discussed in

Section 3.1. Work is what has defined the working class historically, and on a day-to-day basis it is what shapes the life of most working-class people. But within a growingly fragmented labour market, with people so much more likely to jump from job to job over the years, progressive movements today have to establish roots in communities as well.

Local neighbourhoods appeared to be an interlocking theme when discussing race and class, especially for the young people we interviewed. Before their networks become more expansive upon working or going to university, many spend most of their time on their estate or in their neighbourhood, and place thus was a significant factor in people's sense of self. Hence, unlike 'class' or 'working class', place and neighbourhood appeared to be very strong factors in shaping a collective identity.

*[Boys in this area,] their common theme, what they associate with, is being from around here. Class plays a huge part in that, though. Association with postcode is a class thing. So if you look at Hackney, Peckham, Brixton, the middle-class children growing up there, who are being sent to the private school, they're not running around saying they're Brixton boys. Joel, 30s, White, youth programme manager, Camden*

A sense of belonging to a local community was strong among interviewees of all ages and ethnicities. There was often a great deal of pride and investment in local institutions, with one interviewee reporting having had his wedding reception at the local pub, for instance. This pride and sense of commitment towards one's neighbourhood should be looked upon as an opportunity and strength of working-class communities that is worth investing in.

Unlike some middle-class people who might have social or professional networks elsewhere, working-class people often rely on neighbours and informal local networks for survival and upliftment. Such networks function as a lifeline or first port of call in the absence of access to - or trust - in public services. This feature came out very strongly in discussions of the Grenfell Tower fire and how community solidarity compensated, to some extent, for a failed public response after the tragedy:

*With Grenfell, it is a tragedy for everyone, but we are together. So hopefully we are going to keep working together for a better future for the community. I find it very inspiring somehow that people manage to get out of their houses to really make things work better. Nhung, 40s, South East Asian, Kensington*

Given the strength of local solidarity and people's investment in North Kensington politics, many interviewees from this specific area expressed frustration at the lack of appreciation, respect and dignity afforded to their contribution. Despite the proven benefits of strong communities, working-class families remain chronically under-resourced, overstretched and dispersed by cuts to services. One interviewee commented:

*How long can we carry on for? This is really destroying us as a community and as parents. We need to be fit to look after our community because it took us a long time and hard work to build it, and we are willing to rebuild it again but we need consultation. We need them to listen to us in a positive way. We understand the law, we know how to go about our rights [...] So we need really positive attention and quick response. Siham, 40s, Black African, community leader, Kensington*

The role of place in shaping collective identities also came out in discussions on what interviewees perceived to be the culture or 'mentality' of their area. Despite being looked down upon as inward-looking or troubled, interviewees spoke proudly about local values such as being a good neighbour, looking after one another and taking responsibility for other people's children:

*Carol: If there was kids ever arguing on the street, I would always think, I know your mum somewhere along the line [laughs]*

*Fatima: Exactly, so you better fix it up!*

*Carol: Because I feel confident enough to do that.*

*Fatima: Maybe it's because we've grown up here ...*

*Carol: We're part of the furniture, aren't we? And I don't want to see kids out fighting on the street ...*

*Fatima: I wouldn't want it for my child, I would want somebody to stop it if it was my son or daughter fighting. I would want someone to stop it the same way I would stop it.*

*Carol: I think it's because in Ladbroke Grove there's more of a family culture. We've all grown together, I might know your children, or your auntie, or something along the lines. My generation are looking after the next generation same way we were looked after. You voice what's going on the roads here.*

**Focus group with BME parents, Kensington**

Migrant and BME interviewees who did self-identify as working-class most commonly associated this

with productive values of hard work, but also thrift and resilience to adverse life experiences. A culture of sharing was also mentioned as a key value:

**Aisha:** *Take two working-class people. I see in my personal experience, if I have £5 and my friend has zero, we've got £2.50 each. That's how I roll. If we can't go bowling, then we'll go 9 o'clock in the morning to the cinema when it's off-peak, we'll figure it out. We'll have as much fun with that £2.50 each.*

**David:** *But that's working-class mentality!*

**Dalaeja:** *You make it last, whatever you got ...*

**Aisha:** *That makes you value it more, it makes you realize where you're rooted from, where you come from, you become humble.*

#### **Focus group with BME youth, Kensington**

Such examples from North Kensington represent a different picture of working-class community than the image of 'troubled families'. What would it look like to begin policy interventions from the strengths and values of local communities: commitment, hard work, solidarity and camaraderie? Such shared values, as discussed by interviewees, were not rooted in fixed racial or even geographical similarities: people were black, Arab, white or Asian; some were born in the UK, some elsewhere; some people were Muslim, some Christian, some not religious; and so on. This local diversity was discussed in one focus group using the analogy of a 'salad bowl':

**Aisha:** *[about Ladbrooke Grove] We're not a melting pot, we're a salad bowl.*

**Dalaeja:** *That's because the community here, we're tight. Even though we've got our own little cultural communities, but when shit hits the fan, we're there for each other. When they're trying to close down the library or the college, all sorts of people are down there. Black, Asian, white, different ages, children, old people holding up little banners. We're a salad bowl.*

**Aisha:** *We can all be ourselves but we're all together. Everyone is their own lettuce and flavour.*

#### **Focus group with BME youth, Kensington**

Aisha's analogy carries the powerful idea that members of a community do not need to be the same to share a common identity. This is because

collective identity is here rooted in shared values, shared space and the willingness to stand up for and support each other in case of hardship. We believe that this concept of a 'salad bowl' can apply to contemporary race and class solidarity at large. In Section 3.1, we saw how recent shifts in the labour market have fragmented and diversified traditional working classes. The progress of racial inclusion in the labour market, as well as migration, have also diversified the working class in terms of ethnicity. Recognizing and accepting such diversity is key to building progressive movements that advance equality for all, while involving a majority.

If we consider all the working classes, who suffer growing precariousness and ongoing prejudice, together with all migrant and ethnic minorities, who face prejudice and institutional racism, there is possibly a majority of people in Britain whose shared interests are in dismantling structural disadvantage, advancing equality and re-embedding dignity in the welfare state. Given that both groups are disadvantaged and for generations have lacked the influence of numbers, it is past time to build on people's voices towards shared demands and policies that finally reduce these disadvantages (Runnymede Trust and CLASS, 2017). There are also, of course, many others who share these values and reject the current way in which public discourse and policy disrespects the experiences of BME and working-class people, while making their lives materially worse off.

Power relations and hierarchies among working classes and ethnic minorities must also be genuinely acknowledged, as we work to dismantle them too.<sup>22</sup> As Reni Eddo-Lodge has highlighted:

*In order to dismantle unjust, racist structures, we must see race. We must see who benefits from their race, who is disproportionately impacted by negative stereotypes about their race, and who power and privilege is bestowed upon – earned or not – because of their race, their class, and their gender. Seeing race is essential to changing the system. (Eddo-Lodge 2017)*

More generally, if we are to take 'working class' not as a static category but as the product of unequal power relations, then we must also seriously expand our mainstream understanding of what it represents. Because of the traditional narrative of *the* working

<sup>22</sup> Working-class BME people face specific forms of race and class injustice, for instance, which neither middle-class BME people nor white working-class people experience. Migrants also face very specific challenges, whether they are white or BME. Working-class people outside London (more likely to be white than working-class Londoners) also have less access to employment and educational opportunities compared with their London-based counterparts.

class – intrinsically associated with images of manual work, maleness, whiteness and Britishness – many people facing class disadvantage and exploitation are left at the margins of our representations and conversations on class, which weakens the movement overall. Enacting change in our representations will take innovation and diving back into colonial archives to rebuild an inclusive memory of class and workers' struggle – one that reminds us that people of all genders, origins and ethnicities have worked to build Britain as we know it today, often unpaid and against their will. Colonial conquest and transatlantic slavery have indeed significantly contributed to the growth of industrial capitalism in Western Europe, including in the UK (Danewid, 2017: 1679).

In the wider context of imperial Britain, it is important to acknowledge that UK-based working-class movements were not always anti-racist and that unions in the post-war period have often been complicit in racial discrimination, including overt racism (Wrench, 1986). But there are counter-examples, where working-class movements have condemned racism or fascism. One such example of this dates from as far back as 1862: the Manchester cotton boycott which saw working-class English people standing up against slavery even though doing so would harm their material conditions. Such stories can remain a source of pride and inspiration for the present, in the face of ever more pervasive hateful and divisive discourse against racialized minorities.

To conclude this chapter, let us answer the question that it asks. Has the working class been divided and conquered? We have seen that many factors

have fuelled division: from the atomization of the labour market to the attacks on trade-unionism, the demonization of the working-class, as well as racialized discourse pitching a deserving 'white working-class' against 'undeserving migrants'. Such division has justified policies hitting all of the working classes – welfare cuts, de-regulation of the labour and real-estate markets – and, for those with migration backgrounds, Prevent and hostile-environment policies.

At the same time testimonies from this last section are symptoms of tremendous strength and agency to resist division without erasing difference among working classes. To keep resisting 'conquest', we must keep asking why policies and public discourse promote and fuel division. And as we keep rejecting it, we need to keep pointing to the source of the problem: race and class hierarchies benefiting the wealthy few at the expense of most of us:

*Years before this country had a significant black and immigrant presence, there was an entrenched class hierarchy. The people who maintain these class divisions didn't care about those on the bottom rung then, and they don't care now. But immigration blamers encourage you to point to your neighbour and convince yourself that they are the problem, rather than question where wealth is concentrated in this country and exactly why resources are so scarce. And the people who push this rhetoric couldn't care less either way, just as long as you're not pointing the finger at them. (Eddo-Lodge, 2017)*

*We need to shift our attention from who fights over the scraps from the table, to think instead about how much the table holds, and who really gets to enjoy the feast. (Bottero, 2009)*

# CONCLUSION

The interviews in this report outline the lived experience of working-class communities in London. The shared experience is one of precarity and prejudice, with people's ability to change their own circumstances further undermined by a lack of voice or power over the things that most affect their daily lives. We can't ignore these negative experiences, the barriers in individuals' lives, and how local public services are contributing to a sense of indignity and a lack of control over the things that matter most to people – their family, where they live and their personal wellbeing.

At the same time, there is a strong positive sense that place, community and solidarity provide meaning and resources to working-class people. We need to ensure that our policy and practice response to class and race inequalities both removes the barriers and attitudes that prevent people from living better lives, and builds on the positive experiences and resources within the communities we interviewed.

The opposite is happening now. Reduced expenditure on the safety net combined with degrading enforcement among public services have disempowered working-class communities. Charities are even less resourced, and are perceived as often adopting a paternalistic approach. Interviewees felt that neither approach has materialized any tangible, lasting social change. Instead, both strategies reveal the entrenched narratives about working-class people that persist despite being uncorroborated by evidence. Policies based exclusively on principles of tough love and zero tolerance have no place in welfare and create adversarial relationships on the front line. This compromises the duty of care and can distance vulnerable people from support.

For public policy to be genuinely effective and transformative, it must first and foremost reject the demonization of people based on race and class, and abandon divisive notions of deservedness. Instead, at their core, public services must embed a culture of care based on irrefutable principles of human dignity and respect. In other words, they must be anti-racist and pro-equality in design and delivery. Our recommendations provide examples of how this could happen in practice.

At the moment, we are far from realizing this ideal. The overwhelming narrative has been one of stamping out 'life on benefits', with 'nowhere to hide' for the 'work-shy'. This intersects with the dominant narrative we have of migrants, who are portrayed as stealing benefits and having too many children, overburdening our public services. Politicians have been too happy to scapegoat migrants in order to collect votes, while access to services and housing allocation have seen migrants being stigmatized and their interests falsely counterposed against those of the 'white working class'.

Meanwhile, little has been done to scrutinize those at the top who continue to benefit from inequality and business as usual. In this context, we must ensure that ethnic minorities, working-class people and those at the intersection of both achieve more-equal opportunities and access to voice, rights and justice than they do at present. At the core, a new form of aspiration for equality must be about improving people's communities and bettering the conditions they face overall, rather than simply lifting a lucky few into representation or social mobility.

*We want rights, justice and freedom, that's all we're looking for. We just want the community to be together you know, and united. **Abena, 50s, Black African, Kensington***

## Key recommendations

### 1. Change the narrative

The current conception of the working class in the public debate is often based on a mixture of misinformation and mythology, fails to recognise working-class voices and agency, increases division across racial lines, and is divorced from the lived realities of those experiencing race and class injustice. Working-class people are from every ethnic background, British born or migrants, are women as well as men, and live in every part of our country. We can and should build solidarity across such differences: shared identity can emerge from shared conditions but also from shared values, shared history of past struggles, willingness to support each other, and a sense of pride in and belonging to local neighbourhoods.

#### Recommendation 1

- **Stop counterposing race and class.** Analysis of – and the policy response to – both race and class should focus on material conditions as *well* as on prejudice and discrimination. How we talk about working-class, BME and migrant communities currently legitimizes and institutionalizes their disadvantages.
- **Root our understanding of the working class in people's current conditions** (the 4Ps: power, place, precariousness, prejudice), rather than top-down assumptions.
- **Recognize the role of place** in shaping how people interact and identify locally. National discussion and debates about inequality or community cohesion are often too distant from people's experiences and needs.
- We need **a conception of the working class that doesn't pitch working-class people against each other** along the lines of deserving/undeserving, white/BME, British/migrants: such divides have justified policies that make all groups worse off.
- Our conception of the working class must **acknowledge the legacy of empire**: the injustice faced by workers in and from British colonies, and those workers' tremendous contribution to British economy and society over the centuries (Our Migration Story).
- **Build on existing 'framing' work**, notably JRF's work on poverty, to outline the strengths of working-class communities and the current barriers that prevent them from securing better lives for themselves.

### 2. Rebuild the safety net, at work and through public services

A narrative by itself won't change the conditions of working-class people in Britain. Our interviewees were usually more interested in discussing the current injustice and challenges they faced than how they identified or the national narrative on class. Rebuilding the safety net will require undoing years of benefit cuts, while also widening that net to respond to the new forms of precarity identified in this report (see findings in executive summary). This will involve improving the rights and outcomes of people in the labour market, but also expanding the services and benefits that are necessary to provide an adequate safety net for the 21st century.

#### Recommendation 2

- **A genuine living wage.** The current national living wage (for those over 25) is £8.21, £0.79 less than a genuine living wage. In London, the living wage needs to be £10.55.
- **Adopt the Institute of Employment Rights' 'Manifesto for Labour Law'** to improve the security, pay, conditions and bargaining power of workers (IER 2018). This includes **establishing a Ministry for Labour** to rebuild and promote collective bargaining structures.
- **Reinvest in public services** to bring spending back towards pre-2010 levels.
- Different regions or **localities will have different priorities**, but these should all focus on tackling whatever inequalities need the most extensive focus at the local level (transport, labour market, housing, etc.)
- **Stop the sell-off of public land.** Local authorities should be encouraged not to sell land to private developers where they are failing to provide affordable or social housing (Wheatley, 2019).

- **Improve the security of housing tenure.** As well as building more social housing, this will require providing more long-term, low-cost secure private accommodation (e.g. five-year leases with inflation-protected rental rises).
- **Implement the idea of ‘universal basic services’**, expanding the welfare state to include housing, food, transport and internet access (Portes, Reed and Percy, 2017).
- **Lift the ban: give people seeking asylum the right to work**, so that they can use their skills and live in dignity. Everyone deserves a chance to contribute to the economy and to integrate into our communities.’
- **Re-introduce birth right citizenship** as part of a wider review into race, immigration and citizenship law and policy.
- **Relink benefits and inflation**, and ensure benefits more closely correspond to the relative poverty line.
- **Re-establish child poverty targets**, including a specific target to reduce disproportionately high BME child poverty.

### 3. Strengthen voice and participation

Improving working-class people’s lives will require involving them more in decision-making and improving representation across institutions – in the media, in government, in the professions and universities. There are various ways of achieving these goals. The key point is that every public, private and charitable organization needs to develop ways of strengthening working-class voices and power.

#### Recommendation 3

- **Services should be co-produced**, so that people are involved not just as recipients of public services but as shapers of how those services are better delivered.
- **Devolve power, decision-making and resources locally.** Invest in local community organizations and networks, especially those that engage and involve working-class and ethnic minority people. Democracy requires a stronger civil society voice locally, and such organizations can also serve as intermediaries between the state and citizens.

- Ensure not only that **housing management organizations include working-class voices**, but that those voices **have real power over decision-making**.
- **Introduce the socioeconomic duty**, making class an ‘equality ground’. This will allow for positive action measures to be taken on grounds of class as well as race.
- Organizations should set **targets to improve ethnic minority and working-class representation in the workplace**. This includes tackling discrimination in the labour market. Mandate equal pay audits and enforce tougher sanctions on companies who break the law.

### 4. Re-embed shared values at the core of policy

Research shows that values such as dignity, freedom and equality are widely held. We must urgently re-embed such an ethos in public services, which will take investment, rolling back harmful policies, and implementing a wider cultural change to avoid further dehumanization of working-class, BME and migrant communities.

Hostile environment policies and welfare reforms have been underpinned and justified by wider public discourse targeting and pathologizing working-class, migrant and BME people. As a result, public officials have often found themselves with workplans and targets that fail to centre the dignity of such groups. But these are false narratives: cuts to public services and the housing crisis are the result of political choices, and are not inevitable. The UK is the fifth largest economy in the world and is able to provide the public services required for everyone to live in dignity.

#### Recommendation 4

- **Foster equality and dignity across all public services**, embedding inclusion, equality, cohesion in, for example, procurement and planning decision-making processes, and considering social value clauses to enable community participation and control of services.
- **End the hostile-environment immigration policies**, and issue a thorough review of the Home Office’s policies, including whether those policies are in line with human rights and race discrimination legislation.



- **End data-sharing between public services for the purpose of immigration enforcement.**

This destroys trust between communities and services and undermines the duty of care.

- There needs to be **a cultural shift in how local services relate to working-class, migrant and BME people** who use their services. This requires a new public service values framework, as well as training for all staff, from the front line to senior management, on how to ensure working-class, migrant and BME people are treated with dignity and respect when approaching services.
- **Ensure equality law and the socioeconomic duty are taken seriously**, respected and applied in relation to all policy, strengthening the 'due regard' clause in the public sector equality duty.
- In response to the extensive inequalities outlined in the government's Race Disparity Audit, the government should adopt a **race equality strategy across all public policy areas. This strategy should be led by a minister who regularly attends and reports directly to the Cabinet.**

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## APPENDIX: INTERVIEWEES' DEMOGRAPHICS

Ethnicity breakdown	
White	21
Black African	21
Black Caribbean	14
North African	6
Arab	4
Not recorded	3
Mixed White Black Caribbean	2
Mixed White & Black African	2
Mixed Other	1
South Asian	1
Other "Hispanic"	1
South East Asian	2
TOTAL	78

Self-ascribed class breakdown	
Working class	44
Other or "N/A"	18
Not recorded	9
Middle class	7
Upper class	0
Total	78

Area breakdown	
Kensington & Chelsea	41
Southwark	9
Hackney	5
Barking & Dagenham	4
Hammersmith & Fulham	3
Brent	3
Westminster	3
Tower Hamlets	2
Newham	2
Ealing	1
Greenwich	1
Haringey	1
Harrow	1
Camden	1
Outside of London	1
Total	78

### ***About the Editors***

**Dhelia Snoussi** worked as a research analyst at the Runnymede Trust and CLASS from January 2018 to February 2019. Prior to this, Dhelia worked in delivering youth and community projects for a range of organizations. Dhelia is now a Youth Culture Curator at Museum of London, working with local young people to develop innovative arts and collecting initiatives.

**Laurie Mompelat** is a research analyst at the Runnymede Trust and CLASS. Previous work includes campaigning, coordination of Common Cause Networks, and research on local ethnic inequality and racial discrimination in the labour market. Laurie has also researched the intersection of race and sexuality, including place-making among LGBT+ BME groups, and co-founded the Decolonising Sexuality Festival.



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