



UWL REPOSITORY

repository.uwl.ac.uk

Beyond Marxism vs cultural studies: critical theories of racism and political action from migrant workers to Black lives matter

Murji, Karim ORCID logo ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7490-7906> and Zoubir, Zacharias (2020) Beyond Marxism vs cultural studies: critical theories of racism and political action from migrant workers to Black lives matter. In: Routledge International Handbook of Contemporary Racisms. Routledge International Handbooks. Routledge, Taylor and Francis, London. ISBN 9781138485990

<http://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9781351047326>

This is the Accepted Version of the final output.

UWL repository link: <https://repository.uwl.ac.uk/id/eprint/6820/>

Alternative formats: If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact: open.research@uwl.ac.uk

Copyright:

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy: If you believe that this document breaches copyright, please contact us at open.research@uwl.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Rights Retention Statement:

Beyond Marxism *versus* Cultural Studies: Critical Theories of Racism and Political Action from Migrant Workers to Black Lives Matter

Zacharias Zoubir and Karim Murji

Abstract

The emergence of Black Lives Matter (BLM) in the USA has prompted the re-emergence of arguments about class- *versus* race-based campaigns. For some Marxists, movements like BLM are another instance of identity politics that fail to address issues about capitalist markets and material inequality. In this chapter we set this within the context of a similar disagreement in Britain in the 1980s between Robert Miles and the Race and Politics group of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). While both offered more nuanced and sophisticated positions than are evident in current debates, the so-called “Miles-CCCS” debate underscores the division between Marxist and cultural studies approaches to the sociology of race. In the former, racism is seen as an ideology that reconfigures labour relations without changing the political need for a class struggle beyond any divisions. For the CCCS, race is relatively autonomous from class and can not be reduced to it, neither in theory nor in practice. Although their respective contributions were actually different in nature – one general and systematic, the other deliberately conjunctural – we suggest that elements of both can be combined in two ways that seem relevant for us today. First, we argue in favour of a broader understanding of material inequality that includes an analysis of historically ingrained forms of disadvantage, thus connecting present racism with the historical burden of slavery, colonialism and national identities. Second, we suggest that struggles waged by the racialised against the specific forces to which they are exposed – such as racism, discrimination and segregation – are in fact part of the wider struggle against material inequality.

Across many parts of the world there are intensifying mobilisations, often expressed through forms of ethno-nationalisms that are realised in some electoral success and indeed even in government in some nations. This “populist” revival has led to warnings about the “return of fascism” in Europe, while others argue, in a more down-to-earth way, that it makes the task of anti-racism more urgent and demanding. Yet, at a time when the so-called “migration crisis” has led to many deaths at the borders of Europe, and when the precarity of black lives, especially men, in the USA, has become more evident, the question of what anti-racism could or should look like remains as fraught as it has been in some decades. While the span and depth of such debates is too large a subject for present purposes, in this chapter we focus on one area or question in particular: are the resources for anti-racist action, both in theory as well as in practical politics, to be found in drawing on or using the idea of “race” itself? Or, to develop a subsidiary question to this one, to what extent is anti-racism a matter of autonomous and identitarian social and political movements based around group identity, or better founded in a “wider” politics of class struggle and opposition to capitalism? While these questions are not new, we suggest the answer to them is not given in theory. Rather it will be configured differently in specific moments and conjunctures. In order to frame an outline response to the contemporary “race first” or “class first” dichotomy, we draw on and revisit a classic debate from the 1980s to see the ways the debate was framed then, what we can draw from it now, and what this means for political action against racism.

A contemporary instance where similar oppositions are being played out is the Black Lives Matter campaign. Now a well-known hashtag on social media as well as a social movement, Black Lives Matter (BLM) started around 2013 from protests at the death of an African American teenager Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida. The protests were against the acquittal of George Zimmerman who had shot Martin after an altercation between the two of them. Later some of the leading BLM protestors also took part in demonstrations in Ferguson, Mississippi following the fatal shooting of Michael Brown, another African American teenager, by a white police officer. The

Black Lives Matter Network and the Movement for Black Lives came out of these events (Rickford 2016, King 2018) which also included widespread rioting or protests across cities in the US that led some to see the events as a global crisis of policing (Camp and Heatherton 2016). While we are going to focus only on the race/class debate that has occurred around BLM it is important to register that there are other tensions and divergences within it, such as how to engage mainstream politicians. While stating a number of policy demands the Movement for Black Lives tended to reject working with mainstream political parties or elected politicians, while other groups have adopted a more pragmatic approach (see Rickford 2016).

While there have been pro-police counterblasts to BLM such as Blue Lives Matter, there are also reactions such as All Lives Matter that maintains that it is more than just black people who are at risk from police violence, and that the focus on race or blackness is too narrow to build political coalitions. This “false universal” (Rickford 2016: 38) is also highlighted by Yancy and Butler (2015) who suggested that if black people cannot be regarded as being included in “all lives”, this race-blind proposition actively deracializes and obscures the precarity of black lives. (Agozino 2016 makes a similar point.) This takes us to the nub of the race/class and political action issue this chapter considers. While it is undeniable that BLM began in response to black deaths, particularly from contact with the police, and the riots across the USA in 2014-15 can all be linked primarily to the deaths of black men, there are arguments that BLM is both too narrowly as well as incorrectly framed. In highlighting just black lives it misses, it is argued, that the core issue is poverty and class inequalities, often geographically evident in US cities. More generally, by focussing on race it fails to address capitalist social relations themselves.

It is notable that more nuanced versions of this line of argument emerge from Marxist writers who are to an extent sympathetic to BLM, but think it is misguided or underdeveloped in some ways. There are various aspects to this claim; we focus only on those that relate explicitly to the relation between race politics and class politics, and their intersections. John Clegg (2016) for instance recognises the insurgency that drives BLM and the protests across the USA as based in police violence, as well as

worsening levels of racial inequality in the US from the financial crisis of 2008 onwards. Yet in seeing racial inequalities as being based on long-standing or “baked-in” material inequalities over generations, Clegg casts a dubious lens on the impact of policies such as affirmative action and police reform programmes to challenge decades of “inherited black disadvantage” that can “only be overcome by challenging the basic working of capitalist markets”. Although previous generations of black radicals did consider that anti-racism requires a critique of capitalism, his argument is that while “capitalism plays an even greater role in reproducing racial inequality, the most visible activists of Black Lives Matter rarely adopt an anti-capitalist stance”. Part of the reason for this, Clegg argues, is that BLM activists have different social origins – more educated, more middle class – than the victims of police violence. They are part of what he regards as a “new black elite” where activism has become a “professional option”. Such elites “may seem like allies” in the fight against racism but only up to the point “at which their own interests in social order [and] political patronage ... come into conflict with demands from the street”.

While Clegg recognises that the present condition of black lives in poverty is too severe to wait for white workers to move beyond a kind-of bureaucratised trade union consciousness to form “black and white unite and fight” politics, the main point underlying his argument is a class-based view of the struggle against racism. Rickford (2016), while appearing more sympathetic to BLM, drives in the same direction also. He recognises that BLM aims to remain autonomous from the Democratic party’s establishment, as well as the older generation of black leaders, and that the tactics of BLM derive from “independence and militancy” (p. 36). Yet the challenges he sees for BLM are questions of its ambiguous view of electoral politics, and of police reform. Moreover, while “leaders of the movement have displayed signs of a race-class analysis that acknowledges the inseparability of economic justice and black liberation ... the movement has yet to articulate a clear analysis of the economic underpinnings of white supremacy” (p. 39).

So, generally speaking, where BLM and its allies insist upon the much higher degree of exposure of blacks to racist discrimination and violence, their critics argue that the

driving force behind such racist practices is in fact the reproduction of material inequality. The BLM stance highlights the irreducibly specific precarity of “black lives”, whereas its class-based critique contends that today, the primary cause of this precarious situation is not racism but the persisting concentration of disadvantage in certain social groups. These two analyses go hand in hand with two different practical strategies which, although not opposed in every aspect, do imply a different focus. On the one hand, the mobilisation of blacks against, first and foremost, structural racism, and on the other hand, the emphasis on a more general struggle waged by workers against material inequality.

In Britain in the 1980s we can find an echo of these ‘race and/or class’ debates. This took the form of an opposition between the Marxist sociologist Robert Miles and various people associated with the Race and Politics Group at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), particularly Pratibha Parmar and Paul Gilroy. This “Miles-CCCS debate” as it has come to be known has been discussed before (e. g. Back and Solomos 2000, Virdee 2014). This has been and still can be broadly characterised as “Marxist sociology *versus* cultural studies”. For Miles the key issue was to criticise the “sociology of race relations” as it had developed in the UK, and which Miles argues lacked an understanding of the status of migrant labour and the effects of colonialism in capitalist labour markets. For the CCCS group, influenced by the work of Stuart Hall, the focus was instead the ways in which black and anti-racist struggles had developed in the climate of new right conservative ideology and state re-structuring in post-war Britain.. In returning to this debate here our purpose is to draw out some key features as they provide insights that are important for contemporary debates.

On a theoretical level, the sharpest difference between Miles and the CCCS was in their respective conceptions of race. The dividing line here is not Marxism in itself, since both currents drew upon Marx and Marxists in different ways. The CCCS group, following Hall (1980) were influenced primarily by Gramsci and Althusser, as well as theories of “new racism”. As for Miles, he was actually one of the first to develop a systematic theory of racialisation against the sociological current of “race relations”

that presented racism as the result of the conflicts of “ethnic” or “racial” groups (Miles 1982). Instead of presupposing the existence of such “ethnic” or “racial” differences, Miles proposed a research program focussing on the social constitution of the very idea of such differences. He wondered: what are the processes – material, political and ideological – that make us perceive and act upon social relations through the lens of racial signifiers, that is, through the representation of certain characteristics understood as inherent to the bodies of different human groups? Miles understood these processes in terms of “racialisation” and studied them empirically in numerous publications most notably on the history of the relation between migrant workers and British working class organisations, often co-written and researched with Annie Phizacklea (e. g. Phizacklea and Miles 1979, 1987), as well as on the contemporary conditions of the racialised “fractions” of the working class (Phizacklea and Miles 1980).

During the 1980s, the work emerging from CCCS was certainly not anti-Marxist, although some of the associated researchers were later to take their distances with the concepts of class or class struggle (e.g. Gilroy 1987, 1993). Still, in the early 1980s the CCCS was developing a different analysis. For them, mobilisations in the US such as *black power* and the civil rights movement had developed rhetorics and practices distinguished from those of the trade union movement of the first half of the 20th century. In a similar fashion, migrant workers from former British colonies had histories, cultures and political strategies of their own (CCCS 1982). For the CCCS, those workers’ particular experiences as colonial and postcolonial subjects meant that they could not be considered as just low-qualified “class fractions”, as Miles and Phizacklea (1982) had suggested. Hence, for the CCCS, the problem was not so much that Miles theorised society in terms of relations of production and class struggle. Instead, the trouble with his approach was its neglect of the irreducibly specific living conditions and experiences of migrant workers.

What is at stake in this debate are two key points. One what is meant in using “race”, and second, as a corollary of that, what are the forms of political action and alliances required to combat racism. It is here that we can see the divergences

between Miles and CCCS. Drawing upon a certain reading of Marx, Miles suggested that “race” is a “form of appearance” of relations of production, in the sense that the access of certain social groups to material resources or political rights can be barred due to the persistent and institutionalised belief in racial differences between social groups (1982, p. 31-32). For the likes of Gilroy and Parmar, “race” was not just this distorted representation of social relations. As conceptualised in influential theoretical work by Stuart Hall, “race” had a reality of its own, not as a biological distinction but as a set of materialised relations between bodies, racist ideas and social positions (Hall 1980). This is something we ought to bear in mind in order to frame our own take on the contemporary “race first” or “class first” debate. When delving deeper into this opposition it becomes clear that at issue is how to determine precisely the relationship between racism and class relations. Rather than an alternative between race and class, the Miles–CCCS debate can thus be seen as a confrontation between two ways of addressing these two questions: what, exactly, is the impact of race upon the material conditions and political organisation of workers? And what are the consequences of that in terms of anti-racist and anti-capitalist movements?

The CCCS approach to these questions centred the idea of an experience specific to a certain position *within* the class. Drawing upon authors like Frantz Fanon and Selma James, their exploration sought to make room for the lived history of migrant workers within the study of racism, and to place that within colonial and postcolonial relations. “Experience” here is not to be understood as passive impressions of society but in terms of what Hall et al. conceptualised when viewing race as “the modality through which class is lived” (1978, p. 394). In other words, race is the lens through which a group interprets, thinks of and acts upon its social conditions. Since the latter are differentiated by one’s position within or on the margins of the so-called “majority population”, so are the interpretations, the ideas and the actions. This is why, for example, the authors of the seminal *Policing the Crisis* argued that for many blacks in Britain, police repression and violence could be more important, at least on a symbolical level, than issues such as unemployment or working conditions (Hall et al. 1978, p. 387).

For Miles, this way of conceptualising experience was deeply problematical in its tendency to separate political and cultural questions from class relations. Theoretically, he argued, it gave up the question of the social constitution and reproduction of racism (1982, p. 176-177). On a practical level, it over-interpreted the effects of racism by asserting and supposing such a stark divide between white and non-white workers that the conditions for any struggles beyond specific group identities seemed impossible (1982, p. 177-178). That point was reinforced in *Labour and Racism* (Phizacklea and Miles 1980): the affirmation of racial identities, be they black or otherwise, is a step toward a polarisation of society along a white nationalist /black immigrant divide (Phizacklea and Miles 1980, p. 231-232). For Miles, as we will see later on, struggles waged by white and black workers together were by contrast the most efficient way to oppose racism.

It is precisely this theorised version of the “black and white unite and fight” perspective that the CCCS attacked in the collective work *The Empire Strikes Back. Race and Racism in 70s Britain* (1982), a critique which Gilroy (1987) later reinforced. For Parmar, to conceive of labour and British working class institutions as fundamentally neutral, as if any worker, white or black, could relate to them in the same way, was in fact to generalise that which was specific to white workers, understood as those already integrated to the social, political and cultural norms of the nation (Parmar 1982, p. 262-263). Obviously, the long Grunwick strike of 1976-1978 was led by female workers at a film factory in North-East London. However, even while organising as workers, demanding better wages and working conditions, there was always more to the struggle than that, as Pearson et al. (2010) indicate in their intersectional understanding of the strike. Parmar (1982) considered Miles’ and Phizacklea’s outlook as Eurocentric insofar as it neglected the specific forms of these women’s struggle. Many of them had emigrated from India and could thus draw upon representations and modes of organisation inherited from the mobilisation against the British colonial power, as well as from the severe repression it had faced (p. 261). Characteristically, one of the strike leaders, Jayaben Desai, had taken part in

some historical Indian demonstrations involving Gandhi (Ahmed and Mukherjee 2012, p. xvi).

For Parmar, what caused Miles' and Phizacklea's neglect of these specificities was their limited conceptual framework. They presupposed that it was enough to measure migrant workers' politicisation by collecting data on labour union participation, thus excluding alternative forms of workplace organisation (Parmar 1982, p. 262). Such questionnaires were thus not adapted to the kind of wider forms of cooperation that developed during strikes like the one at the Leicester Imperial Typewriters factory in 1974, where workers benefited from financial support coming from both entrepreneurs and religious organisations linked to the South-Asian communities (p. 264). On Parmar's view, such phenomena could not be estimated by means of Miles' and Phizacklea's questionnaires, as they relied upon a more traditional understanding of working class organisation. Politically, the lack of a critique of institutions inherited from the historical workers' movement implied that the authors of *Labour and Racism* failed to question the ways in which British unions treated whites and non-whites differently, through racist discrimination as well as through the management of wage gaps between the one and the other group. To put it simply, against Miles and some of his collaborators, CCCS authors like Parmar were developing the idea that non-white workers are not just workers like any others, with reference to both their living conditions and the struggles they wage. Therefore, even apparently self-evident political concepts like those of "struggle" and "class politics" could no longer be taken for granted or assumed to carry the meaning they did for Marxists like Miles.

In his responses to these critiques, Miles did admit that some of his sociological inquiries into the relationship between labour and racism suffered from a Eurocentric bias (1984, p. 231). Later, in "Racism, Marxism and British Politics" (1988) he stressed that the problem with the CCCS approach remained its belief in a new revolutionary subject, namely the "black masses" which were said to comprise all non-white groups in the UK that had now become relatively superfluous with regard to capital's needs of labour power. First, statistically speaking, in 1980s UK,

non-whites were more affected by unemployment, although Miles added that most Asian and Caribbean migrants were actually employed and therefore inserted into class relations (p. 442). Second, historically speaking, there was nothing new about unemployment. It had always been a structural characteristic of the capitalist mode of production (p. 443). And third, there was nothing revolutionary in itself with the struggles waged by unemployed non-white people. For example, the 1980 Bristol riots in response to a police raid in a café with a mainly black crowd did not give rise to any long-term political organisations, other than calls for reform or the integration of some activists into the parliament and local city structures (p. 444).

Hence, Miles' answer to the CCCS is an internal critique of their project. If the point is to practically overcome racism, it is a mistake to present the opposition between the "black masses" and state racism as *the* most important antagonism, because class belonging shared by whites and non-whites is the only available actual means to this end. Miles (1984) made clear that he was mainly referring here to struggles waged by both blacks and whites together such as those for a minimum wage in the National Health Service, as well as to the leading role played by non-whites with the lowest wages in the public sector during the 1970s up until the early 1980s (p. 224-225). On this view, the only way to fight racist distinctions is to unite through the fight against a common enemy, material inequality, and for a common cause, social justice. From any perspective that sets out to criticise racism, it is of course difficult to reject these goals. For us, the problem is rather that Miles simply substitutes an immediate class unity to the CCCS' somewhat idealised vision of the "black masses". Indeed, for Miles, all workers, be they white or black, share "a universality of experience and interest" (1988, p. 447). It is as if an objective political potential was inscribed into the workers' conditions, while the shared experience and interest of racialised groups could only gain legitimacy by somehow adapting to that potential.

This leads us back to the central issues at stake in the debates outlined here: how does race impact upon workers' conditions and organisation, and what are the implications for political action of different conceptualisations of this race-class relationship? For Miles the precise material and political impact of race on the lives

of workers is, through the process of racialisation as defined above, to influence what kind of occupational niches non-white workers are to fill in the labour market (1982, p. 184-185). In other words, his view suggests that racialisation does not fundamentally constitute the conditions of the racialised, which are already there in the relations of production. However, in the work of the CCCS, the fact that class positions can in theory be said to be the basis of (the experience of) racism means that it does not follow that in practice class is paramount or can be conceived without any other mediations. And one of those mediations is precisely race, understood as a social stigma that can, however, be contested by minorities in their cultural or political resistance.

Gilroy's (1987) later contribution was key in framing this practical – perhaps even pragmatic in the philosophical sense – understanding of race as a “basis for action” (1987, p. 27). This does not mean that the groups in question necessarily use the terminology of “race”, as in the “Inter-Racial Solidarity Campaign”. Instead, as indicated in a 1980s leaflet about the 1984-85 British miners strike that Gilroy (1987) cites, “race” may refer to a broader definition of shared social stigma or subjugation: “The experience of Irish people, Black People and The Miners are Same [*sic*]” (quoted in Gilroy 1987, p. 40). The point, then, is to consider blacks not only as the passive objects of a process of racialisation, but also as the conscious protagonists of economic, political and cultural struggles that form and change their experiences and living conditions. In the CCCS account, “race” is neither a free-floating idea disconnected from class, nor just the allocator of one's occupation. Rather, it shapes the kind of collective political representation that a certain group might reach. Class, then, is not a pre-given universal identity opposed to the narrowness of race. To the contrary, it is differentiated by the degree to which one is exposed to material and symbolic disadvantage, or, in other words: it is composed by different relations to capitalist markets and nation-state institutions.

Returning to BLM and the contemporary US “race first” / “class first” debate, this historical detour provides us with some theoretical tools to think of the articulation between material inequality and racism rather than their opposition. In spite of the

theoretical sophistication evident in some of these debates, it is clear that there is still a clear tendency to articulate race and class as a dichotomy, or to place the latter as primary or as “above” the former due to implicit, unreflected presuppositions. From this it is a short step to seeing movements such as BLM as undermining class solidarity (as in Lilla 2017, and also, in a different context but to the same end, in Winlow et al. 2015). These social movements and class politics are posed as antithetical or at least as not combinable. While Marxists such as Virdee (2014) adopt a more nuanced position, refusing to see race and class as dichotomy, echoes of this way of thinking are still evident, as made clear in Adolph Reed Jr.’s brief intervention in a recent exchange on the Verso blog (Reed Jr., 2018).

Drawing from the Miles-CCCS debate of the 1980s we think there are three main lessons we can take from it. First, we can note that, to a large extent, Miles and the CCCS seemed to be talking past each other, insofar that their respective contributions were actually of a different nature or operating on distinct levels (Solomos and Back 1995). When dealing with the material and political significance of race, Miles raised the question in terms of a systematic Marxian social theory. His point of departure was thus the capitalist relations of production in general: what effect does racialisation have upon the latter? Miles’ answer was that the impact of racialisation is limited to the allocation of groups into positions already constituted by the relations of production. The CCCS, for their part, did not set out to provide such a general theory of the status of racialisation within the capitalist mode of production. Following Hall (1980), Gilroy even dismissed this as a vain effort due, precisely, to the ideological, i.e. distorted, nature of the idea of race (1982, p. 281). Instead, he suggests, race should be approached by limiting its scope to specific conditions, to see how the struggles of the racialised against both capitalists and state institutions are played out. At that time, the CCCS (1982) saw Britain as being in an organic crisis that, as also developed in Hall et al. (1978), entailed a new right orientation under the Thatcher premiership that combined capitalist restructuring as well as different forms of social and political repression or authoritarian populism. It is this conjunctural specificity of race that cultural studies more than Marxism brought to the fore.

Second, by highlighting this difference, partly outlined by the CCCS authors, between the level of social theory and the level of historical inquiry, we want to stress the importance of not conflating epistemological questions with political ones. Indeed, at the level of knowledge, as Miles often pointed out, race and class cannot be granted the same value. Race is an idea of common sense which attributes certain supposedly corporeal, hereditary and unchangeable properties to human groups. Class, on the other hand is, in Marxist terms, an “analytical concept” insofar that it serves to describe a process that actually determines one’s position in society (Miles 1984, p. 232-233). However, as Parmar (1982) and Gilroy (1987) pointed out, what Miles seems to neglect is that both with regard to present conditions and to political history, be it as an idea of common sense or as the theme of an outright racist ideology, race is irreducibly ingrained in that process. More generally, we would argue that it provides not only tropes of discourses, but also a rationale for discrimination in various spheres as well as for nationalist and authoritarian state policies or political mobilisations “from below”. This, we suggest, is something that many Marxist critics of BLM (e.g Clegg 2016, Backer 2018, Haider 2018) either miss or underestimate. By distinguishing the rational-theoretical inquiry into the *validity* of the idea of race from the political-practical question of the *uses* of race as such a trope and rationale, we see that race does not merely allocate individuals into pre-existing class positions, but does actually take part in the “*social and discursive practice of the construction of these groups*” (Müller-Uri 2014, p. 64). More specifically, by marking out certain groups as essentially incapable, unassimilable, or detrimental, this trope and rationale serves to defend the material and symbolical advantages of the “majority population” against non-whites.

Third, this analysis in turn has implications for the way we think politically. Through a thought experiment, Clegg (2016) argues that under present US conditions, “even if racial discrimination were completely eradicated, racial inequality would persist” because “under capitalism poverty is a heritable condition”. The BLM movement’s focus on discrimination thus occludes broader tendencies on the US labour market since the 1970s, characterised by strong segmentation, i.e. blockages to intra- and

inter-class mobility. Undoubtedly, anti-black racism does not have the same impact today as it had during slavery and Jim Crow, and contemporary racial inequality rests in large part upon differentiated segmentation of this kind. However, historically, one cannot separate intergenerational material disadvantage on the one hand, and more or less institutionalised forms of racist discrimination and segregation in labour, housing and education on the other. Also, today, from the point of view of capitalist social relations in the US, such particular forms of racist discrimination and segregation do not have the same status as general tendencies of capitalist markets. Still, to varying degrees in space and time, *racist discrimination and segregation are integral parts* of these markets. This implies that class relations and race as a trope and rationale for discrimination, segregation and political mobilisation can only be separated analytically, not in reality – unless racism has actually been wiped out completely from a particular social formation and its history. So, without falling into the rather indeterminate “both-and” perspective of “we must fight both material inequality *and* racism”, we may argue that, from determinate positions and circumstances, material inequality is actually fought by taking on racist forms of discrimination, segregation and mobilisation as well as their inter-generational, coagulated effects. This does not mean that the struggle against racist discrimination or racism should simply replace the one against material inequality, but neither can it just be collapsed into the latter. Writing about 1970s Birmingham (UK), Hall et al. did indeed argue that the primary focus should be not so much on discrimination *per se* as on the differentiated positions of groups on the labour market (Hall et al. 1978, p. 339-340). A struggle waged by blacks against the specific forces to which they are exposed is thus a moment of the struggle against material inequality, aiming at one of its particular mediations.

Both when looking back on past struggles and when engaging with those that unfold as we speak, what makes this perspective relevant is its ability to point at the specificity of particular forms of inherited disadvantage without losing sight of broad tendencies of capitalist markets. From this standpoint, we can go beyond seeing either race and class, or Marxism and cultural studies, as dichotomously as they are framed in historical and contemporary debates. In the US, racist discrimination and

segregation has taken part in shaping and perpetuating the particularly precarious conditions of many African-Americans, defining them as a “race” in such a way that even today, “improved class position might at any moment fall subject to a racist veto” (Fields and Fields 2012, p. 267). In the UK, the struggles of the working class from the mid-19th to the mid-20th century took part in creating a national identity through which “class as a representational form and as a material relation was indelibly nationalized and racialized” (Virdee 2014, p. 5). Through processes that are political, legal and ideological in nature, material disadvantage can thus be ingrained in certain populations while social and political citizenship is polarised along imagined in- and out-groups. Rather than conflating race into a “relation of production” (Backer 2018), it is the workings of those processes within relations of domination and exploitation that must be explored (Singh and Clover 2018). For instance, many participants in the spate of riots ignited by the police killings of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown were poor, either unemployed or working in low-wage sectors. However, because of their particular forms of inter-generational material disadvantage and the social stigma of race attached to them, many of those participants acted not so much upon labour relations *per se* – from which they tended to be excluded. Rather, they reacted to the state institutions designed to manage them, most notably the police, as well as those characteristic, ubiquitous outlets of capital that even the long-term unemployed can reach: stores, malls, fast-food chains, etc. (for an analysis of rioting in Britain that offers a similar analysis see Millington 2016). Here again, the conjunctural specificity of race explored by the CCCS comes to the fore, not as something given, but as the combined effect of contemporary capitalist markets and the historical weight of past segregation and discrimination.

References:

Ahmed, R. and Mukherjee, S., 2012. *South Asian Resistances in Britain, 1858-1947*, A&C Black.

Agozino, B., 2018 | Black Lives Matter Otherwise All Lives Do Not Matter,

African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies: AJCJS, Vol.11, #1 April

Back, L. and Solomos, J., 2000. "Introduction: Theorising Race and Racism" in Back, L. and Solomos, J., eds, *Theories of Race and Racism: A Reader*. London; Routledge.

Backer, D. I., 2018. "Race and Class Reductionism Today". <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/4068-race-and-class-reductionism-today>

Camp, J.T. and Heatherton, C. eds., 2016. *Policing the planet: Why the policing crisis led to Black Lives Matter*. Verso Books.

Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1982. *The Empire Strikes Back. Race and Racism in 70s Britain*. Routledge.

Clegg, J., 2016. "Black Representation After Ferguson", <https://brooklynrail.org/2016/05/field-notes/black-representation-after-ferguson>

Fields, K. E., and Fields, B. J., 2012. *Racecraft. The Soul of Inequality in American Life*, Verso Books.

Gilroy, P., 1982. "Steppin' out of Babylon – race, class and autonomy" in Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, *The Empire Strikes Back. Race and Racism in 70s Britain*, Routledge, p. 275-315.

-- 1987. *"There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack": The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*. Unwin Hyman.

-- 1993. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Verso Books.

Haider, A., 2018. *Mistaken identity: race and class in the age of Trump*. London: Verso Books.

Hall, S., C. Critcher, T. Jefferson, J. Clarke, and B. Roberts. 1978. *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order*. London: Macmillan.

Hall, S., 1980. "Race, articulation and societies structured in dominance" in UNESCO ed., *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism*, UNESCO, p. 305-345.

Lilla, M 2017. *The Once and Future Liberal: After Identity Politics*, New York: Harper

Miles, R., 1982. *Racism and Migrant Labour*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.

- 1984, "Marxism versus the sociology of "race relations"? », *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2, p. 217-237.
- 1988, "Racism, Marxism and British politics", *Economy and Society*, vol. 17, no. 3, p. 428-460.
-

Millington, G. 2016. "'I Found the Truth in Foot Locker': London 2011, Urban Culture, and the Post-Political City." *Antipode* 48 (3): 705–723.

Müller-Uri, F., 2014. *Antimuslimischer Rassismus*. Mandelbaum.

Parmar, P., 1982. "Gender, race and class: Asian women in resistance" in Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, *The Empire Strikes Back. Race and Racism in 70s Britain*, Routledge, p. 236-275.

Pearson, R., Anitha, S. and McDowell, L., 2010. Striking issues: from labour process to industrial dispute at Grunwick and Gate Gourmet. *Industrial Relations Journal*, 41(5), pp.408-428.

Phizacklea, A., and Miles, R., 1979. "Working Class Racist Beliefs in the Inner City" in Miles, R., and Phizacklea, A. eds., *Racism and Political Action in Britain*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.

- 1980. *Labour and Racism*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.

- 1987. "The British Trade Union Movement and Racism" in Leeand, G., and Loveridge, R. eds, *The Manufacture of Disadvantage: Stigma and Social Closure*, Open University Press.

Reed Jr., A., 2018. "Response to Backer and Singh".
<https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/4073-response-to-backer-and-singh>

Rickford, R., 2016, Black lives matter: Toward a modern practice of mass struggle. *New Labor Forum* Vol. 25, No. 1, pp. 34-42

Singh, N. and Clover, J., 2018. "The Blindspot Revisited",
<https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/4079-the-blindspot-revisited>

Solomos, J. and Back, L., 1995. Marxism, racism, and ethnicity. *American behavioral scientist*, 38(3), pp.407-420.

Virdee, S., 2014. *Racism, Class and the Racialized Outsider*. Red Globe Press.

Winlow, S., Hall, S., Treadwell, J. and Briggs, D. (2015) *Riots and Political Protest: Notes from the Post-Political Present*, London: Routledge

Yancy, G., and Butler, J., 2015. "What's Wrong With 'All Lives Matter'?".
<https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/01/12/whats-wrong-with-all-lives-matter/>