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THE RE-EMERGENCE OF THE 'BLACK SPECTRE'[1]: MINORITY PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS IN THE POST-MACPHERSON ERA

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Abstract

This article reflects on the forging of a collective black identity among professionals working within the criminal justice field in the aftermath of the Macpherson Report (1999). Drawing on interviews with the Chairpersons of 'black' and 'Asian' professional associations, it describes the familiar tensions associated with mobilising against racism and discrimination in the workplace. These include the viability of an inclusive black political position and the challenge of 'fighting from within' or being a 'critical friend' of criminal justice services. The political backdrop is one in which the policy goal of eliminating 'institutional racism' has given way to a discourse of 'promoting race equality and embracing diversity'. Despite the obstacles, these professional associations provide a safe and supportive network for members which is grounded in a powerful, shared history of occupational racism.

Keywords: black, Asian, professional association, collective identity, race equality, diversity.

Introduction

It is axiomatic that the optimism which greeted New Labour's rise to power has now significantly diminished. In areas such as asylum and immigration, terrorism control, criminal justice, and 'community cohesion', there has been a cumulative abjuration of core elements of New Labour policies (Amin 2002; Back et al. 2002; Bowling and Phillips 2002; Alexander 2004; Schuster and Solomos 2004; Burchardt 2005; Phillips 2005). In the race arena, New Labour's aspirations were first exercised when it established a public inquiry into the police investigation of Stephen Lawrence's racist murder. Following the barren years of the Conservative administration, the subsequent Macpherson Report (1999) acted as a catalyst for change. The Lawrence Inquiry team's indictment of institutional racism laid at the door of the police service and other pillars of the establishment was regarded by many commentators as a 'watershed' and 'benchmark' in British race relations (Brah 1996; Bourne 2001). Perhaps even criminal justice professionals and academics were partially swayed by the seeming consensus of public and political opinion that castigated the police for their incompetence and endemic racism. While the subsequent reform programme offered promise, it would be rose-tinted retrospection not to acknowledge a well-honed cynicism about the likelihood of real change, a concern that eliminating institutional racism might only be the political flavour of the moment, whilst the threat of backlash was (as ever) omnipresent (Dennis, Erdos and Al-Shahi 2000).

New Labour's response to the Macpherson Report (1999) was a myriad of policy proposals of which the centrepiece was the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 (Home Office 1999). As was the case with the earlier Scarman Report (1981) on the policing of black communities, the employment practices of criminal

justice agencies were held up for criticism, with particular concern expressed about the relatively low proportion of minority ethnic staff employed by the police service. In the subsequent Home Secretary's Action Plan (1999), there was an explicit managerialist focus on increasing the recruitment of minority ethnic staff to reflect local or national populations, with further targets set to improve the retention and progression of minority ethnic staff in the criminal justice services. The assumption was that the police and other criminal justice services needed to better reflect their multi-ethnic and multi-cultural local communities. This would increase their legitimacy and, with more minority ethnic officers, reduce stereotypical and biased behaviour against minority ethnic individuals[2] (Home Office 1999).

Alongside this there has been a mushrooming of minority professional associations set up in response to the negative experiences of minority practitioners who have faced marginalisation, discrimination, and sometimes victimisation in the police, crown prosecution, probation, and prison services[3]. The National Black Police Association, the National Black Crown Prosecutors' Association, the Home Office Network and Respect (Her Majesty's Prison Service) have all emerged in the last seven years, joining the longer established professional associations, such as the Metropolitan Police Service Black Police Association, the Society of Black Lawyers, the Association of Black Probation Officers, and the Association of Asian Probation Staff , all of whom significantly predate the Lawrence Inquiry[4]. These professional associations provide support networks, mentoring, conferences, training, and social events for their members, and have had a central role in recruitment initiatives as the criminal justice services seek assistance in meeting the targets contained in the Home Secretary's Action Plan. For some of the minority professional associations, their mission extends

beyond these internal activities to a concern with improving service delivery for minority ethnic individuals and communities as 'users' (victims, witnesses, suspects, defendants and prisoners) of criminal justice services (see Phillips forthcoming).

At first sight these organisations – most of whom have adopted 'black' in their name and membership criteria - appear to be signalling a re-emergence and heralding of the collective black political identity, formerly buried (at least theoretically) in the early 1990s, but resurrected in the early 21st century to challenge racism within the criminal justice professions.

Reflecting on Alexander (2002) who has charted the demise of the hegemony of the "old" black political project in favour of the "new" politics of difference within the academy, this paper presents an empirical picture of an uncertain black political alliance in the form of black and minority professional associations in the criminal justice field, six years on from the pivotal Macpherson Report (1999). Whilst many of the organisations included in this small-scale study rode on the wave of optimism engendered by the Lawrence Inquiry, the current political climate is one in which the term 'institutional racism' has all but disappeared from government policy statements. New Labour has seemingly misplaced its anti-racist credentials - if it can ever be claimed that it had them - and now its objective is to promote race equality, a more liberal and less politically controversial policy goal. The New Labour policy landscape is one in which the language of promoting race equality, championing diversity, and reducing social exclusion prevails.

The research on which this paper draws is based on in-depth interviews with the Chairs of the National Black Police Association, Metropolitan Black Police Association, National Association of Black Crown Prosecutors, Association of Black Probation Officers, National Association of Asian Probation Staff[5], the

Home Office Network and Respect (Her Majesty's Prison Service), and two senior officials working within the Home Office on race equality and diversity issues. Additionally, data are included from a small case study of the Association of Black Probation Officers[6], which entailed further interviews with five Executive Committee members, and observation of a small number of regional and national meetings, including the AGM in April 2004[7]. The interviews were conducted between June 2003 and June 2004. Each interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim, then coded and analysed using QSR NUD*IST. In an attempt to preserve anonymity, the interview quotes used throughout this paper have not been individually attributed.

Whilst the experiences of these minority professional associations have undoubtedly been shaped by the politics of race in the post-Macpherson era, their study also presents an opportunity to revisit some of the ghosts of the 1980s; particularly the politics of minority-led institutions and their efforts to influence policy formation and service delivery. This article begins by considering the vexed issue of building a coalition around a black political identity before exploring the inherent challenges of fighting racism from within, as employees of criminal justice services. It ends with an acknowledgement of the important role of black and minority professional associations in providing a supportive network for members whose experiences of occupational racism are only subtly different in the post-Macpherson era compared with earlier periods.

Black political mobilisation in the 2000s: same old, same old?

'…it is not because of their skins that they are Black in their heads.' (Hall 2000:149)

In the 1980s local and national political campaigns organised to challenge racism were frequently mounted under a 'black' banner with those of diverse ethnic origins uniting against white oppression in Britain. Drawing on the symbolism of the Black Power movement in the US, black became a signifier of collective resistance and a rallying cry to band together to oppose racial injustice (Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe 1985; Anthias, Yuval-Davis and Cain 1992; Shukra 1998). However, despite claims to its hegemonic past, even during its heyday as a collective political identity, the basis of blackness was questioned (Housee and Sharma 1999). Among activists it was frequently the subject of rigorous debate as to who was 'black enough' to be included by the term (see for example Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992; Hensman 1995[8]).

Challenges to the validity of a black political alliance were most vociferously voiced by Modood (1988, 1994) who vehemently rejected the term 'black' as an essentialist construct, claiming that its use was coercive and harmful to 'Asians' (Modood 1988: 403). His argument rested on an assumption that blackness operated largely as a descriptive rather than a political device. For it to function in the latter sense, according to Modood, it required a neutrality which it simply did not possess; a positive black identity was almost exclusively rooted in African but not South Asian heritages. For Asians to consider themselves as black required them to "adopt an identity false to their own being", which would militate against their engaging in meaningful political struggle (Modood 1988: 402). Thus, those of South Asian origin could only ever become "secondary or ambiguous blacks" who effectively had to accept the leadership of those of African heritage in any political campaign (Modood 1988: 399). Modood's work does recognise the value of unity against white racism but he rails against what he views as race relations professionals' failure to respect ethnic self-definition which would

privilege Asian cultural traditions[9].

At the heart of Modood's position is the impossibility of a unified political formation among those of Asian, African and African-Caribbean origins when South Asians do not view themselves as black, even if there is a recognition of some commonalities of experience of white racism. His alternative formulation which seeks to elevate 'Asianess', however, has been subject to critique by Housee and Sharma (1999) for its similarly essentialising tendencies which may act to silence other subjectivities. Brah (1996) too challenges Modood's (1988) view that blackness is an essentialist construct, but rather sees it as a historically situated strategy which, in post-war Britain, was organised around the politics of racism rather than cultural difference. Nonetheless, Modood's claims have received some empirical support in Sudbury (2001)study of black women's organisations in Britain. Hall's (2000) work too has expressed concern about the silencing of Asian voices and forms of resistance centred on language, cultural traditions, historical background, gender and class.

In the parallel universe of the academy, anti-essentialism and the 'fetishization of marginality' (Alexander 2002: 566) has been upheld through the politics of difference, with identity coming to be seen as fragmented, fluid, under construction, thus jettisoning the reification of homogenised racial and ethnic identities. Undoubtedly there are some attractive strands to this analysis, but in the cold light of empirical (as opposed to socially constructed) reality[10], structural discrimination and exclusion continue to operate in the lives of marginalized groups buttressed by social and historical processes of colonialism and oppression (Bhattacharyya, Gabriel and Small 2002; Mac an Ghaill 1999; Sharma, Hutnyk and Sharma 1996). Quick to draw our attention to these theoretical blind-spots have been minority scholars, particularly feminists. They have warned against the

potential of the postmodernist turn to obscure and suppress subaltern voices and their claims to truth, authenticity and authority, with the resultant effect of derailing political activism at the collective level. This has led Hill Collins (1998: 136), for example, to ask the pertinent question, 'When weapons of resistance are theorized away in this fashion, one might ask, who really benefits?' The response to this rhetorical question is academics of the postmodernist persuasion whose notion of difference preclude achieving community in any political sense. Spivak's (1988) concept of strategic essentialism offers a get-out or half-way position whereby subaltern[11] consciousness is actively used for political even militant change (see also Jhappan 1996) solution of contextual essentialism)[12]. Essentialisms, according to Spivak (1990: 51) act not as descriptors, but "as something that one must adopt to produce a critique of anything". These theoretical concerns are mirrored in the policy context as minority professional associations in the criminal justice services consider how best to organise politically as a racialized collectivity in order to resist occupational racism.

Race/colour: a marker for inclusion and exclusion?

In the current research, with the exception of the National Association of Asian Probation Staff, the naming of the professional association and establishment of its membership criteria had been a fraught exercise and the subject of painful and prolonged debate. Only the Home Office Network (formerly Ethnic Minority Network) and the prison service's professional association (Respect) had decided against a term which included a politicised racial or ethnic referent.

The other professional associations whose members came from the police, crown prosecution, and probation services had all adopted the black platform as their preferred organising strategy. The exclusionary potential of black (particularly

for those of Asian heritage) was weighed against the appeal of a term which could stand on its own and be recognised as a powerful political force. The use of black as a political category was grounded in an oppositional stance against historical and contemporary forms of racism within criminal justice institutions and wider society. These were regarded as simultaneously affecting black and Asian professionals. However, many interviewees' comments revealed that either explicitly or implicitly they were primarily referring to racialized forms of discrimination as justification for the use of the term black. This is demonstrated in the following two quotes by interviewees of African and African-Caribbean origin respectively who in their interviews readily acknowledged the problems associated with the term black:

> …within the black groups you will have ethnicity, we are one race but we have different ethnic groupings within us…Well black is a colour. We are talking colour here. That is where the distinction is drawn really.

> we have never said Asian people have the same needs as us, what we have said is we all, because of where we come from and the colour of our skin, suffer racism. And that for us is the main focus…we can look at our differences, celebrate them, and work together in that sense. But in terms of working with the establishment i.e. the criminal justice system we felt that was the platform to hang things on… I just think that Europeans are very good at that whole divide and rule. And I think as Africans

and Asians we know this but we still allow them to get away

with it.

The extreme racist standard or what was labelled by one interviewee as the
'Combat 18 criteria' – 'At the end of the day people don't think today I am going
to throw a brick at somebody who looks African-Caribbean but not at somebody
who is Asian' - was also cited as the basis for deciding membership. This assumed
a crude black/white dualism in which black constituted every ethnic heritage which
through visual identification could not be claimed as white, Northern European.
Unity, at least against racism, was assumed among all 'other than white' individuals,
regardless of the diversity of individuals who might constitute the membership. At
one level, of course, this position accepts that racism in society may be absolute
and without regard to ethnic, cultural and regional variations. For Modood (1988:
397-8), however, this position is untenable since:

If anti-racists borrow the racists' classifications in order to

defeat racism… then however successful or not they may be as

an interest group they will have lost…the ideal of a multi-racial

society for a model of society as composed of two and only two

'races' which for the foreseeable future must live in conflict.

Another variant of the race/colour stance was visibility of difference. This
was the deciding factor for full membership of professional associations which
could admit those of Middle Eastern or Chinese origin, whilst denying full
membership to those of Irish or Eastern European origin who might claim similar
discrimination on the basis of their ethnicity rather than race:

for example an Irish person in the history when they said 'No

Blacks, No Dogs, No Irish'. It wasn't because they were

being discriminated because of their colour it was because of

their ethnicity and I think that that is the difference. You know

we can't hide our difference…

Sometimes people say 'why can't other white people who are

non-English attend?' I say it is not a question of language, it is a

question that you see me, I am different, I am physically

different from you. Unless Eastern European opens their mouth

and they have got an accent, that is the only time that you know

that they are not English…Otherwise you assume because they

mirror your image.

Changing times: the political currency of 'Black and Asian'

The detractors to the use of black in the name and membership criteria of

professional associations were not only those representatives from the National

Association of Asian Probation Staff. More broadly there was a recognition of

'changing times', heightened in policy circles through the Census' identification of

the 'mixed race' group, the influx of Eastern European migrants, and the

groundswell of public and political antipathy towards asylum seekers and refugees.

Comments such as 'it no longer holds as well as it did', 'I think that it is a term

that…we are going to have to debate again and again and again …', '…do we

really need to use that term, is it really relevant…?' were relatively commonplace

among interviewees.

Accounts by some South Asian interviewees echoed the claims of Modood (1988, 1994) in their views of a collective black political identity (see also Sudbury 2001). This was particularly so in relation to not identifying with the term because of its implicit link to African and Caribbean heritages. As one interviewee of Indian origin opined, '...black ....it means something totally different in Asian languages. And unless you speak and know them and have that cultural identity you cannot understand the impact of using the term black....'.

The desire to establish a specifically Asian professional association in addition to the Association of Black Probation Officers was also prompted by what was regarded as the probation service's 'anti-Asian' history of ethnic monitoring which used a White/Black/Other categorisation for many years:

> If I say that I am Asian and I read out the political definition of
> black, I am still with you… We want the same thing which is
> race equality. I don't have to turn myself black to be with you. I
> just want to have my own association. Because in the probation
> service… Asians don't exist…. you were black, white or other.

> It was a lack of Asian perspective in the work of the Probation
> Service…for example the service delivery side but also because
> there was an under-representation of Asian staff. Staff that were
> around felt very isolated, very marginalized between the
> dichotomy of black and white on the one hand and them trying
> to struggle to keep their own identity on the other. And I think
> it was out of that kind of sense of frustration that they felt that
> they needed to do something. That they needed to form a

support group that would identify with their needs as Asian

people working within the probation service.

It was also felt that the focus on black had prevented discussion of the significant

under-representation of Asian staff in the probation service, in contrast to the

more proportionate representation of African-Caribbean staff, albeit in more

junior grades: 'We actually formed our association because we thought that the

black term didn't identify, it marginalised us. The fact that there was only 1% of us

around, and nobody said a word.' Quantitatively the research was unable to gauge

the extent to which the use of the term black did prevent some minority ethnic

professionals from joining their respective professional associations. Precisely

because of the definition of black enshrined in the Association of Black Probation

Officers' constitution, for example, figures were not held on the ethnicity of its

membership.

In rejecting the black/white dichotomy as a form of extinguishing Asian

perspectives, another former Chair critiqued the black position for its failure to

understand the complexities of Asian groups along the lines of geography, religion,

language and culture. It is this fault line that Alexander (2002) identifies as creating

divisions between minority groups and playing into the hands of those who claim

cultural inadequacies explain disadvantage and marginalisation (see also Sivanandan

2000). Brah (1996) too rejects 'ethnicist' discourses which privilege cultural needs

over the social relations of power, at the same time as promoting a mistaken

homogeneity of common cultural needs and difference. However, like Modood

(1994), some Asian interviewees pointed to the importance of cultural practices in

relation to dress, dietary habits, and non-Christian religious observance in

contributing to discrimination. This prioritising of cultural (as well as racialized)

discrimination stood in direct contrast to the findings of Holdaway and O'Neill

forthcoming) in their study of black police associations. In the police service, religious beliefs and cultural needs such as diet were of secondary importance to occupational racism, although the expansion of faith-based and ethnicity-based staff associations within some police services, notably the Metropolitan Police Service, significantly qualifies this finding. The establishment of Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Chinese and South East Asian, and Turkish and Turkish Cypriot police staff support associations in the Metropolitan Police Service, for example, points to the increasing significance of faith and ethnicity as identity markers and bases for employment-based political representation.

Rather inevitably the establishment of separate (politically) black and Asian professional associations to represent probation staff had been the source of some conflict, although the current Chairs were sanguine about their differences of opinion and were committed to working together for race equality in the probation service. The 'Asian issue' within the Association of Black Probation Officers remained a live one, however, brought to the fore at the AGM in April 2004, with one delegate forcefully requesting more of an Asian perspective to ABPO work in the future. Despite this, Asian members appeared to contribute fully to conference discussions. Indeed, one of the most moving speeches of the conference was by an Asian probation officer who castigated those individuals who sought to use 'the Asian issue' to hijack the business and potential progress of the Association of Black Probation Officers. Moreover, in recent years Asian probation officers had held important Executive Committee positions within the Association of Black Probation Officers. An estimate of representation at the AGM did indicate a smaller proportion of Asian conference delegates compared to those of African and African-Caribbean heritages. This would be expected to some extent because of their lower comparative representation in the probation staff population (Home

Office 2004. This probably explained some Caribbean-toned addresses to conference delegates and occasional Christian references. Without interviewing Asian participants it is impossible to assess whether these instances were regarded as exclusionary in any way or simply reflecting the cultures of the majority of attendees.

Taken together, these accounts clearly reveal that the concept of political blackness is still a somewhat contested and fragile notion, but nonetheless one that persists (see also Housee and Sharma 1999; Sudbury 2001). Blackness operates to signify a common unity which is perceived to exist among quite disparate groups, sometimes even those categorised as white but subjected to discrimination along the lines of ethnicity, language, religion or some other cultural symbol. It endures as a political signifier in large part because there is not a viable alternative for marginalized groups who wish to collectively resist racism. Indeed, for a small number of interviewees the use of the term black was purely pragmatic or occurred by default. This, from an interviewee who referred to himself as a black man of Indian origin:

> So you had this term 'Black and Asian' but when you took
> black....black is not a geographic term, whereas Asian is
> geographic. Doesn't make sense. So we looked at it and you
> could have a name of everybody's countries where people come
> from but of course you would have a very lengthy name
> [laughs]. But what we were looking at was the common and
> shared experiences of people of colour. And the best definition
> that we could come up with which was all-encompassing was
> black…. As long as it is a description of experience rather than

colour it was easier for us to deal with.

The most descriptive option, given their relative numerical dominance among the minority population in Britain, and following alphabetical convention (Modood 1994) would be to name these professional associations as 'Asian and Black'. However, whilst this may reflect the contemporary (and official) labels attached to these internally diverse groups, it has the drawback of excluding other minorities by being even more specific. It also dissociates itself from a discourse of active resistance and an oppositional solidarity borne out of the emotive language and imagery of the Black Power movement and its connection with civil rights advances in the US. It might even be argued that the symbolic character of blackness remains even more important at a time when New Labour policy discourses have (at least until recently) stridently promoted the elimination of institutional racism, a term which itself came into being during the Black Power movement (Carmichael and Hamilton 1968). At the height of the Lawrence Inquiry the concept of institutional racism captured the political and public imagination. It has subsequently been replaced with the softer language of 'race equality' (of opportunity but not outcome) and 'diversity' (see for example Home Office 2005). Just as the academy has espoused notions of 'difference', the policy arena has adopted 'diversity' as its mantra. The race equality and diversity agendas coalesce in the employment field, framed by a celebration of cultural differences, and the value of allowing individuals to reach their true potential - which has benefits for employers too[13]. As such, these represent more politically palatable goals than the elimination of institutional racism. The diversity agenda is implicitly linked to disadvantage and discrimination, particularly on the grounds of race and gender, but with sexuality, disability (and increasingly, faith) usually added to the

mix. At one level this is a welcome acknowledgement of the multifarious forms of discrimination which pervade public sector workplaces and which operate to oppress various marginalized groups. However, diversity like difference, can serve to obscure structural inequalities and inspire depoliticized multiculturalist responses of the 'saris, samosas and steel-band' variety (Donald and Rattansi 1992; Alexander 2002; see also Wrench 2005 for a fuller critique of the concept of diversity). Wrench (2005) considers the possibility that employers may adopt the 'soft option': promoting 'intercultural awareness' whilst avoiding employing a more representative workforce or undertaking anti-discrimination training. A sign of this blurring of equality and diversity can be seen in the most recent Home Office (2005) strategy document on race equality and community cohesion, where references to racism are made solely in relation to racially motivated offenders and community extremists with no mention of racism within state institutions – a far cry from the Macpherson Report's (1999) understanding of institutional racism. It may be argued then, that this subtle but meaningful shift in discourse necessitates a strategic essentialism, to use Spivak's term, simply to ensure that racism remains on the political agenda[14]. Thus to avoid the political diminution of race under the umbrella of diversity means a reliance on the term 'black' not least because of its crude biological connotation.

Biting the hand that feeds: 'critical friend' or the management of criticism?

There is a sense of *déjà vu* engendered from the above discussion of a black political identity and this is similarly invoked around the question of accountability. In the context of the current research this concerned financial accountability and the politics of funding. As was the case with many community-focused

organisations operating in the 1980 and 1990s, the minority professional associations in the criminal justice field have had to decide whether to opt for the insecurity but independence of charitable funding or receive more stable state funding with the danger of political strings attached. Given the continued focus of government on the employment of minorities in the criminal justice professions (enshrined in the Home Secretary's Action Plan (1999) and annual monitoring reports), it might be argued that direct funding of minority professional associations reflects a new openness by government to listen to accounts of occupational racism, and with this, a commitment to promote organisational change. A critical analysis would suggest a more disingenuous motive whereby holding the purse strings enables the state to co-opt critical voices and manage dissent (Gilroy 1987). In this study, it was evident that there was some cynicism about the motives of the criminal justice services' funding of professional associations who might publicly challenge their practices. A common perception was that funding had come about because of mounting pressure at the time of the Macpherson Report (1999), with services recognising the need to 'get their own house in order' before focusing externally on service delivery:

> I don't think that that has been out of choice. I think it has been
> more out of necessity and the desire to demonstrate that they
> are doing something in relation to the Lawrence report and so
> forth. I think it is about, well we need to do it… we are going to
> be judged on it, and if we don't do it we are going to look silly…

The dilemma of state funding was one that the minority professional associations in the current study were acutely attuned to. The danger of becoming a 'management tool' was the subject of continuous and sometimes heated debate

as the following extracts demonstrate:

> we have had ex number of arguments at AGM about whether
>
> we should take funding… whether that means we are taking the
>
> King's shilling... And in some ways it does mean that and it does
>
> result in a diminishing of what you can do. How you can say it.
>
> …You can begin to rely on it. And although the amount we
>
> get… is small... nevertheless it is now enough that if it were
>
> taken away we would be struggling...

> And we are forced into thinking do we follow them and do as
>
> they bid so to speak … or do we go back for our
>
> interdependence which we risk going back to being a grass roots
>
> organisation meeting at people's houses on a Saturday and
>
> Sunday in the evenings, that is the risk… I think we are
>
> vulnerable to the whims of policy changes, ministers, and
>
> what the [service] does. So we are at a critical point as an
>
> organisation in terms of what we do next.

The term 'critical friend' was used by one interviewee to describe the role of

minority professional associations, with interviewees tending to claim that they

were able to maintain a critical distance from their employers and funders.

However, there was an acceptance that their style of working might be less

confrontational leading them to seek redress internally first, because of the funding

arrangements. A particular restriction on associations was the requirement to

adhere to various bureaucratic procedures. This was seen as detracting from the

needs of members and wider black communities. To give an example, in the case

of one professional association, conference costs had been met in full by a criminal justice service but because of complex procurement arrangements this prevented the use of a black community centre as a venue. A disproportionately heavy focus on meeting the national objectives in the service's business plan was also regarded as another way of stifling independence and dictating association's work agenda with priorities set which might not correspond with members' priorities.

At the time of the research, however, there was little evidence of the incorporation of critical voices. The media profile of some minority professional associations indicate that a critical perspective is more than possible within the constraints of internal funding and employment. The Metropolitan Black Police Association, for example, has continuously sought national publicity around cases of discriminatory employment practice. Likewise, the National Black Police Association recently threatened to withdraw from positive action initiatives to recruit more minority ethnic officers because of continuing racism and discrimination in the police service. Such efforts do not support the view that state funding prohibits independent lobbying with these examples promising maximum embarrassment for the New Labour agenda around race equality in criminal justice employment.

In rejecting the simplification of the co-optation of funded community organisations by the state, Sudbury's (2001) study of black women's organisations indicates the need for a more nuanced understanding which recognises the greater reach of funded community organisations and their creative ability to forward their own political agendas regardless of their paymasters. That said, some of her interviewees as well as some of those in the current study were more inclined to be highly dismissive of state funding and instead hankered after greater autonomy and a more critical edge to their work:

> You are better off having no funding as I said, because you lead
>
> an agenda, you can say what you want. As soon as you fall into
>
> government you stop playing ball in the park and you don't let
>
> that ball go out because you might lose funding. You keep it in.
>
> And it keeps some people in post and in power.

Where additional independent funding had been secured, for example by the Metropolitan Black Police Association, there was a feeling that this increased the extent to which the association was accountable to its members and also galvanised members into demonstrating a more active political commitment.

The political constraints brought about by state funding was also acknowledged by one of the senior officials interviewed for the research. However, in their view it was the former interpretation of open government and freedom to criticise which determined the nature of the funding relationship:

> I have tried to steer this organisation on the path where we do
>
> not compromise on the freedom of our staff associations. They
>
> are responsible for their conferences. They determine who they
>
> want to address them. They can say whatever they feel needs to
>
> be said... I see a strength of staff association in their ability to be
>
> able at any time to provide that critical feedback. One that is
>
> uncomfortable. If it needs to be but I would wish for...
>
> constructive dialogue…. constructive criticism and always try to
>
> find ways of working together.

Funding professional associations was seen as a means of strategically enabling marginalised groups to become 'part of the business', to have a place at decision-making tables, primarily in relation to internal employment practices but also

extending externally into service delivery for minority 'users' of criminal justice services. At the same time this view was tempered by concerns about the way in which professional associations used their funding, particularly since activities had to be accounted for and linked to specific national objectives, such as an increase in minority retention or a reduction in crime or offending behaviour.

The familiar scramble for scarce resources was becoming increasingly evident as some minority professional associations perceived competition with each other or emerging networks focused on disability and sexuality in the criminal justice services. In the current research this played out in the probation service with the state-funded Association of Black Probation Officers and the National Association of Asian Probation Staff questioning the extent of funding given to each professional association. A similar picture has been described by Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992) in their study of the politics of race and racism in a London borough in the late 1980s. Sivanandan (2000: 422) has lamented what he sees as these deep forms of cultural segmentation which have followed on from multiculturalist policies, transforming resistance from a collective (politically black) site to an individual (black or Asian) one where individuals compete 'over position and power and a place under the ethnic sun'.

The issue of political influence and power is a thorny one. Previous research on anti-racist political struggles points to them occurring at the margins of the local political machinery (Ben-Tovim et al. 1986). It was not really possible for this small-scale study to gauge the political influence of the minority professional associations in informing policy formation and service delivery, particularly as some are fledgling organisations. However, among the longer established associations and those with more generous funding, there was certainly a perception that their status had been enhanced in the post-Macpherson era, that

they were now routinely invited and represented at the key decision-making fora in each service. In the probation service, for example, this extended to representation on the main strategy committee and a variety of service delivery committees. Both the Association of Black Probation Officers and the National Association of Asian Probation Staff had played an important role as advisory group members for the thematic inspection on race equality work, covering both employment practice and work with minority ethnic offenders and racially motivated offenders (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation 2000, 2004). Similarly, it seems likely that the adverse publicity garnered by the Metropolitan and National Black Police Associations concerning discriminatory employment practices in the police service was instrumental in the setting up of the Morris Inquiry (2004) into complaints and grievance procedures. These professional associations have also typically had an input into local and national race equality schemes and diversity strategies (see also Phillips forthcoming). Lobbying on service delivery issues was inevitably more difficult for the professional associations representing civil service and agency staff based directly within the Home Office and the Prison Service, and there employment issues remained the sole focus.

The limits to political influence were partially explained by the infrastructure of the minority professional associations representing criminal justice professionals. They typically operate with only a full-time or part-time administrator. Chairpersons and Executive Committee members' time – varying from three to thirteen days a month would be 'bought out' from local services by the national police, crown prosecution, and probation services[15]. Interviewees frequently reported, however, that their minority professional association work extended way beyond the funded time per month or that line managers had not reduced their workloads to take account of their professional association work, and on occasion, that operational expediency (or the excuse of) meant that they were unable to attend key professional association meetings.

Nonetheless, despite the limits to minority professional associations' political influence and ongoing disputes over political blackness, the emotional significance attached to their internal function, that of providing support, was striking. The primacy of the support function was proof of the continuity of occupational racism in the criminal justice services. This is discussed extensively elsewhere (Phillips forthcoming), but it is important to note that interviewees continued to perceive employment within the criminal justice services as an isolating and hostile working environment for some minority ethnic members of staff. For this reason, professional association meetings provided a safe space for members to discuss their feelings about their occupational experiences. Support slots at each meeting allowed members to seek emotional support, advice or advocacy regarding incidents of discrimination or concerns about career development. The nature of this should not be underestimated as the following quotes reveal:

We sit and discuss personal problems and think actually it is not

just you that feels like that. I also feel like that. But the biggest

support I have discovered after speaking to staff is seeing each

other. Speaking to each other. It just reassures them.

I knew if I was ever feeling low, depressed, I could always pick

up the phone and there was someone there that I could talk to,

who could understand what I was going through. Because

sometimes when you are in an office on your own, and whether

we like it or not, there is things that go on, it is not always overt

racism, covert racism goes on. And sometimes you feel 'am I

going mad?' and you know because we go through that… we

have been through that syndrome before… all sorts of things

going wrong. It sort of has a negative effect on you. You can

think that you are paranoid, until you pick the phone up and

speak to someone from [black professional association].

Conclusion

In the post-Macpherson era it cannot be argued that race is no longer on the

political agenda. The racialization of the current political flavours of the moment –

asylum and immigration, terrorism control, 'mugging' and 'community cohesion'

are juxtaposed with New Labour's earlier commitment to eliminate institutional

racism in the wake of the Lawrence Inquiry (see also Bourne 2001). In the criminal

justice field, the Macpherson Report (1999) opened up a space for minority

professional associations to publicly resist discriminatory employment practices

from within the criminal justice services. The platform that the reform agenda

provided for minority professionals to speak out about their experiences of occupational racism is one primarily founded on a contested notion of political blackness. The re-emergence of the 'black spectre' is testimony to its enduring appeal but its contemporary manifestation displays all the familiar hallmarks and tensions of inclusion/exclusion that ultimately led to its earlier downfall among political activists and academics alike. The establishment of new ethnicity- and faith-based staff support associations further reinforces this view. It remains to be seen whether its comeback – like that of institutional racism – is short-lived.

It might be argued, somewhat paradoxically, that it is this privileging of the diversity agenda which marks the most significant nail in the coffin to the political agendas of minority professional associations. Presenting the dual dangers of reducing financial support amidst the call for the resourcing of other discriminated-against staff groups, as well as obscuring the structural elements of racism in favour of multiculturalist difference, the ideology of 'diversity' threatens to undermine the political dimension of their work. However, providing the supportive function of minority professional associations' work is maintained this may not matter. The seemingly continuous uncovering of vestiges of racism in the criminal justice services evidenced by, for example, Her Majesty's Prison Service's failure to prevent the racist murder of an Asian prisoner by his cellmate, the findings of the BBC *Secret Policeman* documentary which unearthed blatant and extreme racism among trainee constables, and the collapse of the inappropriate disciplinary case against senior police officer Ali Dizaei and other minority officers, demonstrates that this work is becoming no less vital.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

[1] This is borrowed from Alexander (2002:553)..

[2] This assumes that minority ethnic officers do not act in the same way as their white colleagues in negatively stereotyping members of the public from their own ethnic groups, an assumption which is not necessarily supported by empirical evidence (see for example Walker, Spohn and DeLone 2004).

[3] Many others have been established in other public sector services. In March 2005, the National Coalition of Black-Led Organisations (NCBLO) was launched with representatives from many government departments and some private companies. 'Black' refers to those from African, African Caribbean and Asian and other visible minority ethnic communities who may face racism.

[4] The Metropolitan Police Service Black Police Association formally launched in 1997, but a smaller grouping of officers had met informally since the Bristol Seminars of 1990 (see Holdaway and O'Neill 2004).

[5] A former Chairperson was also interviewed.

[6] This professional association, founded in 1984 obviously predates the Lawrence Inquiry (1999). It was selected because it is one of the longest established of all the minority professional associations, and because of its internal (supporting black probation officers) and external (promoting anti-discriminatory service delivery) focus.

[7] There was also some documentary analysis of ABPO materials (e.g. constitution, minutes of meetings, AGM papers, business plans, etc.).

[8] Hensman (1995) cites the Black Lesbian and Gay project which established that black applied to those with one or both parents from Africa, Asia, the Middle East, China and the Pacific Nations, Latin America, indigenous peoples in Australasia, North America and the Atlantic and Indian ocean islands.

[9] Housee and Sharma's (1999) critique of Modood centres on his failure to distinguish between political campaigning by grassroots black organisations and the language used by anti-racist local authorities (see also Brah 1996).

[10] The Economic and Social Research Council is currently funding a £4m *Identities and Social Action* research programme in recognition that 'much public debate and recent social theory is based on untested claims about the changing nature of identity in modern and post-modern societies' (http://www.identities.org.uk/).

[11] Here Spivak is referring to those who do not have access to social mobility within colonized countries.

[12] Housee and Sharma (1999) also consider the possibility of syncretic hybridity as a an alternative for political solidarity in the new forms of British culture, Nonetheless, this may not simply result in an emancipatory orientation.

[13] See Wrench (2005) for a critique of action taken only on business grounds rather than the moral imperative of equality, fairness and justice.

[14] In 2003, Doreen Lawrence claimed that race was no longer a central pillar of the government's equalities agenda .

[15] The main exception to this was the Home Office and Prison Service minority professional associations. The Network has a full-time co-ordinator and administrative support. Respect has been able to negotiate five full-time members of staff with 96 regional staff having one day a week for professional association work.