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**SHIFTING IDEOLOGIES, SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS: BLACK WOMEN'S
GRASS-ROOTS ORGANIZATION, THATCHERISM, AND THE FLATTENING
OF THE LEFT IN LONDON**

by

Tracy L. Fisher

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in
Anthropology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of
New York.

2001

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

**SHIFTING IDEOLOGIES, SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS: BLACK WOMEN'S
GRASS-ROOTS ORGANIZATION, THATCHERISM, AND THE FLATTENING
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by

Tracy L. Fisher

Advisor: Presidential Professor Leith Mullings

This dissertation project is concerned with black women's grass-roots organizing in England from the 1960s until the present; specifically the political transformations of these organizations that occurred in the context of Britain's political economy. The project has two components. First, I review particular historical moments in Britain that have played a critical role in including and excluding individuals, nation-state formation, colonialism, and the patriarchal structure of the state, in order to understand the constructions of race, gender, class, and nation in the subsequent centuries. I also

explore the importance of belonging, immigration and citizenship, in light of migration flows to and from the United Kingdom. This part of the dissertation enables us to better understand contemporary issues, movements, and processes outlined in the second half of the project.

In the second part of the dissertation I focus on the period between the 1960s to the present--years marked by radical political Left thought and activism at the level of the grass-roots and local government, as well as conservative retrenchment, Right-wing policy and the devolution of state welfare. I revisit the themes of race, nation, and identity and ask: how are these themes negotiated after the Second World War? What is the relationship between grass-roots activism and the state in the post-War era? How do conservative constructions of the nation affect black women's grass-roots activism? Specifically, how are black women's grass-roots organizations responding to the restructuring of the welfare state, and of the Labour government?

It is here that I document three overlapping phases of grass-roots activism and changing state policy. Phase one examines the period following World War II, one of mass migration from Britain's Commonwealth countries. Phase two, beginning in the late 1970s, covers the period known as Thatcherism. Phase three takes up the final period of activism during the post-Thatcher era.

All told, the dissertation addresses three

simultaneous processes: (1) how women negotiate the complexities of race, class, gender, and identity; (2) the political transformations of black women's grass-roots organizations; and, (3) shifts in Britain's political economy.

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Figure 1 - Map of the United Kingdom and Ireland



Introduction

Introduction

This dissertation is concerned with "black" women's organizing in England from the 1960s until the 1990s. This is a period of transformation that includes substantial changes in state policy and shifts in black women's grass-roots mobilization, resulting in a syncretic relationship between the state and the grass-roots. Focusing on one self-help and advocacy organization--the Southwark Black Women's Centre¹ (SBWC)--for intensive ethnographic investigation and historical reconstruction, I investigated the political transformation of black women's grass-roots organizations that occurred simultaneously with shifts in Britain's political economy. In particular, I am interested in how an organization such as SBWC, with a distinct focus on service provision, self-help and advocacy, is responding to the restructuring of the British welfare state and of the Labour government. Within this context, my work also

¹ I have retained the British spelling of all organizations and of several words.

addresses how the complexities involved in creating a dual identity (of race and gender) have affected the mobilizing efforts of black women involved in grass-roots organizations. I was concerned with understanding `the ways in which women are trying to transform the conditions of their lives in the context of a changing European cultural landscape whose boundaries are constantly being redefined and fortified (see Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989, 1992; Brah 1993; Brinkler-Gabler and Smith 1997; Lutz 1995, 1997; Lutz, Phoenix and Yuval-Davis 1995; Yuval-Davis 1992).

State policies recognize, support and respond to particular types of organization, while shunning, defunding or repressing others. As is the case for community organizing in general, state intervention is an important factor in women's organizing (see Bookman and Morgen 1988, Laslett et. al. 1995; Naples 1998; Ready 1999; Susser 1988). A broad range of social science literature documents the complexity of women's relationships to the state particularly as it intersects with race, gender, and class (see Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989; Gordon 1990, 1994; Klug 1989; Mama 1992; Orloff 1996; Peterson and Runyan 1993). My research adds to this literature by exploring the underlying structures of class, the complexity of race and gender, and the ways in which state intervention and policy

influence the type of political activism, as well as the overall existence of black women's grass-roots organizations.

In the last three decades there have been major advances in theorizing gender roles, gender inequality and women's experiences. In many of the early (1970s) studies (see Rosaldo 1974; Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974; among others) women were framed within the context of white women's experiences. Contemporary scholarship distinguishes itself from this older paradigm in several ways: (1) gender is perceived as a social relationship and a cultural, social, political construction; (2) race, ethnicity, class, and gender are not "additive" categories but interlocking systems that produce inequality for some (see Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill 1994; Brewer 1993; Collins 1990) and privilege (see Frankenberg 1993) for others; (3) the interlocking systems analysis emphasizes a relationship between transnational economies and cultural constructions. Anthropological political-economic approaches to the study of gender (see di Leonardo 1991; Mullings 1997; Sacks 1989; Susser 1988) have contributed to contemporary scholarship by underscoring the significance of culture, power, and history. Informed by this scholarship, my research will reveal how, in a context of changing state policy, women in

such organizations as SBWC negotiate these transformations in building political solidarity and consciousness while at the same time meeting women's needs.

Ethnographic Context

Known by many as the land of fish and chips, Britain in general and England in particular has undergone many changes since the open door policy of immigration following World War II. It is a country whose cultural, social and geographic boundaries are being reconstructed, redrawn, and refortified. It is a place where the currency is very strong, yet, in just a few years may soon be abandoned.

At the beginning of twentieth century Britain was a world power, still reveling in empire and an imperialism that grew out of a scrambling for different parts of Africa as well as domination across the seas (see Chapter I). Moreover, once a country divided by strong regional dialects that often marked one's class position, there are today a mixture or cacophony of sounds, dialects, and regional variations.

More specifically, England is a country of immigrants, refugees, English, and asylum seekers, just to name a few groups. It is a place where the myth of Englishness--rooted in nation-state formation (see Chapter I)--still permeates society and it is here that the construction of race and

nation converge. As discussed in Chapters I and II a hierarchy of belonging and a subtext of "difference"--based on race, class, gender, and/or culture--underpins the inclusion and exclusion of individuals, and how people are differentially racialized in the construction of the nation. While reference to the "English" still signifies white (Euro) people born in England, the way in which the term "black" has been used and manipulated continues to shift. As discussed in Chapter I, how people are differentially racialized depends on the particular historical moment. For example, I draw attention to how "black" has been used a marker of racial, cultural, and ethnic distinction constructed against immigrants from Ireland (see Chapter I).

"Black" also refers to those of Caribbean and (at times) Asian background as well as those of the African diaspora born in England. More frequently, the phrase "black and Asian" is used, representing a shift from the use of "black" as a form of political solidarity by the above-mentioned groups. I explore this further in Chapter III and ask such questions as: what has contributed to the decline in the use of "black" as a multiracial political signifier for Caribbeans and Asians? How has the state shaped the use of this political category?

As became evident during my months in the field, race is simultaneously complex, subtle, and elusive. Most people seemed very uncomfortable talking about racial issues. As I discovered, voice levels, tone, and body language often changed when issues of race were evoked. This was surprisingly the case during my field stay in London. I argue that the way in which race has been, and continues to be, articulated influences how racism is negotiated (see Chapter III).

In the Britain of the post-Thatcher era, Janus-faced Thatcherite policies loom larger than ever before. Despite Labour's victory in 1997 making Tony Blair Prime Minister, the restructured welfare state may turn out to be far more conservative than in the era of John Major (1990-1997) and Margaret Thatcher (1979-1990). As I explain fully in the second half of the dissertation, regressive modernization, in addition to themes of family, respectability, and nation, continue to shape Englishness and Britishness. It is within this political, ideological, and cultural context that such organizations as SBWC struggle to survive.

The political-economic climate in Britain is laden with paradox and contradiction. Britain continues to witness Prime Minister Tony Blair's restructuring of the welfare state. At the same time, however, 1997 was declared

the "European Year Against Racism." Some local politicians even suggest that over the past few years, particularly given the salience of the April 1993 murder of Stephen Lawrence, a young black youth murdered by five white teenagers, that the state has increased its concern about the growth of racism and violence in Europe in general and Britain in particular. Others, including anti-racist and human rights groups and grass-roots organizations, suggest that processes of collaboration and harmonization in Europe concerning questions of border controls, immigration, and asylum further contribute to the construction of "Fortress Europe" (Lutz 1997; Martin 1999) and the exclusion of "Others." Hence, there is the continuous creation of a new racism in Europe. Having said that, I ask, how have these changes and concerns with regard to, for example, race, racism and immigration, affected grass-roots mobilization? And, in what ways has the growth of racist violence affected black women's grass-roots activism?

Southwark Black Women's Centre is the lens that enables me to explore a larger set of political-economic issues related to the intersection of public policy, social welfare, race, class, and gender. In other words, it is my contention that the present research is set within the context of the restructuring (or the declining) welfare

state and the national framing of the question of "race" or "race relations."

For women's organizing in general, and Southwark Black Women's Centre in particular, gender is simultaneously a primary way of signifying power as well as a critical social, political, and cultural category. Moreover, the complexities of race, class, ethnicity, and nation, as well as the construction of identities, remain persistent issues of contestation, particularly for women.

The complex relationships within SBWC, its leadership, and its linkage to the larger society allow me to examine how gendered resistance, protest, and grass-roots organization are influenced by the state.

Research Objectives

Southwark Black Women's Centre (SBWC), the primary site for this research, is a venerable government-funded organization located in South London. Its principal emphasis is on service provision, self-help and advocacy. SBWC is one of at least 50 BWOs in Britain (Commission for Racial Equality 1996; Sia 1996) concerned with such issues as: improving access to employment, education, and healthcare as well as addressing domestic violence. Some BWOs, such as the Liverpool Black Sisters, have a long-standing reputation and have been in existence since the

early 1970s. Several organizations, such as Brixton Black Women's Group were initially autonomous collectives and like many grass-roots groups, were eventually supported by government grants under the radical-Left Greater London Council in the 1980s. Policies under Margaret Thatcher (see Dolowitz, 1996; Evans 1999; Hall 1988a, 1988b; Hall and Jacques 1983; Hall and Jacques 1989; Laybourn 1995; Pierson 1995; Porter 1994; Taylor-Gooby 1988; among others), however, produced drastic cuts in government funding, causing some organizations to disband. During these same years--a time of conservative reduction in expenditure, heightened racial tension, demonstration, and urban unrest--Southwark Black Women's Centre was formally launched.

During the initial stages of fieldwork, my research objectives were directed toward analyzing the different social, political, and economic contexts in which women select and negotiate racial and ethnic identities. This interest was due to the history of "black" women's organizations (BWOs) in England. Traditionally, they have been characterized by their diverse membership--that is, their members include South Asian, African, Caribbean, and white women with mixed race children. However, through participant observation and individual interviews with (1) persons affiliated with SBWC; (2) former activists of BWOs

dating to the 1970s and 1980s; and, (3) local politicians in the borough of Southwark, I found that over the past few decades there have been interesting shifts in the way in which "ethnic minorities" in Britain have come to define themselves. The data revealed that in Britain the category of "black" has, to a certain extent, lost the connotation of political solidarity among African, Asian and Caribbean groups characteristic of prior decades, and has come to more specifically signify the Caribbean community (see Chapter III). This finding contributed to my shift in focus from identity formation to a broader set of concerns.

Nearly all of the 75-100 members of Southwark Black Women's Centre became the sample population for my research. In order to broaden my sample population and establish relationships with activists outside of the borough of Southwark, data were also collected from principal informants currently or previously involved in grass-roots political activism who are no longer based in the borough. Data were collected through four methodological approaches: (1) participant observation; (2) life histories; (3) individual interviews; and, (4) archival research.

Research extended over a period of 12 months. I initiated data collection with participant observation, an

on-going activity throughout the duration of the project. To this end, I took part in some of the organization's activities. As I got to know the women in the organization I was able to take full advantage of opportune moments to conduct interviews and life histories.

After I established relationships with the members of the organization, I began collecting life histories from a small sub-sample of current leaders (specifically the coordinator and president) and members of the Centre. I also collected life histories from a small sample of activists from other BWOs dating to the 1970s and 1980s. These life histories brought out generational changes in BWOs, as well as processes of identity and assessed the social, political, and economic conditions in the larger society that have helped shape individuals and their political beliefs.

The data elicited from life histories played a significant role in directing the focus of the research. Through life histories I was able to discern differing styles of leadership within SBWC as well as contrasting visions with regard to grass-roots organizations in the larger social and political context. In particular, they have enabled me to see that the relationships within SBWC, its leadership, and its various linkages to the larger

society, are critical points of convergence and collision within the organization as well as with the state. It is precisely these sorts of tensions and contradictions that led me to focus more on the political culture of the declining welfare state that occurred simultaneously with the overall transformation of black women's community-based organizations and less on issues of identity. This political culture includes radical advocacy by liberals, socialists, and people in the voluntary sector versus New Labour, neoliberals, and neoconservatives.

Issues concerning organizational stability, neighborhood services, and welfare reform were elicited from the life histories. Individual interviews provided insight into the politics of community-based organizations and enabled me to better understand conflicts and contradictions that occur within these groups. Interviews often revealed the extent to which fault-lines are racial, class-based, and/or generational.

Archival research enabled me to situate SBWC, as well as other black women's organizations, within the larger social, political and economic context. To what extent have Britain's state policies shaped the social and political mobilization of "ethnic minority" women in England? Furthermore, I have been able to discern how changes in

Labour and Conservative governments shaped black women's grass-roots organizations' concerns regarding housing, healthcare, and employment. Specifically, how have these political transformations influenced organizational political mobilization and participation?

The field research for this project began in June 1998 and ended in June 1999. Access to several libraries and research institutes in London such as the Institute for Race Relations, the Women's Library (formerly the Fawcett Library) at London Guildhall University and the Feminist Library's holdings of women's organizations since the 1970s, assisted me in data collection. In addition, permission to collect data from Southwark Black Women's Centre (SBWC) and conduct numerous interviews with current and former activists of black women's grass-roots organizations dating to the 1970s and 1980s assisted me in the research process.

The significance of my dissertation research is two-fold: (1) it offers insight into the intersection of race, class, and gender, as they interact with the state; (2) it explores the complicated and nuanced relationship between grass-roots organizations and the state over different historical periods.

The Chapters

I began the dissertation with the understanding that different historical moments enable us to comprehend, analyze, and interpret contemporary movements and processes. It was therefore important to review particular historical conjunctures in Britain that have played an important role in the processes of the marginalizing persons, producing immigrants, and the inclusion and exclusion of individuals. These histories underscore England's colonial context, the myth of Englishness, the dependency it has had on labor at home and abroad, the patriarchal structure of the state, as well as the legal legacy of the commonwealth. These particular histories also shed light on the early settlement patterns of Asian, African, and Caribbean people in England.

Chapter II begins with the years following World War II, a period in which Britain faced insecurity as well as realignment as a world power. This chapter underscores the various migration flows to and from the United Kingdom as well as the hierarchical ranking of populations (with regard to immigration policy), which was influenced by race, nation, class, and gender critical ingredients in the maintenance of Britain as a world power. Coupled with state practices of inclusion and exclusion during these years is

the imperial rhetoric of equality; this was essential to Britain's position as a world power. It is in this chapter that I take up the importance of belonging. Whether one was deemed a subject or alien, citizen or migrant is essential to the maintenance of order and to the reconstitution of national identities.

The era following World War II was characterized as one of "free entry" for British subjects. The years between the 1948 British Nationality Act and the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrant Act were marked by migrant labor patterns that reflected an open door for British subjects (see James 1993; Paul 1997; Peach 1986). It is during this period that a majority of Britain's "black" population entered the country.

Chapter III moves us to the contemporary period and takes up the first of three overlapping phases of grass-roots organization and changing state policy that span the 1960s to the present. In each phase there are political-economic transformations that are accompanied by shifts in community-based grass-roots organizations. The first period, from late 1960s to the late 1970s-early 1980s, is marked by the anti-imperialist turn for Africans, Asians, and Caribbeans evidenced by grass-roots organizing in relation to issues of both racial (see Sivanandan 1981) and

gender inequality. Feminist organizations and feminist theory of this period did not address racism; and black activist (previously known as "Black Power") groups did not address gender-specific issues or the concerns of black women (see Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe 1993[1985]). Shortly after, the recognition of shared or diasporic (see Clifford 1994; Gilroy 1993; Hall 1990; Hanchard 1991; Safran 1991) historical experiences of colonialism, racism and sexism, brought women from the Caribbean, Africa, and South Asia together. The inclusive organizations they created, although multi-racial and multi-ethnic, were defined by the state as "black" women's organizations.

It is here during this time that the seeds of what would be known as Thatcherism are planted. It is probable that Britain's unstable position as a world power, alongside deindustrialization and economic instability, moved the country toward the Right. Simultaneously, as the country moved to the Right on the national level, at the local level, a radical Left became even more discernible.

If, in Chapter III, I introduce the Right-wing sentiment by exploring the seeds of Thatcherism, in Chapter IV no introduction is necessary; it is readily apparent. Chapter IV, covering the second of the three phases, overlaps with the previous one; it spans the late 1970s

through the mid-to late 1980s. It is here that a full-scale Right-wing anti-Labour sentiment, simultaneous with the election of Margaret Thatcher and the emergence of Thatcherism, materializes. Chapter IV examines this development in relation to political activism, race, and social transformation. This chapter explores the transformation of politics and Britain's political culture, including the precarious relationship between white Left liberals, the Labour Party, and black mobilization and participatory politics. Furthermore, in this chapter, I discuss shifts in grass-roots activism and the gradual disintegration of black women's community-based organizations. State-funded black women's organizations emerged during a period when some grass-roots groups were undergoing shifts and changes in relation to funding, while others were slowly facing disintegration.

In Chapter V I discuss Thatcherite policies in the post-Thatcher era. The issues covered compel us to rethink the political activism of black women's grass-roots organizations, as exemplified by SBWC's focus on service provision. In its shift from more traditional forms of political participation and empowerment, the organization's focus on service provisioning remains a principle goal and objective.

Moreover, I suggest that since there is not one route to political activism, we must broaden our understandings of what is deemed political as many feminists have. In addition, Chapter V outlines the complicated dimensions of black women's grass-roots activism.

Finally, in the Conclusion I re-examine and explore the inextricable linkages between race, nation, and the state. Race and nation are produced and reproduced within the context of a changing nation-state. Having recognized this ever-changing context, black women's community-based organizations continue to be transformed. Much of this is due to the role of financial and political co-optation, which, I argue, is key in undermining oppositional grass-roots activism by reducing and transforming it.

All told, the situation is complicated. This is particularly notable in cases such as Southwark Black Women's Centre, a state-funded organization whose role as service provider within the devolution of state welfare builds political solidarity and consciousness.

Chapter I:
Colonialism At Home and Abroad: The Production of
Immigrants

Introduction

Particular historical moments often enable us to understand contemporary movements, issues, and processes. One can approach the history of the English via agriculture (Brenner 1976, 1982; Hobsbawm and Rudé 1968; Roseberry 1991); industry (Adams 1996; Hobsbawm 1984, 1969[1962], 1964; Ramdin 1987; Thompson 1966) and colonialism and colonial practices (see Adas 1995, Brantlinger 1986[1985]; Fanon 1967[1952]; Fryer 1984; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Mintz 1986; Walvin 1973, 1993; Williams 1944). I have highlighted these particular strands of history in order to underscore how England's inclusionary and exclusionary practices, based on class, ethnicity, race, or gender, articulated as difference, have been critical over time to the country's processes of marginalizing persons. In fact, these overlapping processes foreshadow shifting discourses,

practices, and events (that I discuss in the subsequent chapters of my dissertation) with regard to (1) immigration, race, and gender; and, (2) changes in Britain's political economy.

In a related manner, these historical moments are critical in the processes of nation-state building as well as in the creation of Britain's¹ welfare state. More specifically, however, they are significant in understanding acts of dispossession and dislocation, progress and expansion, as well as forced migration. All told, these histories require us to rethink the development of English colonialism at home and abroad; and how in turn, these processes have contributed to the constructions of race, gender, nation, and class in the subsequent centuries.

Taken together, these selective histories enable us to understand the long-term processes of class formation in early modern England; the complexity of rural "improvements" during the time of the "enclosures;" and the reasons why Britain proved to be fertile ground for unique

¹ Britain or Great Britain is generally used to denote England, Wales, and Scotland. The term United Kingdom (UK) refers to England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, and is also more formally known as the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. See Figure 1.

expansion during the Industrial Revolution. The selective histories speak to England's creation, cultivation and dependency on labor "at home" as well as across the world. To be more precise, through these histories, the foundations of state formation and the development of a nationalist ideology steeped in the myth of "Englishness" are revealed. Ultimately, the histories underscore a political, economic, and cultural context that is predicated on empire.

It is against this framework that the small nineteenth century black population in such British seaports as Cardiff, Liverpool, and Bristol, and the immigration of Caribbeans to Britain during the post-World War II period, must be understood. In particular, attention must be given to the early settlement patterns of Asian, African, and Caribbean peoples as they provided the foundation for post-Second World War migrations. More importantly, the framework is crucial for understanding Britain's policy towards these new communities.

To this end, I wish to use state formation in England as a point of departure. In doing so, I want to underscore a particular ethos (rooted in political economy and moral philosophy) which is characteristic of English state formation and at the same time sets the framework for

understanding the more recent developments of black British populations. I argue that this ethos is a key element in understanding the development of the British welfare state as well as the complex, interrelated connections between English agriculture, industry and colonialism. It is also important to emphasize that this is not a comprehensive history of the English, for that is another story to be told by an historian. As an anthropologist, I draw upon a selective history for the purpose of highlighting the theme of an imperialist ethos.

The social, cultural, political, and economic context sets the stage for the British Empire while at the same time reinforcing English nationalism as well as ideological myths of both "Englishness" and "Britishness." In the process, the production and reproduction of difference on the part of Britain's "white" population distinguishes "black" people as objects of desire and colonial conquest. Furthermore, "black" people are placed at the bottom of Britain's hierarchical ranking of populations. Despite these facts, "black" populations are still called upon to defend the imperial nation.

The Nation-State

Influenced by Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, Philip

Corrigan and Derek Sayer (1985) convincingly argue that nineteenth century England upheld two conflicting projects, one rooted in political economy and another in moral philosophy. These parallel developments--a cultural, moral revolution and a process of state formation--are complex, contradictory processes. Over the course of time, however, the contradictions have produced and reproduced particular moral attitude. I would argue that English history in general, and the nineteenth century in particular, is characterized by the contradictory moral stances of: (1) indifference and expendability (see Schneider 1997:725) and (2) protection and paternalism (patriarchy). By the nineteenth century, for example, England had become increasingly politically and militarily dominant at home and overseas. These years are marked by exploitation, intensification, and objectification of "free" labor at home and abroad. At the same time, however, the country saw Parliament's passage of acts that were to aid the working classes and emancipate the enslaved.

In *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution*, Corrigan and Sayer attempt to "grasp state forms culturally and cultural forms as state regulated" (1985: 3). Furthermore, in their words,

Englishness--as nationalism at home, imperialism

abroad--permeates the social power of the state, nuancing and enormously enhancing its legitimacy through a systematic practice of identification (p.122) .

The authors underscore the relationship between state formation and cultural revolution in the making of bourgeois civilization. To this end, they address the meanings of state activities, forms, routines, and rituals as well as the state's constitution and regulation of state activities. These simultaneous projects created a tension and struggle within state formation. As I will illustrate below, these conflicting projects--rooted in political economy and moral philosophy--have permeated English history. As a result, the English have not only developed and cultivated hierarchy, but also a continuum of belonging which structures the inclusion and exclusion of individuals.

Commodity Production by "Improving Landlords"²

As many historians have observed, the woolen industry played a major role in the development of English agriculture. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, England made the transition from exporting raw wool to the

² My appreciation for the significance of agrarian history to wider processes of domination in England began with reading Eric Wolf's chapter, "Europe, Prelude to Expansion" in *Europe and the People Without History* (1982).

increased production of woolen cloth at home. This laid the foundation for converting land into sheep ranges while at the same time enabled England to become a key player in sea-faring trade. New links were thereby established to foreign markets and with this an increase in mercantile wealth.

Since at least the seventeenth century, English agriculturists relied on indigenous labor at home while at the same time they created a system of coerced labor abroad. Over time colonial labor has been imported to the metropole. At home, labor exaction took shape through the "long term processes of class formation" (Brenner 1982: 18) known as the "enclosures," that culminated in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. This period in England was marked by (1) massive displacement, dispossession, and the vulnerability of peasants to landlord predation, (2) an increase in mercantile wealth (Schneider 1976; Wolf 1982), and, (3) intensification of capitalist agriculture. As well, the process of enclosures is marked by the creation of a system of "free" mobile labor and the development of a new kind of pauperism with the creation of a rural proletariat. The earlier logic of small-scale cottage commodity production, itself a shift from community-based to household-based form of production

during the late Middle Ages, became marginal (Roseberry 1991; Wolf 1982).

Between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, “‘enclosure’ as the whole complex of ‘improvements’ associated with the elimination of common privileges and constraints and the introduction of individual privileges and constraints” (Roseberry 1991: 27) was an ideological approach, which laid the foundation for capital-intensive agriculture.³ These developments (as I explain below by drawing from the work of Robert Brenner) in England were in marked contrast to those that occurred throughout the rest of Europe.⁴ More specifically, the intensification of capitalist agriculture meant a peasantry vulnerable to landlord predation.

In England, lords used the legacy of their feudal powers, established and maintained throughout the medieval period, to control land furthering capitalist development (Brenner 1982: 84). This development in England was in

³ In the first wave, (the sixteenth century), enclosures had mainly the effect of setting aside land for sheep. They produced vagrants and landlessness but not yet a rural proletariat because there was no demand for labor on the sheep farms. See E.L. Jones (1974), *Agriculture and the Industrial Revolution*.

⁴ See also Robert Brenner (1976), *Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe. Past and Present* 97: 16-113.

contrast to what happened, in, for example, France. As Brenner (1982) has argued, a stronger centralized state in France, which protected peasants' property, as well as abolished serfdom, prevented the exaction of arbitrary rents. Furthermore, the peasantry in France was able to maintain a grip on the land through the guarantee of perpetual inheritance. Although able to increase tribute, "the landlord [in France] could not alter the conditions of land management and cultivation" (Wolf 1982: 121). As Brenner states, the peasantry in France had,

Relatively powerful property rights over comparatively large areas of the land. This presented a strong barrier to those who wished to concentrate on the land. For whatever the market situation or the price of the land, the peasantry would not easily relinquish their holdings, the bases of their existence and that of their heirs (1976: 46).

The English peasantry, on the other hand, did not have control over their landed property; thus, "improving" landlords could prevent the achievement of full property rights by customary tenants. As a result, England saw the development of new social-productive relations between property owners, leaseholders, and laborers.

In addition to the new social-productive relations, there was also an increased differentiation between (as well as within) landlords, tenants, and peasants. The

social-productive relations inevitably laid the foundation for competition. Improving landlords, fully dependent on competitive production, looked for tenants who would cut costs; leaseholders, had to compete to acquire land at affordable rents; and peasants, slowly developing into a rural proletariat, found themselves searching and competing for full and part-time labor (Brenner 1982).

Farm laborers, however, struggled against poverty and degradation. Laborers demanded such rights as higher wages and better employment. More broadly, they defended their "customary rights of the rural poor as freeborn Englishmen, and the restoration of the stable social order which had-- at least it seemed so in retrospect--guaranteed them" (Hobsbawm and Rudé 1969: 16). Resistance against relentless proletarianization took the form of protests against wage cuts or demands for higher wages; incendiary campaigns, which involved burnings, poachings, and cattle maiming; and the smashing of machinery, which was perceived as an attack against the conditions of unemployment.

The period of the eighteenth century enclosures was devastating for English laborers. Slowly evolving into a rural proletariat, they suffered greatly from violent displacement and marginalization. Some of the devastation was already experienced at the end of the seventeenth

century. In the words of Robert Brenner, "by the end of the seventeenth century English landlords controlled an overwhelming proportion of the land -- perhaps 70 to 75 per cent" (1976:63). In addition, according to agricultural historian E.L. Jones, by the end of the seventeenth century at least 40 percent of the English population had moved out of agricultural employment and began to seek work in industrial areas (as cited by Brenner 1976: 66). In other words, laborers also facing dislocation had to seek employment in other than rural areas such as London and Manchester.⁵ Here industrial employment absorbed some of the rural displacement. In what follows I draw our attention to the period of industrialization. As is discussed, the development of agriculture also marks the beginning of industrialization.

Industrialization

As previously noted, the period known as the "enclosures" laid the foundation for mechanization and

⁵ See Gareth Steadman Jones' (1971), *Outcast London: A Study of the Relationship Between the Classes in Victorian Society*. Jones' analysis of the contradictory configuration of the English middle and aristocratic classes--that of, complacency and fear--is useful. By the early and mid nineteenth century, London symbolized the problem of endemic forms of poverty associated with casual labor.

industrialization in England. Based on the notion of "improvement," the "enclosures" represented a systematic drive toward improving the economy as a whole. The dislocated rural population was ultimately transformed into "free" mobile laborers, setting the stage for a change in social-productive relations. Furthermore, the intensification of capitalist agriculture by way of "mixed farming," the increase in sea-faring trade, and in cloth production, encouraged the rise of industry and manufacture. In the words of anthropologist, Eric Wolf,

The major vehicle for the transition to the capitalist mode of production was the textile industry of eighteenth century England. In cloth production mercantile wealth was visibly transformed into capital as it acquired the dual function of purchasing machines and raw materials on the one hand, and buying human energy to power their operation on the other (1982: 267).

Categorically, the manufacture of cotton textiles had become central to Britain during the eighteenth century. As Landes (1969:41-42) notes, in 1760 Britain imported 2.5 million pounds of cotton, mostly to the countryside cottage industry in Lancashire. By 1787, the consumption of cotton had increased to 22 million pounds and by the early nineteenth century this amount had increased to 366 million pounds (Landes 1969: 41-42). Crucially, colonial trade and the enslavement of Africans to which the manufacture of

cotton was attached stimulated this unprecedented expansion. Labor from enslaved Africans in the Caribbean and the southern United States provided the bulk of the cotton for British industries; and, ultimately influenced the mechanization of cotton manufacture. In addition, "cotton-growing enterprises based on the use of slave labor, were highly organized, labor-intensive units of production" (Wolf 1982: 279). In North America for example, between 1790 and 1860 cotton production increased more than ten-fold, from three thousand bales to over four and a half-million bales (Fogel and Engerman 1974 as cited by Wolf 1982: 280). Furthermore, in the United States, the system of slavery was maintained and perpetuated by supplying raw cotton to such towns as Lancashire (Hobsbawm 1962: 52) and it contributed to such textile producing centers as Liverpool and Manchester.

During this period, England as the "workshop of the world" developed in an unprecedented way. According to Eric Hobsbawm (1962: 27-53), this unique take-off and expansion --in England in general, and Manchester in particular--was due to a set of special conditions. The rise of industry and manufacture transformed the lives of many, if not all. The "redundant" rural population became exposed to various changes in both rural and urban life. Due to changing

agricultural conditions, the rural proletariat (often dependent on seasonal work) was forced to seek employment throughout the periphery of the countryside. Affected by these processes, laborers were drawn into centers of urban life and at the same time were unwillingly seduced into the factory setting. Factory work created a different work environment that involved, among other things, the introduction of a new kind of machinery as well as a new kind of discipline. The laborers' ability to complete work at his or her pace had become a way of the past. Under the watchful eyes of overseers, workers adhered to the pace of inanimate equipment, which was tireless and rapid. As such, laborers were subject to the boundaries of labor as imposed by the clock.

All told, during this period, England witnessed two simultaneous and massive transformations: the development of industrialization and an increase in urbanization. Furthermore, as Thompson notes, between 1801 and 1841 Britain's population rose by at least 70 percent (from 10.5 million to 18.1 million) (1966: 197). As I illustrate in the following section, however, "improvement" of the economy as a whole does not happen in isolation from "the state." It was during this period that government interventions were vastly needed to cushion the

dispossessed population.

The Welfare State

Since at least the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, England has had a national policy of social welfare.

Broad in scope and paternal in spirit, the Elizabethan Poor Law provided work for the unemployed, education for the children, relief for the impotent, and punishment for those able but unwilling to work (Webb and Webb as cited by Cowherd 1977: 1).

There was a tripartite division of a poorhouse, workhouse, and house of correction. The aged, blind, sick and lunatic also known as the impotent poor, were to be provided with institutional relief in the poorhouses; the able-bodied were to be made to work in the workhouse or the house of correction; and, those who refused to work were to be punished in the house of correction (Laybourn 1995: 17). The famous Act of 1601, the 43rd under Elizabeth, established the Old Poor Law system, which was in place until the major reform of 1834, The Poor Law Reform. This Elizabethan Poor Law reinforced the belief that the government was responsible for the welfare of its working people. The able-bodied poor had to work for their subsistence, however. Relief was not intended in aid of wages, being meant only for those who could not obtain

work. It was administered via the local parishes at the discretion of the local authorities such that each parish was responsible for its own poor.⁶

From the outset, vagrancy and settlement were problematic issues, emphasized in relation to poor relief (Flynn 1990:19). There was a national concern for paupers whose place of residence was dubious (Fraser 1973: 31). The government sought to solve this problem in 1662 with the passage of the Act of Settlement. According to this law, "settlement was gained by birth, marriage, apprenticeship, and later in practice inheritance" (Fraser 1973: 31). Moreover,

[T]he Law of Settlement was passed allowing parish officers to 'remove' any poor person who *might* become dependent on the Poor's Rates. This was conceived as a way of eliminating vagrants from the parish register, making funds available for the 'deserving,' impotent poor, and protecting wealthier parishes from undue depredations on their stocks by the destitute from other districts (Flynn 1990: 19).

There were, however, inherent problems with the passage of this act. Although the Act of Settlement empowered the parishes, at the same time it created a parish-bound system that affected the mobility of the working classes to the disadvantage of industrial employers

⁶ The poor were working people. As noted by Cowherd, poverty then referred to the "necessity of having to work for a living" (Cowherd 1977: 2).

(see Cowherd 1977; Fraser 1973; Polanyi 1957). In 1795, however, a loosening of the parish-bound system of relief would ultimately affect both the market economy and the working classes in a contradictory way.

It is during this period that one sees shifts in England's political economy and development of pauperism (Polanyi 1957). In 1795, parish-bound serfdom was loosened with the passage of the Speenhamland Law. In May of 1795 justices in Speenhamland decided that

Subsidies in aid of wages should be granted in accordance with a scale dependent upon the price of bread, so that a minimum income should be assured to the poor *irrespective of their earnings* (Polanyi 1957: 78).

The Speenhamland Law assisted in the development of an incipient, self-regulating market system that was pushing towards "free," mobile labor. At the same time, Speenhamland supported persons dislocated through, among other things, ("improving") landlord predation and population growth. Speenhamland was meant to be an emergency measure, but not long after it was passed it became the law of the land in the countryside as well as in manufacturing districts (Polanyi 1957: 80).

Polanyi (1957: 77-85) has written a penetrating account of the long-standing results of the passage of Speenhamland. He states,

Although it took some time till the self-respect of the common man sank to the low point where he preferred poor relief to wages, his wages which were subsidized from public funds were bound eventually to be bottomless, and to force him upon the rates (Polanyi 1957: 80).

He further contends, "little by little people were pauperized; the adage, 'once on the rates, always on the rates' was a true saying" (Polanyi 1957: 80). As opposed to Elizabethan Law, this new law provided relief to the poor even if they were employed, so as long as the worker's wages were less than the family income granted to him by the bread scale. As a result, the relationship between worker and employer changed. The worker had no reason to satisfy the employer and the intensity as well as the productivity of labor declined. Slowly people preferred relief to wages and eventually were pauperized. The Speenhamland Law created a new kind of pauperism building on social dislocation. More broadly, as Polanyi clearly states,

Under Speenhamland society was rent by two opposing influences, the one emanating from paternalism and protecting labor from the dangers of the market system; the other organizing elements of production, including land, under a market system, and thus divesting the common people from their former status, compelling them to gain a living by offering their labor for sale, while at the same time, depriving their labor of its market value (1957: 80).

Speenhamland marks the development of poverty, a process that does not happen in isolation. Growing urbanization and industrialization, as a result of "improvement" for the economy as a whole, encouraged a climate that suggested the Old Poor Law was in need of reform. Throughout the 1830s, the Speenhamland system was attacked for preventing the "progress" of industrial capitalism as well as destroying the productive capacity of the masses. Beginning with the Reform Bill in 1832 and ending with the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, measures were taken to change the market system and government's responsibility to the poor. Thus, the beginnings of a competitive labor market as well as the beginnings of industrial capitalism are associated with the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act.

The 1832 Poor Law Reform Bill revisited the concerns of the Old Poor Law. Appointed by the Royal Commission, such Parliamentary reformers as Nassau Senior and Edwin Chadwick sought to (1) "deter pauperism, not to reduce poverty" (Fraser 1973: 42; Laybourn 1995: 22); (2) expose abuses within the existing system. As noted by Laybourn, there were three primary principles central to the Bill: "those of 'less eligibility,' the workhouse test and bureaucratic demand [for] administrative centralization and

uniformity" (1995: 22).

The workhouse test was particularly important to the Poor Law Reform; it would ultimately abolish outdoor relief (Cowherd 1977; Laybourn 1995). Outdoor relief was temporary relief for unemployed persons outside of the workhouses; that is, they were not subjected to the workhouse test (Polanyi 1957:88). It was however the "deserving poor" who suffered the most when outdoor relief was withdrawn. They were among the most needy poor who had been too proud to enter the workhouse due to the shame associated with it (Polanyi 1957: 82).

Ultimately, outdoor relief (of money, rent, food, clothing, family allowance, parish employment or private employment granted to able-bodied persons) was perceived as a central abuse of the system; reformers believed that it was a major contributor to idleness (Cowherd 1977: 249). Therefore, in the words of historian Keith Laybourn,

The workhouse test was considered vital, for it would end outdoor relief for those seeking assistance, remove the poor from subsidy by the Poor Law, and restore the principle of work. By offering relief at a lower rate than that of the independent worker, it would remove the attraction of the Poor Law (1995: 23).

Influenced by Malthusian principles regarding population, social reformers perceived pauperism as a social disease that was a residual consequence of outdoor

relief. Furthermore, overpopulation or a "redundant" population supposedly caused unemployment. With the abolition of outdoor relief, it was believed that the working classes would regain a sense of industriousness and there would be a decrease in the pace of moral decline. With this in mind, severe, radical measures were taken to solve society's social ills. The workhouse conditions, for example, were "made less agreeable than the living conditions of the lowest paid person in private employment" (Cowherd 1977: 286). In other words, relief had to be below the standard of the laborer in order to encourage industriousness. This was done to remove the pernicious attraction of poor relief. What is more, the workhouse "became an abode of shame" (Polanyi 1957: 82).

Colonial Beginnings, Colonial Practices

Mid-nineteenth century England was intensely and self-consciously nationalist in orientation. Its growing colonial empire both engendered and was justified by a myth of Englishness which stressed the innate English capacity to rule--for how else to square dominance over large tracts of the earth's surface when the other part of that myth stressed values of freedom, individual liberty and growing democrati[z]ation (Waters 1995: 98).

The themes with regard to the cultural particularity of the English--indifference and expendability as well as protection and paternalism--are the guiding principles that

enable a country to simultaneously both enslave and free people.

The development, maturity, and expansion of England's mercantile system, coupled with the establishment of colonies, produced the expanding territorial scope of ruling power. Likewise, it provided a cultural, political, and economic environment for the system of slavery that would oppress people of African descent for centuries. In other words, during the time of the "enclosures" and concurrent with the rise of industry, there was the simultaneous evolution of an economic system abroad. In other "tracts of the earth's surface," there developed a type of English colonial sentiment, one that would span the seas and underwrite the institution of slavery.

To be bought and sold as "black ivory" (Walvin 1993), Africans were forcibly removed, purchased, and sold into a institutional system of slavery that would ultimately last for over two centuries. The economic system of slavery slowly evolved with the shaping of England, including social and cultural consumption practices surrounding colonial products--tea, tobacco, and sugar (see Mintz 1986 Walvin 1993; Williams 1944). The British institutional system of slavery was set into motion with the seventeenth century colonization of the Caribbean. Colonization proved

to be instrumental in the creation and maintenance of a plantation system used for the cultivation of sugar (in such Caribbean islands as Barbados and Jamaica) and tobacco (in the southern parts of United States). The system of triangular trade (between Britain, Africa, and the "New World") that arose in the seventeenth century had, by the eighteenth century, reached maturity on a grand scale. With the growth and sophistication of the system, Africans were transformed into chattel-commodities. Sold across the Atlantic, their toil produced, among other things, "tropical" commodities--not only tobacco and sugar, but also rum, molasses, indigo and cotton, too. The wealth from this economic system was consumed in Britain, enhancing the material pleasures of British life.

In England, the legal framework for the enslavement of people of African descent, as noted by historian James Walvin, was influenced by (1) colonial legislatures and approval from the Privy Council; (2) parliamentary legislation via the Navigation Acts; (3) precedents of common law which dated to English villenage (1973: 107). Yet, the legal contradictions remained, as is apparent when one examines the relationship between England and its colonies. In addition to differences of economy and legal jurisdiction, the issue of slavery put the English courts

in an interesting and awkward position, revealing a confused relationship between English law and slavery. This confused relationship raised the question: How could a country treat people of African descent as both chattel and human? Or, English property rights and basic human rights were, in other words, fundamentally incompatible. This contradiction influenced England's most famous slavery case--that of James Somerset in 1772.

Somerset was an enslaved person of African descent who was forcibly brought to England by his owner, a Virginia planter.⁷ Upon reaching England, Somerset escaped, was recaptured and was to be shipped to and sold in Jamaica. Granville Sharp a white abolitionist who had represented other enslaved persons of African descent in previous years defended Somerset. Having previously defended enslaved Africans successfully, Sharp (both publicly and privately) was known as a principal defender of black interests in England. After Somerset was recaptured, he was ordered to appear in court and was released due to the Chief Justice's ruling in favor of a writ of habeas corpus. This ruling marked the beginning of the case. After months of legal and

⁷ Fryer (1984: 121) states that Somerset's owner, Charles Stewart, was a Boston customs official. On the other hand, Gerzina (1995:116) states that Stewart was Scottish--a cashier and paymaster living in Boston.

public attention, Lord Mansfield, the presiding Chief Justice, ruled that a black slave could not be forcibly taken from England, across seas, and sold into slavery. The reason for this ruling according to one nineteenth century source was that Chief Justice Mansfield embraced the following belief:

[It is] not merely that Negroes become free on being brought into this country, but that the law of England confers the gift of liberty entire and unencumbered; not in name only, but really and substantially (Tuke 1876 as cited by Gerzina 1995: 123-124).

The case was solved and Somerset was granted freedom (see Walvin 1973; Fryer 1984; Shyllon 1977; Gerzina 1995)—an outcome of great significance for the history of black people in Britain. It contributed to similar proceedings in its wake, both in England and abroad. In Scotland for example, there was the case of Knight v. Wedderburn in 1778. Joseph Knight fled his owner and was ordered to return to him. The Scottish courts, however, ruled that Knight was a free man because Scottish law did not recognize slavery.

In the decades that followed, the United States would witness one of the most famous slavery court cases of the nineteenth century, the Dred Scott Case (Erlich 1974; Marable and Mullings 2000). Dred Scott was a black man born

into slavery in 1795 in Virginia. Scott later became the litigator representing himself in 1847 when he sued for his freedom on the grounds that his master took him to the state of Illinois, a free state, and Wisconsin, a free territory. Upon winning the case, the US Supreme Court overruled the decision on the basis that slaves were not legal citizens. This decision ultimately presented a challenge to anti-slavery activists. All told, these cases did not, however, end slavery. Yet, they do underscore the ways in which people of African descent responded to, and tried to reform, the structures of oppression.

Until the "Act of Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Empire"⁸ had passed in 1833 and was implemented in 1834, Britain, and more specifically, England, found itself in a position similar to that of a pendulum. As Walvin notes,

As a free country, it sustained an Atlantic empire based on slavery and yet found great difficulty in accommodating the transplanting of colonial problems and institutions into the mother country (1973: 134).

As a result there was great uncertainty among both the enslaved and the slaveholders. Slaveholders, unclear with regard to the legal parameters of slavery, sustained the

⁸ Public General Statutes lxxiii, 1833, 913 (see Walvin 1973: 140).

colonial system by creating legally binding contracts of indentured servitude that slaves had to sign before leaving the colonies. For those of African descent, after leaving the colonies, there was a shift from bondage to servitude.

The social, cultural, and political consequences of the contradiction between England and its colonies presented enslaved persons of African descent with a particular set of circumstances. An indentured servant who came to England with his/her owner was legally bound, but could seek freedom by way of escape. Moreover, a person who was legally enslaved in the West Indies or America could be freed by escaping to England. Certainly the enslaved always had to guard their freedom in England against those who wished to profit from such commodities. Nevertheless, the legal constraints challenged the slaveholders' absolute possession of their "property;" at the same time they created an environment that spoke to the long tradition of enslaved persons seeking self-liberation--"fleeing to be free."

With that in mind, freedom was often found in flight or in transit. With the help of abolitionists and free Africans in Britain, many enslaved persons found emancipation just as their predecessors had done in previous years; that is, through individual successive acts

of resistance multiplied many times over. It is this historical context of resistance that produced black women and men as agents shaping histories of struggle and emancipation. In the nineteenth century William Cuffay, a radical activist and one of the primary leaders of the Chartist Movement in London, for example, and Mary Seacole, a nurse, who was also a significant figure in saving lives during the Crimean War, contributed to changing the destinies of black people. In the twentieth century, this context of resistance produced a society of black people that included such figures as CLR James and Claudia Jones.

Cultural Authority, Myth and Ideology

For middle and upper-class Victorians, dominant over a vast working-class majority at home and over increasing 'uncivilized' peoples of 'inferior' races abroad, power was self-validating. There might be many stages of social evolution and many seemingly bizarre customs and 'superstitions' in the world, but there was only one 'civilization,' one path of 'progress,' one 'true religion.' 'Anarchy' was many tongued; 'culture' spoke with one voice (Brantlinger 1986[1985]: 186).

During the nineteenth century many black people in Britain found themselves in a precarious position.⁹ On the one hand, (after 1834), black people were no longer viewed as chattel

⁹ It is difficult to determine exactly how many blacks were living in Britain during these years. Spencer (1997: 2) estimates that during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Britain's black population was about 10,000.

to bought and sold as commodities. On the other hand, they were not equal to their white British counterparts. Many black people were poor and had to struggle within an environment where white Britons envisioned them as "different" from themselves. Numerous people during these years worked as street singers and musicians, servants, cooks, and maids, while others were "beggars" (Fryer 1984: 230; McClintock 1995: 113). The production and reproduction of "difference" on the part of Britain's "white" population would be the foundation upon which people of African descent would become the objects of curiosity, amusement, and exhibition as well as desire.

This is, perhaps, best expressed through the exhibition and display of Saartjie Bartman also called Sarah Bartman, but more popularly known as the "Hottentot Venus." A Boer farmer brought Bartman to Britain and convinced her that she could gain wealth as well as repatriation by the public display of her large buttocks (Fryer 1984: 229-230; see also Gilman 1986[1985]). She was exhibited for several hours a day for more than five years in Europe (most notably London and Paris), and was believed by many to be either a freak or a beast. European audiences who paid two shillings each to witness this public display

were most fascinated by her physical characteristics.¹⁰

Reduced to her sexual parts in life, Bartman died in Paris in 1815 at the age of twenty-five. After her death, these body parts were dissected and made into molds for the Musée de l'Homme in Paris, where they remained on display for over a century (Fryer 1984: 229-230). The British exhibition of African people continued throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. The shift from the Victorian to the Edwardian years in Britain--marked by the rise of empire--continued to reinforce exhibitionism. This act in and of itself represented the self-validating belief that white people were superior.

In the years following the passage of the abolition of slavery throughout the Empire, Britain made a transition from outlawing slavery to the "imperialist partitioning of Africa which dominated the final quarter of the nineteenth century" (Brantlinger 1986[1985]: 185). Increased dominance at home and abroad, coupled with the production and reproduction of "difference," accompanied colonial conquest and administration. The myth of "imperial superiority" was soon to be a widespread belief throughout Africa as well as throughout the rest of Western Europe,

¹⁰ In comparison to today's UK currency, one shilling is the equivalent of 12 pence or in US currency, 16 cents.

and most specifically in Britain. Here, by the middle of the nineteenth century, an evolutionary social science was ranking populations according to a hierarchy of "races." An integral part of middle and upper class Victorian ideology, this practice gave rise to the belief that Africa "demanded imperialization on moral, religious, and scientific grounds" (Brantlinger 1986[1985]: 186). The evolutionary ranking of populations and the notion of "natives" as subhuman were critical to the development of the British colonial self-image as superior.

After the abolition of slavery, Britain's role changed. As argued by Patrick Brantlinger (1986[1985]: 192), the British began to displace the blame for slavery onto others, i.e., Americans and Africans. What developed was the idea that the British had to end slavery at the source. This laid the foundation for the "Great British Expeditions"--missionary, civilizing, and geographical. The sentiment that it was "the White Man's Burden" to civilize the African continent perfectly captures the British colonial image of imperial superiority.

Early Settlement, Growing Communities, and Racialized Groups

Just before the shift from the Victorian Era to the

Edwardian years, European colonial administrators in Africa scrambled for parts of the continent's soil. Meanwhile, during this period, migratory movements were occurring throughout Britain and Britain's colonial dominance over Ireland reached an apex.

Displacement, agricultural and industrial change, as well as population growth are critical in understanding early settlement patterns, new communities, and migratory movements in Britain during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Most of the people who migrated to Britain during this period were from Ireland and other parts of the European continent. New communities must also be placed within the wider context of the "condition of the working class in England."

Irish immigration needs to be situated within the context of rapid economic change, class formation, urbanization, and industrialization in both Britain and Ireland. Coupled with social, economic and cultural transformation, Ireland's colonial dependence on Britain also served as an important factor in Irish immigration. In addition, it is important to note that the Irish have been both marginalized and racialized as "different" under specific historical conditions--above all, colonialism. A particular racist ideology against the Irish was

constructed and developed in the nineteenth century. In order to better understand how inclusionary and exclusionary practices are played out, as well as how groups are differentially racialized in the British context, it is useful to compare this nineteenth century anti-Irish racist sentiment, which was associated with culture, difference, and immigration, to the racism directed at African, Caribbean, and Asian people in the twentieth century. Looking more closely into the Irish case (and, as I discuss below, Jewish immigration) draws our attention to how different racist ideologies have been constructed and made operative at different historical junctures.

Prior to the potato famine in Ireland, out-migration was due to rapid economic and social change and the British demand for wage labor (see Miles 1982:121-150). Many Irish were being displaced as a result of two parallel processes: one of land consolidation and the other related to a change in the production of grain, meat and dairy for sale in English markets. At the same time, the potato was being introduced as the main crop and means of subsistence (Solomos 1993[1989]: 41; Miles 1982).

The Great Famine of the 1840s vastly intensified Irish migration. The Irish were suffering from economic distress;

and the potato famine was the source of death and disease for one million Irish (Panayi 1994:29). Additionally, it uprooted and propelled the Irish on a massive scale to both Britain and the United States. As a result, many English cities drew large numbers of Irish settlers. London absorbed the majority with other industrial cities coming in second, in particular, Manchester, Bradford, and Birmingham (Walvin 1984:49).

Alongside the potato famine and the mass movements of Irish persons there developed a comprehensive (yet at the same time contradictory) anti-Irish discourse framed within the cultural construction of the Irish Catholic as the "other" (Hickman and Walter 1995: 9). In Hazel Waters' words,

The English were honest, and the Irish were liars; where the English worked and prospered the Irish idled in poverty...English industriousness, energy, order, sense of justice were contrasted with Irish disorder, fecklessness, propensity for violence and irresponsibility. A manly Protestantism confronted a cowardly Catholicism (1995:98).

The historian Sheridan Gilley¹¹ addresses some of the more contradictory aspects of this English discourse with regard to the Irish. Gilley draws our attention to

¹¹ See Gilley (1978). I recognize that this work is problematic particularly because of Gilley's emphasis on race based on phenotypic differences.

nineteenth century stereotypes of the Irish found in the popular English newspapers known as "broadsheets" whose themes range "from the lament of the Irish exile to the defiance of the Irish rebel" (Gilley 1978:82). The author, states, however, that in many instances the attitudes towards the Irish were inconsistent.

The enthusiasm and abuse mingle oddly in the English literature on Irish immigrants in England, so that they were despised as drunken and disloyal, ignorant and illiterate...as prostitutes [yet,] they were also extolled for their conviviality, generosity, industry, [and] piety (1978: 88).

Alongside the influx of Irish, during the late Victorian and early Edwardian years England also saw an influx of immigrants, predominantly Jewish, from Eastern Europe. They too were treated as "the other." Similar discourses regarding the Irish, the construction of Jews as "different" is interesting and useful in understanding processes of racialization. Discourses surrounding Jewish immigration at the turn of twentieth century somewhat anticipated post-World War II discussions of "black" populations.

A majority of Jewish immigrants during this time were fleeing persecution from Czarist (Tsarist) Russia. As noted by Walvin, Eastern European settlement in England was characterized by two factors:

Firstly, the word 'Jew' became, somewhat incorrectly, synonymous with the word 'immigrant.' Secondly, the very great majority settled in London, the bulk in the East End... (Walvin 1984: 62).

Much like Britain's concerns in relation to post-war West Indian migration in the 1960s (see Chapter II and III), the new, relatively large communities of Eastern European Jews in the East End were a source of controversy at the turn of the twentieth century. Still, the East End continued to absorb Jewish newcomers--immigrants, permanent residents, and those in route to America. According to James Walvin, Jewish immigration and settlement between 1891 and 1906 increased by nearly 59,000 (1984: 64). Within just five years that number had increased by 67,000 (Walvin 1984: 64). Interestingly enough, although perceived as both a problem and a threat in relation to competition for employment and housing, the number of Jewish immigrants did not begin to approach Irish immigration.

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, immigration in general, and Eastern European Jewish immigration in particular, was problematic for Britain. There was clear hostility towards immigrants. Colin Holmes (1979:89-97) for example, draws our attention to 1901, the year in which the British Brothers League organized protests in relation to Jewish immigration and settlement,

putting the issue on the nation's agenda. The protests contributed to Parliament's passage of the 1905 Aliens Order, which restricted the entry of non-United Kingdom subjects. The law required that new immigrants reside in sanitary, non-overcrowded conditions, as well as have the means to obtain "subsistence in adequate sanitary conditions" (Solomos 1993[1989]: 46). An "alien or immigrant could be expelled from Britain if he/she was found guilty of: (1) receiving poor relief within 12 months their arrival; (2) residing in overcrowded unsanitary conditions; (3) vagrancy" (Solomos 1993[1989]: 46).

The anti-immigration hostility went hand-in-hand with the construction of the Jew as prostitute, diseased, and degenerate (see Gilman 1990). The work of Sander Gilman (1990) is most useful in discussing constructions of race and gender in Victorian London. He compares the nineteenth century social, political, and cultural construction of "the Jew," with specific reference to Jack-the-Ripper and that of the prostitute. According to Gilman, diseased skin (of Jews) and genitalia (of Jews and prostitutes) were signifiers of difference. Both Jews and prostitutes were constructed as those who were carriers of diseased and degenerate genitalia, sexually transmitted diseases, and general pollution. Pseudo-scientific theories reinforced

these negative images as well. Moreover, racialized social scientific theories maintained that Jews were a mongrel race. In Gilman's analysis, anti-Jewish sentiment was upheld for such reasons as: "Jews are black because they are different, because their sexuality is different, because their sexual pathology is written on their skin" (1990: 167). Blackness was believed to be a marker of those suffering from disease, and circumcision was a marker of anatomical difference. These beliefs with regard to Jews were reproduced as Britain shifted from the Victorian to the Edwardian years.

The Dockland Communities and Government Policy

Although concentrations of Asian and black settlement can be traced to the sixteenth century, it must be understood that the notion of a multi-racial Britain did not come into being until the years following World War II. Until recent times people of Asian, African, and Caribbean descent were merely a tiny segment of Britain's settled population. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, most people of African descent were poor and were working as servants and entertainers. In addition, a small majority were students and pan-African activists (many of whom were Americans). Moreover, as observed by Kenneth Little (cited in Spencer 1997: 6), until a decade or so

after World War II, the majority of Britain's Asian, African, and Caribbean people were primarily occupationally related to the sea. As a result of trade and colonialism, persons of African, Caribbean, and Asian descent settled in the dockland localities of Cardiff, Liverpool, Bristol, and London, contributing to the creation of a long-standing diversity in Britain's seaport communities.

As I discuss in this section, it was during the interwar period that issues in relation to immigration and citizenship became of central concern to the British state. As we see later in reviewing the years following the Second World War, such issues were a fundamental part of both public and private discourse sustaining the myths of "Englishness" and "Britishness." In other words, the debates in relation to immigration and citizenship that emerged in the wake of the Second World War were in many instances part of an older discourse, which began to take shape in the early part of the twentieth century. The First World War foreshadowed debates that became highly contested after the Second World War. In particular, it was in the interwar years that the communities in the dockland areas became the target of scorn and disgust on the part of whites. Images of black people as creators and perpetuators of social decay were pervasive. Moreover, during this

period racial difference became one of the key elements in the politics of immigration.

Spencer (1997) has noted that the foundations for these new communities were laid during the nineteenth century. This was the time of the large-scale expansion of Britain's shipping industry that brought transient seamen from India, Africa, China, and the Caribbean as well as the Middle East. These seamen were employed primarily as unskilled laborers of seamanship--i.e., cooks and stewards, fireman and coal trimmers. The dockland communities, although growing, remained small. For example, the combined numbers of black and Chinese living in Liverpool during the inter-war period was less than one-thousand. During this period Britain saw the expansion of its Royal Navy. Europeans were recruited to work as merchant mariners. Many ships with black crews were assigned to government work. And, there was the formation of labor troops abroad for wartime service in Britain (Spencer 1997: 7). In addition, Britain recruited men from its colonies to work in munitions and chemical factories. The outbreak of the First World War further increased the numbers of Asian, African, and Caribbean people living in Britain.

After World War I Britain experienced a brief post-war employment expansion particularly in relation to

occupations associated with the sea. Thereafter, it faced deindustrialization, declining employment, a lowering of wages and spreading fear of redundancy. In some cases, unemployed men gravitated toward areas such as Cardiff and Liverpool, where there were brief post-war boom employment opportunities.

In this context small groups of working-class and middle-class white communities began to perceive "coloured" seamen as both an economic threat and a problem (see St. Clair Drake 1965[1955]). Black seamen recruited from the colonies were paid a lower wage than white British seamen; and as such they were perceived as competition. This fear was brought to the attention of some branches of the National Union of Seaman in Cardiff, Liverpool, and London. The "coloured" seamen could not be easily forced to return to the colonies. Since they were British subjects, there was no legal basis upon which these men could be sent home.

Here I turn briefly to the issue of subjecthood of great importance during the interwar years; it is explicated still further in Chapter II. As historian Kathleen Paul (1997: 11) suggests the 1914 British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act identified the means by which members of the British Empire could attain nationality and become a British subject. This Act

confirmed the existence of a universal status--that being British subjecthood--and its uniformity throughout the Empire. She further contends that the "code" by which one acquired subjecthood was based on being born or naturalized in the Empire. What is the significance of this Act? One could be a British subject anywhere and everywhere within the Empire. Moreover, the Act ironed out ripples in Britain's fabric of unity and put a stop to the dominions' individual policies with regard to who is considered a subject or alien (Paul 1997 11-12).

However, despite the appearance of universal subjecthood, dominions could discriminate among British subjects because it was up to them to create their own class of nationals (Paul 1997: 13). It is here the themes of the inclusion and exclusion of individuals and the hierarchy of belonging can be detected. Recent studies suggest that between the two world wars, "[Britain] applied a *de facto* immigration policy which was specifically directed at limiting the growth in numbers of 'coloured' seamen, whose communities had already become established in a number of UK ports" (see Spencer 1997:8).

As noted, "coloured" seamen were indeed British subjects, meaning that, by law, they were entitled to work in Britain. Yet, influential citizens within the National

Union of Seaman saw repatriation as the best way to eliminate them as competition. One of the primary ideas was to eliminate the "coloured" seamen from the labor market. As a result, there was union pressure on employers not to hire these seamen. In addition, it is not readily apparent whether these men could obtain other jobs. The inability of the state to repatriate the seamen legally, combined with their loss of employment, produced British subjects who were ultimately dependent on poor relief for survival (Drake 1965[1955]: 199).

It is against this background that assaults against black people must be understood. In 1919 there were a series of riots throughout Britain in Cardiff, Glasgow, Liverpool, London, Newport, and Barry. Small groups of whites attacked "coloured" seamen living in the above-mentioned dockland areas. At the root of the riots were the issues of ensuing competition and unemployment, fueled by fears of redundancy in the labor force. As noted by researcher Michael Rowe who writes specifically about Liverpool, competition for employment "transformed perceptions of the local black population as an important group of migrant workers into a scapegoat for the frustrations and anger of the white rioters" (1998: 53). As a result of the riots, there were five deaths, numerous

serious injuries, and many people taken into protective custody (Spencer 1997: 9). All told, the riots are known as "the opening move in a chain of events leading toward the definition of the 'coloured' seaman alien problem" (Drake 1965[1955]: 199).

In addition to competition for jobs, studies conducted by the University of Warwick's Research in Ethnic Relations (see Rowe 1998), have turned up three additional themes that arose during the 1919 riots. Particular reference in these studies is made to Liverpool, but the themes were more widespread. They are: (1) fears of white women's sexual relationships with black men and miscegenation, (2) notions of citizenship and difference, (3) black migrants' place in British society (Rowe 1998: 54).

Although the media did not portray this as a primary explanation for the riots, white rioters' fears of miscegenation were expressed in the "broadsheets." *The Times of London* (June 19, 1919), for example, reported that the intermarriage of black men and white women has "excited much feeling." In addition, a June 13, 1919 article from the *Daily Herald* entitled "RACE RIOTS: THE ROOT CAUSE," implies that race mixing should be resisted. Yet, race mixing did occur. As anthropologist Jacqueline Brown notes in her study of race in Liverpool, African seamen are noted

for setting into motion the institution of interracial marriage (1995:301). In Brown's words, "during their careers at sea, African men commonly docked in Liverpool's port, formed romantic relationships with local women, mostly white, and later married them, had children, retired from seafaring and settled in the city" (1995:301). Moreover, as Brown further underscores (1995: 298-302), seafaring was a male-dominated sphere; thus, this gender-specific work created an absence of black women in the port communities.

Nonetheless, during the period of the riots there were several newspaper articles that both directly and indirectly spoke of interracial relations, specifically the relationships between black men and white women, as problematic in the eyes of the rioters and the media. These arguments reinforced a racialized and gendered social scientific discourse from the nineteenth century which associated white women with Victorian, virginal middle-class ideals, black and working-class women with licentiousness and promiscuity, while defining black men as backward and subhuman. This Victorian ideology has since been labeled the "cult of true womanhood" or the cult of domesticity. As Paula Giddings (1988:47-55) notes in her narrative history of black women in the US, domesticity as

well as the role of mother and housewife was central to women's position in this paradigm. Moreover, as white middle and upper-class women were being placed on a pedestal, black women were increasingly seen as breeders, mistresses, and whores. The resulting dichotomous descriptions of black and white women in Britain clearly mark the implementation of a binary opposition in characterizing differentially racialized constructions of gender and class.

The race riots and tensions of 1919 in the dockland areas were intensified in the 1920s and 1930s by a decline in employment in the British merchant shipping industry. Alongside assumptions about the propensity of dockside populations to crime and violence, local and national authorities emphasized the need to establish control. Therefore, policies were implemented to limit the number of "coloured" people settling in Britain. At the same time, however, "the imperial rhetoric of 'equal rights for all British subjects'" (Spencer 1997: 8) was upheld.

The 1919 riots influenced the state's response at both the local and national level. As a result, in the 1920s immigrants, aliens, and subjects of Britain saw the passage of legislation which tightened borders and made it increasingly difficult for those whose could not easily

show proof of identity. In 1920, Britain passed an Aliens Order, which restricted the settlement of alien immigrants. This Order marked a further step in the attempt at border control. As required by this legislation, immigrants had to prove that they were British subjects or be deported. Though the legislation was not obviously directed at British subjects, those who could not prove their nationality were affected. Subsequent legislation, passed five years later, was directly aimed at "Coloured" seaman. In 1925, the Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seaman) Order was passed (Drake 1965[1955]: 199, Solomos 1993[1989]: 50); and it was applied to all seamen under the 1920 Act as well as all "coloured" seamen regardless of citizenship or nationality (Spencer 1997: 10-11). Under this Act, satisfactory documentation of British subjecthood was necessary. Most seamen carried a discharge book--a ledger that recorded previous voyages. Those books, as well as such items as birth certificates, were deemed unacceptable as evidence. Satisfactory evidence of identity was a recently issued passport--an item that most seamen did not have. "Coloured" seamen who did not possess proof of identity faced arrest by the police and were required to register with the authorities (Spencer 1997: 11; Solomos 1993[1989]: 50). Subsequently, they were required to carry

an alien identity card.

The British government also developed another scheme used to further restrict the entry of British subjects. The state encouraged many of its overseas agencies to limit the issuance of the necessary travel documents needed by individuals. The government's refusal of travel documents was directed toward certain classes of people. Spencer (1997:12), for example, has documented that the government saw a problem in the influx of seamen and peddler immigrants from India, fearing high numbers of unskilled or illiterate Indian subjects. As a result, arrangements were made between the United Kingdom and the Indian government. Between the 1930s and post-independence, applicants from India had to have a sponsor in Britain who could provide guarantees of maintenance and repatriation; this requirement was followed by police confirmation in the United Kingdom.

During the interwar years the state's stringent immigration policy, which was ultimately aimed at restricting the entry of Asian, African, and Caribbean peoples, was implemented through the British shipping industry. This fact is important in explaining of the slow growth of immigrant communities during the interwar years. Moreover, these communities were stigmatized for relying on

government assistance as well as being a source of poverty and unemployment. At the same time, they were negatively perceived as harboring individuals who ultimately seized jobs from "the British" due to competition in the labor market. Nevertheless, as the years of Second World War drew closer the British state reevaluated its Asian and black British subjects whose military potential was needed again in time of imperial defense.

Thinking Through Colonialism at Home and Abroad: The Production of Immigrants

I began this chapter by drawing our attention to three inextricable processes that have marked the history of the English--agriculture, industrialization, and colonialism. These histories provide a lens for us to understand the development of state formation and at the same time they shed light on the small nineteenth century, black population that slowly multiplied in such cities as Bristol and Liverpool.

The contradictory themes of (1) indifference and expendability and, (2) protection and patriarchy reappear at different historical junctures in English history and are part of the tensions and ambiguities within state formation. These inconsistencies are perhaps most revealing

when one recognizes England's creation, cultivation, and dependence on labor at home and abroad. As discussed, it is during the second wave (nineteenth century) of enclosures that the notion of "improvement" caused massive displacement. Also, it was during the period of slavery and colonialism that the English courts were faced with legal and ethical dilemmas with regard to the institution of slavery. Meanwhile, England was developing sentiments of both nationalism and imperialism that systematically intensified its military and political dominance at home and overseas.

These frameworks further allow us to understand Britain's "hierarchy of belonging." The seeds of this were planted at least as early as the sixteenth century during the first wave of enclosures. The hierarchy was fully revealed during the early twentieth century migration and settlement of non-English groups from Ireland and Eastern Europe as well as those from Asia, the Caribbean and Africa. As is discussed in the following chapter, such groups would serve different purposes for England during and following the Second World War.

Chapter II:
Imperial Rhetoric, Subjects, Citizens, and Migrants: The
Reconstitution of British Identities

Introduction

The last chapter initiated a discussion of subjects and citizens in Britain with particular reference to "coloured" seamen, and more specifically the "'coloured' seamen alien problem" during the interwar years. In this chapter, I will further explore this issue in light of the migration flows, following World War II. It was during the post-World War II years that discourses crystallized with regard to the making of national identities, the hierarchical ranking of populations, and the marginalizing of certain categories of person. As suggested in Chapter I, debates in relation to immigration and citizenship during the interwar years foreshadowed discourses that became highly contested after the Second World War.

For this reason, I begin Chapter II in the years following World War II. During these years, Britain

experienced profound social, political, and economic changes. It was a country that faced financial strain and demographic crisis, as well as imperial insecurity and realignment. These changes challenged previous assumptions about national identity. Thus, the very notion of what it meant to be "British" came into question. During these years, the reconstitution of national identities, which were dependent on the ranking of human populations, was articulated through key markers of difference. "Race," gender, nationality, color, religion, and country of origin were the key signifiers of difference. At the same time, they were critical elements in Britain's hierarchy of belonging.

In this chapter, I explore how the movement of Britons to dominions with substantial white settlement was significant in strengthening the notion of a widespread Britishness. Moreover, I discuss migration to England from Europe and Ireland, as well as the Commonwealth countries of Africa, Asia, and the West Indies. To what extent is European migration and recruitment important to Britain, I ask. Recruitment and migration from Europe serves as a counterpoint or comparison to recruitment and migration from the Commonwealth countries. Interestingly enough, as I explain below, in the post-World War II years, immigrants

recruited from Europe received assistance from the government. Also, European continental "aliens" were considered advantageous to the UK economy and it was expected that they would eventually become British subjects. They were deemed to have the ability to assimilate whereas the majority of Commonwealth subjects were not. I will contrast responses to people of African, Asian, and Caribbean descent with responses to Europeans with the exception of the Irish migration, which has always been ambiguous. Ultimately, much of the difference in how continental European, Irish, and Commonwealth migrants were received depended on how the state, as well as the society at-large, interpreted their presence, i.e., as a threat or as an advantage to Britain's economy.

In the post-war years, through labor recruitment as well as immigration and nationality laws, Britain made distinctions between native and other, subject and alien, those who belonged and those who did not. The social context in which these populations were ranked is significant. As critically observed by Bob Carter, Marci Green, and Rick Halpern (1996:138), the geographically widespread empire, in addition to the expanded notion of citizenship, provided the context in which immigration and nationality laws were enacted in Britain. This background

enables us to understand migration flows to and from the United Kingdom.

The Rhetoric of Imperial Equality

•As noted by Kathleen Paul in *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* (1997:9-10), until the Commonwealth Immigrant Act of 1962, British governments chose to emphasize the theoretical notion of universal equality: the belief that all British subjects should be treated the same. In other words, no matter where British subjects resided within the empire, the universal equality of the British subject or common subjecthood, coupled with the allegiance to the British Crown, was the link that bound the Empire together (see also Dummett and Nichol 1990). In accord with the imperial rhetoric,

Whether born in Kingston, Ontario; Kingston, Jamaica; or Kingston-upon-Thames, one was a subject of the imperial Crown and shared universal British nationality. With this nationality came customary rights: all British subjects could freely enter the United Kingdom, vote for Parliament when resident there, and take up employment (Paul 1997: 10).

An expanded notion of citizenship, which set the stage for immigration and nationality laws in the post-war era, could be found in the Canadian government's 1945 decision to create a national citizenship independent from that of

Britain. Following Canada, Pakistan and Ceylon (Sri Lanka) created citizenship laws after independence in 1947 (Spencer 1997:54). By proposing such a bill, Canada "reversed the emphasis on imperial nationality and [at the same time, made] British subjecthood a secondary status, almost a fringe benefit" (Paul 1997: 14). In other words, citizenship, not subjecthood, became the collective identity throughout the country. Canadian residents "would still be British subjects only by virtue of their Canadian citizenship rather than as members of the British Empire..." (Paul 1997: 14).

Why is this act significant? By proposing such a bill, the Canadian government threatened the idea of a single, universal, "equal" nationality throughout the British Empire/Commonwealth.¹ In other words, the Canadian government overturned Britain's universal rhetoric of equality. As explained in Chapter I, the British

¹ In *The Commonwealth* (1995), Patricia Larnby and Harry Hannan state: "The modern Commonwealth grew out of the former British Empire - it is the outcome of the decline and eventual demise of British Imperialism. If there had been no British Empire there would today be no Commonwealth. The origins of the Commonwealth association date back to the Durham Report of 1840 which initiated the gradual growth of self-government in the colonies of British settlement." The term Empire/Commonwealth or Commonwealth/Empire is used to denote the irony as well as the interconnectedness between the two classifications. Commonwealth countries are independent countries.

Nationality and Status of Aliens Act, passed in 1914, was intended to confirm a universal status--British subjecthood. With the passage of the Act, irregularities, which may have caused wrinkles in the fabric of unity, were supposed to be ironed out.² Birth or naturalization within the Empire was the means by which one acquired one's primary nationality and British subjecthood (Paul 1997:11). The Canadian bill challenged the concept of a single imperial nationality. All told, this confounded the position of the British Parliament, which maintained, "residents of the empire were British subjects first and local citizens second" (Paul 1997: 11).

The conflicts and contradictions in the notion of "universal equal nationality" are of course most apparent when one considers the varied forms of inequality and unequal development throughout the Empire/Commonwealth, for the most part based on differences of class, race, ethnicity, or gender. Contrary to the notion of imperial equality, for example, is the unequal access to and distribution of resources. This has compromised working-class rights to full citizenship and participation in Britain. As discussed in Chapter I, the existence of state

² For example, prior to 1914, a person recognized as a subject in Australia was considered an alien in New Zealand (Paul 1997:11).

welfare is rooted in the history of inequality. Although welfare has been used to aid the working classes, at the same time, it has been a legitimate way of rationalizing economic inequality. What is more, the poor have been perceived as "unfit," morally inferior, and undesirable members of the "British race."

Similarly, with regard to race and ethnicity, the notion of imperial equality has been compromised. Britain's hierarchy of belonging has long been racialized. As discussed in the previous chapter (see Chapter I), during the years between the First and Second World Wars, Britain imposed administrative restrictions on British seaman (also subjects) of color. In the midst of a rhetoric that emphasized "free migration within the empire," "coloured" seamen were required to show proof of identity. This administrative constraint was used to tighten the United Kingdom's borders while at the same time making it increasingly difficult for British subjects of color to enter the country.

A final example in which imperial equality had been compromised is seen through the lens of gender. The patriarchal state structured citizenship. As Paul indicates, women's citizenship had been dependent upon that of men; and, nationality could only be transmitted through

men. To illustrate this point, Paul draws our attention to the Passage of the 1914 British Nationality and Status Aliens Act (see also Chapter I). She argues that with the passage of the Act, "British women automatically lost their nationality upon marriage to an alien, and alien women marrying British men automatically became British" (1997: 12). All told, women were secondary subjects in the British Empire and became members of the empire through their husbands.

The work of Francesca Klug strengthens this point. In "'Oh to be in England': A British Case Study" Klug (1989) explores how the intersection of racism and gender differentiation found expression in the "British nation." Furthermore, she underscores the explicitly patriarchal nature of British nationality legislation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Reproducing the British nation occurred only through a woman's husband. Not only was a woman who married an alien considered to be outside of the British nation; conversely, if a woman who was alien or foreign married a British man, she automatically became part of the British nation. Also, if an unmarried British woman gave birth within the Empire, the child would be a British subject. In contrast, if an unmarried British woman gave birth outside of the Empire she/he would be considered

to be outside of the nation, or stateless (Klug 1989: 16-21).

The patriarchal state structured citizenship with regard to marriage until 1948, when women were granted the right to retain their nationality on marriage. This was three decades after women over 30 years of age were granted the right to vote. Not until 1981 were women were granted the right to transfer their citizenship to their children born abroad (Klug 1989: 22).

These examples provide insight into how nationalisms are reproduced. British women's roles were circumscribed in relation to their reproductive capacity. The ability of British women of middle or elite class position to reproduce "healthy," "pure" stock was deemed important. These women were perceived as biological reproducers of a particular racial collectivity and central participants in the transmission of culture.

These examples speak to a circumscribed British nationality and citizenship. In other words, class, race, ethnicity, and gender have been used as markers of difference. Meanwhile, these signifiers have been used to define boundaries of citizenship and nationality in Britain. The aforementioned examples contradict the rhetoric of imperial equality for all British subjects.

Canada's decisive threat to universal equality under the Crown gave rise to much consternation in Britain. Britain wanted to maintain the appearance of equal opportunity throughout the Empire/Commonwealth. As I explain further below, the governing elites wanted to strengthen imperial ties. Canada's threat was in reality a disruptive measure. Fearing decolonization in the other dominions following Canada's decision, Parliament cooperated by producing a United Kingdom (UK) bill along similar lines. As the Home Office worked to establish the United Kingdom's position, much consideration was given to the need to avoid division (Spencer 1997: 54-55; Paul 1997:14). The result was the passage of the 1948 British Nationality Act, a revision of the Nationality Act of 1914.

We Must Strengthen Our Imperial Ties

In 1948, as India experienced its first taste of independence, Parliament passed the British Nationality Act. James Walvin describes the Act as follows:

The Act was a remarkably complex piece of legislation that divided up all the monarch's subjects into two main groups: citizens of independent Commonwealth countries, and citizens of the rest of the empire, described as a *united citizenship with the United Kingdom*³(emphasis

³ This is also referred to as "Citizenship of the United Kingdom and Colonies." See Spencer (1997:54) and Paul

added)...It was then the 1948 Act which enabled Commonwealth citizens to settle in Britain (1984: 118).

In other words, if in 1948, for example, a person from Jamaica migrated to Britain, they did so as a citizen of the United Kingdom (UK) and colonies, also known as United Kingdom and Colonies (UKC) citizenship. In effect, one could say that they were considered a subject-citizen; and, were granted full rights of entry and settlement in the UK. Furthermore, in the words in Kathleen Paul: "the 1948 act succeeded in satisfying the varying expressions of nationalism throughout the Commonwealth while preserving the common status of British subjecthood"(1997: 17).

The passage of the Act, as observed by Carter, Harris, and Joshi (1993: 57), was neither a way to meet Britain's post-war labor shortage, nor an effort to provide colonial subjects the right to entry and settlement. On the contrary, the authors convincingly argue that the Act was passed so that the government could intentionally restructure the Empire as both an economic and political force (Carter, Harris, and Joshi 1993:57 see also Paul 1997: 23-24). The authors state,

"[T]he concept of a 'United Kingdom and Colonies'" citizenship--as opposed to a separate

1997:19) who calls it "United Kingdom and Colonies" citizenship (UKC citizenship).

citizenship for each territory--enshrined in the Act was meant to curb colonial nationalism rather than to concede rights of entry and settlement in Britain (Carter, Harris, Joshi 1993:57).

As countries of the Empire began to secure to their independence, however, Prime Minister Clement Atlee's Labour government had to reevaluate this position. Furthermore, as Carter, Green, and Halpern contend, Britain, as a world power, was fearful of anti-colonial liberation movements (1996: 143). Ultimately, passage of the 1948 British Nationality Act emphasized a particular relationship between the colonizer and the colonized through a shared identity of United Kingdom and Colonial citizenship (Paul 1997:17; Spencer 1997: 54; see also Carter, Green, and Halpern 1996: 143). Under this act, "Home and Foreign Offices saw a new nationality bill as an opportunity to straighten things out and to reaffirm the appearance of uniformity" (Paul 1997: 14). Essentially, the Act stipulated that the various dominion governments had the right to create national citizenships but that, in the eyes of Parliament, the imperial status of the British subject was the only nationality that mattered (Paul 1997:16).

This Nationality Act came under strong attack during

parliamentary debate in 1948.⁴ While members of the Conservative party criticized the Bill for undermining imperial nationality, Labour party members argued for what Paul calls an "imagined political community of Britishness" (1997:22). All told, Britain's seemingly moral stance prevailed and the government continued to emphasize the notion of imperial equality.

During Attlee's Labour administration (1945-1951), the government further enacted an imperial immigration scheme that privileged certain parts of the British Empire/Commonwealth. This plan was a renewal of the Empire Settlement Act of 1922 and did the following:

[It] empowered the United Kingdom Government to cooperate with any overseas government or with public authorities and public or private organizations either in the United Kingdom or elsewhere in the Commonwealth in carrying out agreed schemes to provide joint assistance to suitable emigrants from the United Kingdom who intended to settle in any part of the Commonwealth (Smith 1981: 90).

Countries of substantial white settlement such as Canada, South Africa, Southern Rhodesia (Rhodesia and Nyasaland), New Zealand, and Australia were known as "old" dominions and were targeted to receive the new migrations. From the outset, however, the assisted migration schemes seemed to

⁴ *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5th ser., [1948], v.453, c.483.

be in conflict with the needs of Britain's economic recovery and the demographic needs of the country. Nevertheless, in the 15 years following World War II, the above-mentioned "old" dominions received over 1.5 million United Kingdom residents. This kind of migration had occurred in earlier decades. However, the objective behind the outward migration patterns during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was to provide paupers a new start and to improve the social and economic conditions of the United Kingdom. Many convicts, for example, were transported to such countries as Australia (Paul 1997: 25-27). In the post-war era, by contrast, migration from the United Kingdom to other parts of the Empire/Commonwealth was enacted and supported by a government that wanted to strengthen its imperial ties.⁵ These migrations not only involved significant numbers, but also extended the imagined community of Britishness geographically, politically, and spacially.⁶ The migration practice came to

⁵ Historian Kathleen Paul (1997) provides an excellent discussion of the outward migration schemes in *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era*, Chapter 2, Emigrating British Stock, Pp. 25-63.

⁶ Paul notes that between 1946 and 1960 annual UK emigration averaged about 125,000. Overall, dominions with substantial white settlement such as Australia, New Zealand, and Canada absorbed eighty percent of the migrants. Overall, these

be known as the transplanting or transporting of "British stock." Nationality and color as well as culture were deemed critical to the migrants' distinction.

I will take the case of South Africa to illustrate my point. In South Africa, corresponding with the rise of Afrikaaner-dominated politics in 1948, the Afrikaaner government wanted to maintain its numerical advantage over the British element in the country. Therefore, Afrikaaners focused less on absorbing "British stock" (in this case, subjects with white skin who were, however, unlikely to maintain the apartheid conditions) and more on recruiting Dutch and German immigrants (See Paul 1997: 31; Smith 1981: 95). It is important to note that "British stock" meant those British subjects of European descent with white skin. By contrast, subjects with dark skin, of African, Caribbean, or Asian ancestry, were considered British subjects not "British stock." This example clearly demonstrates the way in which groups are hierarchically ranked. Similarly, it reveals that specific immigrants are considered more desirable than others, depending, for the most part, on race, ethnicity, class, and gender. The Afrikaaner government wanted to secure its position in

dominions received at least 1.5 million UK residents (1997:25).

South Africa; likewise, Britain wanted to strengthen its position as a world power. Britons moving to other countries within the Commonwealth secured and strengthened "Britishness" and assisted Britain in maintaining a powerful post-war influence and strong international position. Furthermore, it was believed that an empire with "British stock" would also remain loyal to its source of labor, the mother country.

For those Commonwealth countries involved in the migration scheme (in particular, South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, and Canada) national self-interest was at hand. These countries wanted young men and women, skilled laborers who had received some level of education. Both men and women initially were eager to migrate and were influenced by post-war food shortages, rationing, and labor controls at home. In later years, family and friends who, already living in a new place, held out the example of improving the quality of life for themselves and their children, recruited additional migrants.

As suggested in the previous chapter, migration into Britain is not a new phenomenon. The migration scheme which involved the outward movement of "British stock" to other countries within the Commonwealth, was, however, problematic from the beginning. Its continuance was because

of the state's wider objective of strengthening its imperial power demographically as well as geographically.

Recruitment and Migration from Continental Europe to England

Unquestionably, the state, in order to fulfill its wider objectives, has the ability to manipulate both nationality and migration (Paul 1997: 64). This is true for Britain, particularly in the years following World War II. These years were marked by economic recovery and reconstruction. Population had declined, especially the age group between 20 and 44, notwithstanding an increasingly high level of immigration from Ireland, which surpassed immigration from the Commonwealth. Soon after the war, Britain faced an acute labor shortage, especially in the area of agriculture, coal mining, textiles, health services and factory work. During this period, 345,000 European "aliens" were recruited from Europe for work and life in Britain (1997: 64). Ultimately, these "aliens" would be transformed into Britons.

Polish veterans who served in the war were the first "alien" group to be considered by Clement Atlee's Foreign Labour Committee (FLC) as it searched for additional labor. The FLC was responsible for a resettlement scheme which

gave attention to post-war refugees and other displaced persons. Polish veterans and their families responded to the 1947 Polish Resettlement Act, which provided financial provisions (i.e., pensions) as well as eased the transition into British society; within two years of the Act, at least 120,000 veterans and their dependents were living in Britain.⁷ Many found work in construction, agriculture, coal mining, and textiles (Paul 1997: 69). Together with other Eastern European groups, thousands settled in Lancashire, South Wales, and Scotland (Walvin 1984: 104).

A significant number of new "aliens" or potential workers were to be found in the displaced persons camps in continental Europe run by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). These displaced persons, brought to Central Europe by the Nazis, consisted of uprooted families, including Jews and other concentration camp inmates. Recruitment schemes sought to prevent such displaced persons from bringing with them clans of dependents (who would ultimately be the responsibility of the British government).

One of the most significant of the labor recruitment schemes was known as "Westward Ho!" which was aimed at

⁷ The Ministry of Labour cites the figure 120,000 in LAB/1098 Report on Foreigners Accepted into Great Britain, no date.

Bulgarian, Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Rumanian, Ukrainian, and Yugoslavian men between the ages of 18 and 44 and women between the ages of 18 and 49. Men were recruited for mining, agriculture, clay pits and steel; and women were wanted for domestic work, textiles, wholesale clothing, nursing and midwifery. Considered a successful project, Westward Ho! required the coordination of several governmental sectors, among them the Home and Foreign Offices and the Ministries of Labour, Transport, and Health (Paul 1997: 73). All volunteers first underwent an interview to assess their potential and, upon passing, a medical exam. If selected, accommodation, financial assistance, food, and if necessary, clothing was arranged in Germany and Britain.

The Ambiguity of Irish Migration

In the years following the war, the Irish occupied a unique "space" or legal status. As noted by Paul, the Labour government (and the subsequent Conservative administration) did not seek out the Irish migrants; this was contrary to the recruitment of "aliens" from continental Europe. I draw attention to the Irish in order to emphasize the ambiguity and fluidity of their migration patterns. Irish migrants from all parts of Ireland were

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able to move freely back and forth to Britain despite the 1922 distinction drawn within Ireland that divided one country into two.

In 1922, religious-geopolitical lines were drawn, and Ireland was divided into two countries: one of which would remain a free, independent state within the Commonwealth; and the other, a unique country within United Kingdom. In other words, from that moment Ireland would be known as the Irish Free State within the Commonwealth (named as the Republic of Ireland or Eire in 1949) and, Northern Ireland. Today, we refer to this region and relationship as the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the Republic of Ireland.

With regard to the Irish in Britain during the postwar years, economic and social historian Colin Holmes, states the following:

Owing to the unrestricted movement of population between Ireland and Britain and the continued element of transience among the Irish, the exact born [in Britain] population remained difficult to calculate...[But,] at the time of the 1951 Census there were 716,028 Irish recorded as living in Britain at the time of the return. In 1961, the figure was returned at 950,978... (1988:216).

Curtin, Dwyer, and O'Tuathaigh (1988) tell us that between 1936 and 1941 there was an annual rate of 19,000 Irish persons moving to Britain; these figures rose to

24,000 between 1941 and 1951, and 42,000 between 1956-61 (p.74). Overall, by the 1950s almost 750,000 Irish people had been born in Britain (see Curtin, Dwyer, and O'Tuathaigh 1988:75). Like Holmes (1988), they suggest that the majority of this migration stemmed from the Republic (Curtin, Dwyer, and O'Tuathaigh 1988:74).

Holmes (1988:216) specifically notes that the Irish from the Republic of Ireland were in considerable majority, particularly in England and Wales, although not in Scotland. In addition, Paul indicates that during the Second World War there was a recruitment office set up in Dublin, facilitating a continued flow of immigrants to the UK. These immigrants came to Britain to work in such areas as agriculture, coal mining, and construction.

Without question, during the post-war years, the Irish were the largest immigrant group to enter Britain. In Holmes' words, "contrary to much popular belief, down to 1971, the Irish constituted the largest immigrant minority in postwar Britain" (1988: 216). These migrants were young, unmarried, semi-skilled, and unskilled workers (Holmes 1988: 216). Consisting of both men and women, they found employment as construction workers, nurses, and domestic servants (Paul 1997: 99). Kathleen Paul states the status of Irish immigrants:

[T]he majority of Irish migrants occupied an ambiguous position within British society. Formally they were neither subjects nor aliens; informally they appear to have been regarded as neither British nor foreign. Instead in both cases they were simply perceived as Irish, with all the connotations that label carried in Britain (Paul 1997:91).

She also notes that after the war, many Irish from the Republic relied on the Dublin Liaison Office in order to find work in Britain. Although documents to work in Britain were needed, they were issued freely and remained valid indefinitely (Paul 1997:93). Similar to their counterparts from continental Europe, Irish immigrants were given medical and fitness tests and if successful, they were provided with food and temporary accommodation in Britain.

In the process of recruitment and migration from the Republic of Ireland, Britain recognized the Irish as subjects within the Empire/Commonwealth despite the fact that they were Irish citizens by law. Moreover, the Republic relied on Britain for work.

Labor and Migration from the Colonies: Open Door Policy or Hidden Restrictions?

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, people in the densely settled islands of the

Caribbean relied on seasonal as well as permanent migration to improve the quality of life for themselves and their families.⁸ Many West Indians from the islands of Jamaica, Trinidad, and Barbados found themselves migrating to such countries as Cuba, Britain, and the United States, where they worked in banana and sugar cultivation, and in domestic service. Those who migrated to Britain found themselves part of a growing black indigenous as well as non-indigenous population of entertainers, servants, slaves, or independent subjects whose roots in Britain can be traced back hundreds of years (Fryer 1984; Green 1998). As noted in Chapter I, Britain's multi-racial population did not come into being until the years following World War II (Spencer 1997: 1-2). Before World War II, people of Asian, African, and Caribbean descent were a fragment of the total population. In reference to the pre-war period, Elizabeth Thomas-Hope states that the small number of West Indians were:

predominantly middle-class, coloured, rather than black, and going to visit, do business or study.

⁸ In my discussions of the Caribbean, I am referring to the English-speaking region. This area was colonized by the British and later became part of the Empire/Commonwealth and/or independent countries. The countries include: Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Guyana, St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla, Dominica, Grenada, Monserrat, British Virgin Islands, and the Turks and Caicos Islands.

Most black, working-class West Indians who settled in Britain had been employees on British ships and had generally settled in the port cities of London, Liverpool and Cardiff (Thomas-Hope 1986: 22).

World War II proved to be a significant moment in the history of West Indian migration. During this time large numbers of workers from the West Indies were recruited to Britain (and the US) to work in designated employment areas and to serve in the British armed forces. Moreover, in response to the war, both the British government and the Merchant Navy accepted as volunteers several thousand colonial subjects to work for military labor battalions, munitions factories, and in naval service.

For the duration of the Second World War, West Indians primarily from Jamaica and Honduras were recruited for munitions and factory work, and many of them settled in the northwest region of Britain after the war (Thomas-Hope 1986: 23). Furthermore, "10,000 skilled tradesmen from Jamaica volunteered for the British armed forces, of whom 7,000 were enlisted in the Royal Air Force" (Thomas-Hope 1986: 23). Throughout these years, migration was shaped by contractual arrangements for workers and servicemen. This constituted a particular type of migration pattern that continued after the war (Thomas-Hope 1986: 22-23). Subsequently, the Asian, African, and Caribbean diaspora

that had been based in many of the dockland communities grew rapidly, expanding to the industrial towns of the Midlands and the North as well as to the air bases of the South and the East (Spencer 1997: 14). Although the origins of these communities can be traced to earlier periods, as we have seen, it was not until the Second World War and after that they became substantial in size and home to people who were committed to settle permanently. In other words, this particular historical juncture was critical to the development of African, Asian, and Caribbean communities in Britain.

Colonial subjects who migrated in this period experienced de facto segregation; they were treated as inferior in comparison to their white counterparts who were recruited primarily from Eastern Europe (Paul 1997; Spencer 1997). During the War, the state limited the entry of black British subjects altogether. The careful definition of boundaries meant that the colonial subject's relocation to the "imperial motherland" was intended as a temporary one. World War II created conditions that were reminiscent of the First World War; there was a demand for sailors as well as other governmental workers in this time of imperial defense. Instead of cutting off entry, the state (more specifically the Colonial Office), welcomed entry, due to

the demand for labor. But, for colonial subjects to serve the imperial motherland under the rubric of defense is not the same as migrating for work and permanent residence. Committed to the idea that colonial subjects were not in the "imperial motherland" to stay permanently, the state kept the majority of these people under close surveillance (Paul 1997: 113).

In the post-war years, it appeared that in theory British subjects of the Empire/Commonwealth were free to enter the United Kingdom when they pleased. In practice, however, British immigration policy was restrictive in relation to persons of Caribbean, African, and Asian descent. The restrictions placed on such peoples were a part of a larger discourse which spoke to the undesirability of immigrants who were phenotypically as well as culturally distinct.

As noted, immigration restrictions reinforced the belief that black British subjects' relocation to Britain was temporary. That belief, however, was overturned. More specifically, it was during the post-war years that migration patterns from the Caribbean changed dramatically. The first significant wave of migrants, 492 West Indians from Jamaica, arrived in Britain 21 June 1948 on the SS Empire Windrush, a vessel in route to Jamaica to pick-up

servicemen on leave from their units in the armed forces. During the next few years, migrants came to Britain by sea and later traveled by air. The fare was expensive and many West Indians had to sell their possessions as well as rely on kinship networks in order to pay for their ticket. These immigrants differed from those in previous years in that they were neither seaman nor members of the armed forces.

Following the war, many West Indians who had served the war effort in fact stayed in Britain. Many West Indians returning home after wartime service realized the economic bleakness in their homelands and saw Britain as a country that offered employment. Overall, in the 1950s and 1960s, poverty, exploitation, and exclusion--conditions that had lasted throughout the West Indies since slavery--produced many West Indian migrants. The result was a transition from migrant to surplus labor. Patterns of Caribbean migration were also a part of the general European capitalist demand for labor. In Ceri Peach's words, "West Indian migration to Britain must be seen within the context of Irish and Asian movement to Britain, Turkish and Italian movement to Germany and the Algerian movement to France" (1986: 65).

Recruitment practices of British Rail, London Transport and the National Health Service reflected a government facing post-war labor shortages (Peach 1986: 67-

68). By 1958, for example, "London Transport employed almost 4,000 black workers, about one quarter of whom had been recruited directly from the Caribbean" (Walvin 1984: 109). The migration movement began in earnest during this time with approximately 1,000 to 2,000 per year (Peach 1986:66). As the work of Peach indicates, West Indians overwhelmingly resided in cities such as London (fifty-five percent) and Birmingham (thirteen percent) (1986:72). In contrast, immigrant populations from Pakistan were more evenly spread with twenty-two percent settling in London and sixteen percent in West Riding and Birmingham. Finally, immigrants from India were the intermediary group. Thirty-three percent settled in London, while only fourteen percent settled in Birmingham. All told, by 1971 over fifty percent of the South Asian and Caribbean population resided in Britain's seven Metropolitan Counties. More specifically, West Indians settled in areas where the prospects for employment were high, avoiding other countries in the United Kingdom, namely, Scotland and Wales, as well as other parts of England where unemployment was high (Gmelch 1992: 48).

Patterns of Migration

Early immigration patterns differed according to gender. Men outnumbered women during the early stages of

immigration. Thus, as noted by anthropologist George Gmelch, seven out of every ten immigrants from the Caribbean from 1952 to 1954 were men (1992: 51). Within just a few years this changed dramatically as the proportion of women and children increased at a steady rate.

Family resources, economics, and employment opportunities shaped migration patterns that were differentiated by gender. Most households, for example, could not afford to send their entire family to Britain. Men, perceived as the principle breadwinners, were sent first to see whether or not housing and employment conditions were favorable for the rest of the family. If so, then monies would be saved to send for them. In general, many women remained behind to look after the children.

Extended family and kin networks were highly significant during these migrations. Migrants often relied on financial help from extended family members in order to make the sea voyage to Britain. As John Rex and Robert Moore noted in their 1960s sociological study of race relations in Sparbrook, Birmingham, over sixty percent of the West Indian migrants in their sample population received some form of support from friends and/or relatives

in England or the West Indies in order to make the voyage to Britain (1967: 100). Extended family members also proved to be helpful in terms of child rearing and in finding accommodation. In many cases mothers and fathers from the West Indies were forced to leave their children, who were raised by grandmothers or other relatives.

Housing and Employment

For West Indian migrants, housing and employment were two seemingly inseparable problems during the years following World War II. Historian Ron Ramdin draws attention to this direct relationship (1987: 190-193). He notes that a vast majority of West Indian immigrants found accommodation through extended kin networks--they relied on friends and relatives--those who had recently migrated as well as those who had already established themselves in Britain. Several of the already established migrants opened their homes to newcomers and in effect these dwellings became hostels for the new migrants. A small number arrived without an address and other West Indians who migrated found temporary accommodation in Salvation Army hostels and through Welfare Officers from the Colonial Office, the London County Council, and the Red Cross.

Overall, West Indian housing in London (North, West, and South) was characterized by its dilapidated condition

yet, general availability. As Ramdin notes, the rooms and basements that West Indians rented were in advanced states of deterioration and decay (1987: 191-192). On top of paying rents of approximately five-to-six pounds⁹ per week (Rex and Moore 1967: 101-102), many migrants lived in shared overcrowded, limited-space dwellings. Their one-room living space was used for cooking, eating, and sleeping. Because of landlord exploitation, West Indians often feared homelessness. Moreover, certain neighborhoods, such as those in the East End, were in effect off-limits to many West Indians. In the words of Ron Ramdin:

West Indians could not find accommodation in the working class districts of the East End...because of the stability of the population and tenancies, and there was no room for sub-division. The ranks of the white working-class were effectively closed (1987:192).

In a related matter, Ramdin notes that as immigrants continued to flow into Britain at a steady pace, social relations became strained between black and white tenants and landlords. As the competition for scarce resources increased, it created more tension, and blacks became the scapegoat for rent increases, overcrowding, noise, and poor accommodation (1987:194).

⁹ A pound today is equivalent to approximately 1.4 US dollars.

Other forms of discrimination with regard to accommodation were noticeable and increasingly pronounced in the advertisements for vacant rooms. Not only were there "anti-coloured" advertisements for rented rooms; West Indians were suspicious of advertisements for rooms labeled as "coloured only" or "coloured welcome," because of the commonly experienced exploitative relationships between white landlords and black tenants. A "coloured welcome" advertisement was, most probably, a clear sign of an inflated rent (Ramdin 1987: 195).

Employment was a second major problem that West Indians migrants faced. Unlike the more overt discrimination with regard to accommodation, racism in the area of employment was subtle. As noted previously, London Transport employed thousands of black workers by the late 1950s. But London Transport was exceptional (Ramdin 1987: 197). In other places of employment, West Indians were treated with much hostility. For that reason, many West Indians had to take menial jobs, those designated for semi-skilled or unskilled laborers. In doing so, they often were confronted with doing work of lower occupational prestige than that of their previous job in the West Indies (Ramdin: 198).

The ambiguity and contradictions in employment were

apparent. While there was much hostility toward West Indians--for example, they were often referred to as slow and sloppy workers--some found work as nurses, barbers, tailors, cleaners, laundry persons, and shopkeepers (Ramdin 1987: 198).

Opening and Closing the Door: Race, Immigration and Citizenship

The period between the passage of the 1948 British Nationality Act and the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrant Act is a critical one in the history of the politics of immigration, citizenship, and race in post-war Britain. Between 1948 and 1961 migration grew at a steady pace; a rate of 1,000 to 2,000 per year (Peach 1986:66).

During this period, but more specifically in the late 1950s, there were a series of racist attacks on West Indians. Paul draws our attention to the 23 August 1958 race "riot" in the St. Ann's area of Nottingham, in which a pub scuffle over a black man talking to a white woman turned into a full-scale race riot involving thousands of whites attacking blacks (Paul 1997: 155). Within a week in the Notting Hill section of London, whites, using homemade weapons, launched a series of attacks against black people, their homes and businesses. These events placed "coloured

immigration" on Parliament's agenda. There were negative and racist sentiments associated with the immigrants. West Indians, for example were linked with unemployment, crime, and disease, while Asians were seen as illiterate, and having poor language skills (Paul: 157-159).

Then came the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrant Act, under which Parliament began to restrict the flow of immigrants from former colonies, whose numbers had been swelling under the post-war British Nationality Act of 1948. For West Indians, peak migration was in 1961, with 60,000 migrants, after which there was a decline (Peach 1986: 66). Subsequent acts of 1968 and 1971 contributed to collapsing racial and ethnic categories and brought an end to the migration of vast numbers of West Indians.

The 1962 Commonwealth Immigrant Act made a distinction between citizens of Britain and its colonies and citizens of independent Commonwealth countries. The main clauses of this Act sought to control the entry of black Commonwealth citizens into Britain.

All holders of Commonwealth passports were subject to immigration control except those who (a) were born in Britain; (b) held British passports issued by the British government; or (c) persons included in the passport of one of the persons excluded from immigration control under (a) or (b) (quoted in Solomos 1993: 63).

Under this Act, a sizable number of East African Asians (many from Kenya and Uganda) were exempt from immigration control because they held British passports.¹⁰ The racially discriminatory nature of the act was also evident in the case of Irish immigration. As discussed previously, citizens of Ireland, although not Commonwealth citizens, had a right of entry and the number of immigrants from that country exceeded those from Commonwealth countries (Carter, Green and Halpern 1996: 150-151).

In the period immediately following the enactment of the Commonwealth Immigrant Act, general debate about immigration continued (Jacobs 1985:34-35). This was particularly evident in 1964 in the Smethwick, Birmingham by-election of Tory candidate Peter Griffiths to Parliament. Despite the national electoral swing toward Labour, with the recently elected Prime Minister Harold Wilson, Griffiths' openly anti-immigration platform reversed Labour's widespread momentum (Jacobs 1986:35). Not only did Griffiths' campaign clearly reflect an anti-immigration platform, it was at the same time openly

¹⁰ East African Asians were British subjects who were primarily from Gujarat, Punjab, and Goa. They had settled in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanganyika as merchants, traders, clerks and artisans (Spencer 1997:140). Upon independence in Tanganyika (1961), Uganda (1962), and Kenya (1963), subjects could choose either British or local citizenship.

racist. Such overt racism was reflected in his campaign slogan "If you want a nigger neighbor, vote Liberal or Labour" (Foot as cited by Jacobs 1986: 35).

In 1965 the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination (CARD), a national umbrella body representing various "black" political organizations such as the Indian Workers Association of Great Britain, the National Federation of Pakistani Organizations, and the West Indian Standing Conference Organization, was formed in response to such open racism (Jacobs 1986: 35). Meanwhile, a steady flow of East African Asian immigration occurred between 1965 and 1967, but came to an abrupt halt in 1968 with the passage of the second Commonwealth Immigrant Act.

The Commonwealth Immigrant Act of 1968, also known as the Kenyan Asian Act, extended the immigration restrictions to East African Asians holding British passports. Under this act, an East African Asian was subject to immigration control unless he or she had at least one parent or one grandparent who was born, naturalized, or registered as a citizen in Britain or its colonies (Solomos 1993: 66). Furthermore, as Fryer (1984: 384) notes, the passage of this Act was heavily influenced by the intervention of Conservative Enoch Powell who, through an influential, racially discriminatory political speech, pleaded with the

nation to block the entry of these "impurities" into British culture and society.

In 1970, the shift from a Labour to a Conservative government ushered in the passage of the Immigration Act of 1971 which "qualified the notion of citizenship by differentiating between citizens of Britain and its colonies who were 'patrial' and who had the right of abode in Britain, and 'non-patrials' who did not" (Solomos 1993: 69). Patrials were defined as,

- Citizens of Britain who had the citizenship by birth, adoption, naturalisation or registration in Britain or who were born of parents, one of whom had British citizenship by birth, or one of whose grandparents had such citizenship.
- Citizens of Britain and its colonies who had at any time settled in Britain and who had been ordinarily resident in Britain for five years or more (quoted in Solomos 1993: 69).

British subjects and UKC citizens who had neither any familial connection nor had lived in the UK for at least five years were classified as non-patrial. Upon the passage of the Act, non-patrials who lived outside of Britain were not able to settle in Britain permanently; they could only enter with a work permit which did not carry such settlement entitlements (see Paul 1997: 181; Spencer 1997: 143; Solomos 1993: 69).

Restrictions on immigration and citizenship, now reaching their peak, represent the convergence of

nationalism and racism articulated through carefully coded language. The Acts mark Britain's heightened awareness of the inescapable, rapid growth of racial and ethnic diversity. This legislation speaks to the manner in which race influenced, yet simultaneously was negated by, the state; and, it reflects a change in policy surrounding the nature of "race." Increasingly, the policies provide the basis for an entire structure that discriminates systematically against socially constructed racial-ethnic groups. With time, this legislation was realized in the creation of racialized state institutions and hardened attitudes about race.

In other words, the racialization of British political culture and society was instituted through socially constructed ideological notions of culture, politics, and nation. Moreover, this racialization produced "a notion of Britishness that was spatially bounded as well as socially and politically circumscribed" (Carter, Green and Halpern 1996: 143).

Fearful of being outflanked by fascists and each other, fearful of losing votes and seats, Tory and Labour politicians progressively accommodated themselves to racism. The problem was not white racism, but black presence; the fewer black people there were in this country the better it would be for 'race relations....' The legislators made one surrender after another. Step by step, racism was institutionalized, legitimized and

nationalized. That which had been unthinkable in 1958 was by 1968 the law of the land (Fryer 1984: 381).

Enforcing the aforementioned type of legislation marks the construction of artificial boundaries. Although artificial, they represent power and domination. As illustrated, hegemonic powers can create and delineate specific boundaries. One could argue that, in this case, the inclusion and/or exclusion of persons was based primarily on race and ethnicity; class and gender may be perceived as secondary criteria. It is the construction of the boundaries of citizenship that is most highly contested and remains at the center of struggle for black people.

Racialized Politics and Social Control

In the years following the passage of the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrant Act, the Labour government made several proposals to strengthen this legislation. The August 1965 publication of the White Paper, *Immigration from the Commonwealth*, for example, proposed several recommendations for further restrictions as well as imposed controls with regard to (1) work permits; (2) immigration officers' authority; and (3) deportations (Miles and Phizacklea 1984:53).

Besides the restrictions, however, the White Paper

considered the problem of creating harmonious relations between blacks and whites (Jacobs 1986:36). In other words, it

Also defined a new political concern and initiative – 'integration'. As a prelude to setting out a program to ensure integration, the document identified Britain as a 'multi-racial' society, one whose economy required the presence of immigrants (Miles and Phizacklea 1984: 54).

Following the White Paper, the Home Office produced the 1965 Race Relations Act, followed by two other Acts passed in 1968 and 1976. The Acts were written with the intention to eliminate discrimination through public education and court sanctions (Ben-Tovim, et. al. 1986: 29). The 1965 Act also established a Race Relations Board to handle public cases of racial discrimination. Meanwhile, the newly established National Committee for Commonwealth Immigrants (NCCI) was a coordinating body and liaison intended to encourage harmonious relations (Ben Tovim et. al. 1986: 29; Jacobs 1986: 37).

Notes on Immigration and Britain

In our efforts to better understand people in different places, spaces, and locations, anthropologists engage in cross-cultural comparisons. With respect to migration, through the use of ethnography anthropologists

strive to better understand the human condition and at the same time to appreciate the meaning and experience of being a migrant or immigrant. Such questions concerning the who, what, when, and why of migration are, as Brettell and Hollifield suggest,

framed by the assumption that outcomes for people who move are shaped by their social, cultural, and gendered locations and that migrants themselves are agents in their behavior, interpreting and constructing within the constraints of structure (2000:4).

As well, we are concerned with the articulation between places--where a migrant originates and where he or she ultimately goes. How the state receives its migrants is often a point of concern as well as apprehension. In the case of Britain, immigration policy has been both complex and, at times, obscure. Although immigration occurred in Britain during the early decades of the twentieth century, migration patterns during the post-World War II era are shaped by a particular set of circumstances, above all threats to the existence of an empire in decline.

As Joppke (1999: 100) asserts, "the logic of British immigration is thus determined by the logic of empire." Furthermore, immigration legislation has been about restricting the entry of non-white members of the Commonwealth/Empire. Much of the complexity and resistance

is rooted in notions of the nation and what it means to be British, Irish, Jamaican, Indian, etc. Moreover, these underlying assumptions are also based on phenotype and assimilability.

In 1962, 1968, and 1971 the English Parliament passed legislation restricting the flow of non-white immigrants from former commonwealth countries. Although Irish immigrants were also subject to immigration control, the number of immigrants from that country exceeded those from Commonwealth countries (Carter, Green, and Halpern 1996: 150-151). As we shall see in chapter III, members of groups subject to immigration control defined themselves as belonging to the category "black." At the same time, both Labour and Conservative leaders imposed this category as they formulated racially discriminatory policies. The series of legislative acts between 1962 and 1971 revealed how race preoccupied the state, notwithstanding its protests to the contrary; clearly race influenced, although it was simultaneously negated by, the state. The acts also mark Britain's heightened awareness of an inescapable, rapid growth in racial and ethnic diversity. More than this, the policies provided the basis for an entire structure that systematically discriminates against non-white racial groups. In the meanwhile, the growing

contradictions of Labour in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the recession in the mid-1970s (Jacobs 1995; Fainstein and Harloe 1994; Cain 1993), formed the contradictory political terrain upon which Thatcherism began to ground itself as a political project and as an historic bloc (Hall 1988a).

Chapter III:

From the Struggles Against Imperialism to the Seeds of Thatcherism: Community Activism, Political Change, and the Shaping of History

Introduction

In the 1950s and 1960s, the black presence in Britain was identified as a principle source of the country's problems. The large numbers of West Indian immigrants, coupled with the popular and political forms of racism, placed black people at the bottom of Britain's hierarchical ranking of populations. In Britain, both public and private discourse focused on (1) the need to control black immigration; (2) the behavior of the "undesirable" black immigrants; (3) the substantial numbers of Caribbean, Africans, and Asians migrating to Britain. In addition, as similarly expressed at the beginning of the twentieth century in the "coloured seaman alien problem" (see Chapter I), public and private discourse on post-war immigration was linked to "colour" as well as housing, employment, and

interracial dating/marriage.

During this period, Britain reinforced a racialized construction of Britishness which involved the inclusion and exclusion of persons based on color. Furthermore, while the state tightened its immigration controls, during these years, new communities of Africans, Caribbeans, and Asians experienced racist attacks and violence. The 1950s riots in Nottingham and London represent public manifestations of racist beliefs and had the effect of reinforcing of anti-black sentiment. As recounted by historian Peter Fryer (1981: 377), for approximately 18 months prior to the summer of 1958, there was a series of white attacks against black individuals in Nottingham. By the summer of 1958, these attacks had become more frequent as well as increasingly intense. As the month of August drew to a close, black people in Nottingham were on the receiving end of stabbings, fights, and smashed windows.

In London, specifically in Notting Hill, Kensington, and Shepard's Bush, African, Asian, and Caribbean communities were the targets of racial violence. Teenage, working class white youth, also known as the "Teddy Boys" (see Hebdige 1977), were the perpetrators of violence against these communities. White youth armed with iron bars, sticks, and knives made it a practice to go 'nigger-

hunting' (Fryer: 1981: 378). Black people were in many instances savagely beaten.

The African, Caribbean, and Asian response to racist attacks, violence, and immigration controls came in the form of anti-imperialist grass-roots organizations and coalitions. It is during this period that "black" as a political category was embraced by many African, Asian, and Caribbean communities. Uncompromising in their struggle to end racism and discrimination, Afro-Asian unity represented a shield of armor in the battle waged against the broader enemy--that of imperialism. Racial and ethnic identity for Caribbeans, Africans, and Asians had a direct bearing upon their political capacities and practices. The resulting formation of grass-roots coalitions (as discussed below) speaks to the idea that consciousness and action were intimately related. This consciousness was marked by the recognition of widespread British (neo)colonialism and imperialism.

This chapter underscores the significance of grass-roots organizing. Grass-roots organization is critical in drawing people into both global and local processes of economic and social transformation, particularly as it intersects with race, class, and gender. Grass-roots collective activism is often a way in which people attempt

to address structures of power, social institutions, and often at the same time often search for meaning, voice, and identity. Grass-roots activism sheds light on the ways in which people collectively attempt to transform the social, political and economic conditions of their lives.

Most important, perhaps, this chapter analyzes the first of three overlapping phases of grass-roots activism I underscore in my dissertation. The first phase, (defined from the late 1960s until the early 1980s), follows the period of mass migration from Britain's Commonwealth countries. It is during this period that we see the formation of black nationalist, anti-imperialist groups, and black women's grass-roots organizations. I document organizational transformations that occurred during this period. Alongside these processes, I identify shifts in Britain's political economy and a gradual change in its overall political-economic context, both of which laid the foundation for Thatcherism. Chapters IV and V take up subsequent phases of grass-roots activism and changing state policy. Chapter IV covers the period known as Thatcherism, (defined from the from 1979 to the late 1980s) and Chapter V spans the post-Thatcher era, (defined as the latter years of 1980s until the present).

Overall, this chapter marks the beginning of the

second half of the dissertation. In the first part of the research I called attention to an imperialist ethos by analyzing particular historical moments that enable us to understand, for example, the inclusion and exclusion of individuals based on race, class, and/or gender, issues related to immigration and citizenship, as well as the importance of belonging. But, it is here, in the second half of the research project that the threats to an empire in decline are most revealed. By discussing three overlapping phases of grass-roots organization and shifts in Britain's political economy the themes of inclusion and exclusion, race, nation, identity, are analyzed within a contemporary context that allows us to see how they are negotiated. In other words, the salience of race, class, gender, identity, and nation--within the context of Britain's shifting political economy, over different periods--is foregrounded. Attention to this case raises the following questions: how is "black" being manipulated as a form of political solidarity? How are black women trying to transform their lives within the context of conservative discourses and constructions of the nation? How do state policies and practices shape grass-roots political activity and local organizing? My field research explored how such issues have been negotiated within the context of black

women's grass-roots organizations.

The Anti-Imperialist Turn from the Grassroots

In his comparative study of United States, Brazil, and South Africa, Anthony Marx tells us that "[b]lack protest relates to nation-state consolidation built through racial domination; the state-led race making process seems to be double edged" ([1998]1999: 264). Moreover, he convincingly argues that the state's policies of inclusion and exclusion have demarcated and solidified boundaries for particular racialized groups. For that reason, a subordinated, solidified racial identity serves as the basis for collective action, political opportunities, and social movements (Marx 1998[1999]: 264). As we shall see below, this is the case for Afro-Asian unity in Britain, exemplified by the formation of "black" grassroots organizations.

In particular, black feminists in the United States and more specifically, Britain (as I discuss below) have explicitly argued for movements and organizations that are comprehensive of race, class, gender, and sexuality. People of the African diaspora are linked, not deterministically via common ancestry, but by similar experiences in relation to enslavement, continuous oppression, and subordination

(Hanchard 1991:89).

[T]he commercial dissemination of enslaved Africans into Meso and South America, the Caribbean and North America, coupled with [neo]colonialism and imperialism, is what gives ontological credence to the categories of 'black,' 'Afro-diasporic,' 'African American' and 'African' peoples (Hanchard 1991:89).

In the African diaspora, some of the largest clusters of black people can be found in the United States, Brazil, Canada, Britain, and France. These clusters confirm the existence of an African diaspora.

It is probable that black feminist organizations and alliances established by Caribbeans, Africans, and Asians in England during the 1960s and 1970s were shaped by shared political beliefs, particularly anti-imperialism. As such, they represented sites of political contestation, transformation, and resistance.

In both the US and Britain, for example, the 1960s was an extremely turbulent decade; race riots and police brutality were common occurrences in both countries. During these years, the ideological notion of "Black Power" inspired political and social mobilization on a large scale. Black women's organizations in Britain were patterned after African diasporic movements and struggles within the US and Africa (see Sivanandan 1981).

In "From Resistance to Rebellion: Asian and Afro-

Caribbean Struggles in Britain," Sivanandan (1981) reaffirms the importance of global processes. Ghana's independence in 1957, Uganda, Trinidad and Tobago's independence in 1962, and the struggles in the United States together provided the political fervor and impetus behind Afro-Caribbean organizations in Britain. He further maintains that Martin Luther King's visit to Britain in 1964 was the stimulus behind the formation of an umbrella body for various Asian and Afro-Caribbean organizations known as the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination (CARD). CARD's main thrust, through the coordination of local and national organizations, was the elimination of racially discriminatory legislation (see Heinman as cited by Solomos 1993: 203). In 1965, Malcolm X's visit to London helped facilitate the formation of a more radical organization that stressed Black Nationalism, the Radical Action Adjustment Society (RAAS). Finally, inspired by Stokely Carmichael, the Universal Coloured Peoples' Association (UCPA) formed in 1967, emphasizing the struggles of the international working class and its fight against imperialism and racism (see Sivanandan 1981).

In these coalitions, "blackness" was embraced as a shield of political solidarity based on a notion of Afro-Asian unity. In addition to the aforementioned

organizations, in the 1960s, branches of the Black Panther Party, the Black Liberation Front, and the Black Unity and Freedom Party (BUFP) began to establish themselves across England, especially in urban areas such as London, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, and Nottingham. Here Africans, Caribbeans, and Asians all collaborated. For example, Black Power organizations (themselves a mixed membership) supported the Indian Workers Association of Great Britain and the National Federation of Pakistani Associations. These associations in turn embraced "blackness" in the political arena.

In 1974, a journal called *Race* was launched. Later renamed *Race & Class*, it was published by the London-based Institute of Race Relations. The journal would soon be distinguished by (1) its uncompromising anti-imperialist stance; and, (2) its activist-scholars, most notably, A. Sivanandan--a Ceylonese economist who came to London in the 1950s to look for work in the field of banking (Owusu 2000: 417).

As the Institute of Race Relations shifted from being "a posh elitist institute" (Owusu 2000: 418), so too did the political climate in Britain. As previously mentioned, it was in the late 1960s that Afro-Asian solidarity and a generalized "blackness" were embraced. Sivanandan, then a

librarian at the Institute (he currently serves as the Director) began to introduce the writings and speeches of black radical activist-intellectuals such as Eric Williams, CLR James, Amilcar Calbral, and Sojourner Truth to the library's shelves.

Still in existence today, *Race & Class* has been for nearly three decades committed to "Third World" struggles. According to Nancy Murray, in her article "Apprehending Reality: *Race & Class* as an Anti-Imperialist Journal," Sivanandan's contribution to *Race & Class* is distinguished by his

feel for imperialism not as an abstraction, but as 'lived experienced,' by his dialectical analysis of the connections between histories and struggles, and his unwavering commitment to socialism not as an ideology, but as 'the process through which liberation is won' (1999:75).

Black communities had to cope with the lived experience of racism, discrimination, and imperialism in the minutia of everyday life, particularly after World War II. As discussed in Chapter II, there was continued discrimination in housing and employment. As noted below by Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe (1985), inadequate accommodation was a serious problem.

I was living in a small room which was draughty and cold and had one little paraffin heater. If you slept with it on, the next day your nose would be blocked and you'd feel drowsy. The

bathroom--and I was lucky to have one--had no heating at all. There was no [hot water] and you had to heat buckets of water if you wanted a bath (Anon. quoted in Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe 1985:130).

Clearly, on another level, the survival techniques and networks of support "on the ground" were critical for black communities as they endured the lived experience of imperialism. With this in mind, we can understand the post-World War II implementation of the "Sou Sou" or "Pardner" System (Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe 1993[1985]: 131; see Williams 1993). An early form of collective action by West Indian women, the Pardner System, usually run by a woman, was organized on a family basis and typically addressed families' needs and priorities. Through this system, women collectively pooled funds on a regular and rotating basis. Money was often used for mortgages as well as airline tickets for family members still living in the Caribbean. In the absence of friendly lending institutions, the Pardner system (an informal form of organizing), contributed to the maintenance of black communities. The significance of this system lies in its ability to supply the support that the British government did not provide to many immigrants entering the country after World War II. In all, the Pardner System gave Caribbean communities a social organization and networks; it still exists in some

communities today. As noted by Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe,

It was mainly women who set up the Pardners. Nine out of ten of the pardner schemes had a woman in charge of them. It was done on a village or family basis. [Whose ever] needs were greater, they got the deposit on the house. It was a woman who held [onto] the money and paid down the deposit, but still no home could be put in her name...It helped to pay the mortgage, but it also provided us with somewhere to go. That's why they started (Anon. quoted in Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe 1985:131).

For black women, there were other forms of organizing that, at times, included joint participation with black men. During an interview with two former members of Brixton Black Women's Group (one of the first black women's organizations formed in Britain in the 1970s)¹, both remembered the early combined efforts of both black men and women. In this instance men and women from the Black Panthers and the Black United Freedom Party came together to establish the first black bookshop in London.

There was a squatter's movement. Olive squatted the bookshop that turned into a movement. She was such a 'big' person, considering she was only 5 foot (laughter). Basically it [Sabarr bookstore] was suppose to sell black literature, because no one else was doing it. Unfortunately, [there was] an inability to see....we were laid back, we got into a terrible financial situation and in the end we had to pay [out of our pockets]. But before it died, Sabarr--it was the only black book shop in South London...it did its thing. It

¹ I provide a more detailed discussion of Brixton Black Women's Group later in this chapter.

was run jointly [with men] and women had something to do with it (Interview n.d. March 1999).

In the combined efforts of both males and females, particularly those associated with the Black Power Movement (BPM), black men often overshadowed black women. The contributions, therefore, of such individuals as political activist Claudia Jones² often went unnoticed. Despite their unrecognized status in such organizations as the League of Colored Peoples, black women had substantial influence. Claudia Jones and Amy Ashwood Garvey, for example, established an Afro-Caribbean journal in Britain, the *West Indian Gazette*, in 1958. For both Jones and Garvey, founding the journal was one of their many attempts to continue the struggles of their predecessors. The *Gazette* was a cultural, political, and social information source for black people (Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe 1993[1985]: 136-137).

Throughout Claudia Jones's lifetime, she was actively involved in political struggles in both the US and Britain. She was born in Trinidad in 1915, but at the age of eight, Jones moved with her family to the well-known section of New York City, known then as the capital of black culture--

² See Marika Sherwood's (1999) *Claudia Jones: A Life in Exile*.

Harlem. During her late teens and early twenties she was actively involved in radical, anti-racist, leftist politics. At the age of eighteen, for example, she joined the Young Communist League and served as the editor of its newsletter (see Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe 1985: 6; Marable and Mullings 2000: 340). Moreover, she was actively involved in publicizing and campaigning against the Scottsboro case in the 1930s (Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe 1985: 6).³

After being deported from the US during the McCarthy Era due to her 'un-American activities' and Communist Party membership (Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe 1993[1985]: 136), Jones crossed the Atlantic to Britain where she became actively involved in anti-racist, anti-imperialist work. It is during this period that she and Garvey established the *Gazette*. One of Jones' most significant political

³ See James E. Goodman (1994), *Stories of Scottsboro*. The Scottsboro trials received worldwide attention in the 1930s. Nine African American boys were charged with raping two white women in Scottsboro, Alabama. This case occurred within the era of Jim Crow segregation and eight of the young men were sentenced to death. There were much publicized campaigns for their release from both civil rights organizations and the Communist Party, USA. Appeals for the case were brought before the US Supreme Court, after which some charges were dropped, two were tried and convicted again, and several faced lifetime imprisonment. It was not until the 1950s that all the Scottsboro boys were freed. (See also Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe 1985: 6; Marable and Mullings 2000: 302-303).

struggles, however, centered around fighting against the passage of the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrant Act which, as we have seen, distinguished between citizens of Britain and its colonies and citizens of independent Commonwealth countries. As discussed in chapter II, the main clauses of this Act sought to control the entry of black Commonwealth citizens into Britain. Unfortunately, Claudia Jones' campaign against the passage of the Act came to an untimely end with her death only two years after the Act was passed in 1964 (Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe 1993[1985]: 136-139).

Building Unity From Diversity: "Black" Women's Grass-Roots

Organizing

[We live in] a world which is definable only in *relational* terms, a world transversed with intersecting lines of power and resistance, a world which can only be understood in terms of its destructive divisions of gender, color, class, sexuality, and nation, a world which must be transformed through a necessary process of pivoting the center..., for the assumed center (Europe and the United States) will no longer hold. But it is also a world of powerful histories of resistance and revolution in daily life and as organized liberation movements. And it is these contours which define the complex grounds for the emergence and consolidation of third world women's feminist politics (Mohanty 1991:2).

The early 1970s ushered in the formation of grass-roots organizing around issues of racial and gender

inequality; groups promoting black power and feminist concerns emerged and black women began to address both of these areas of inequality. Although the initial impetus came from Jamaican and Trinidadian women, the collapse of racial categories and the recognition of shared historical experiences of colonialism, racism, and sexism bridged a gap between Caribbean, African, and South Asian women in the context of struggle. Women from all these racial and ethnic groups began to identify politically and collectively as "black."

Two issues converged to shape black feminism in England: (1) feminist theory and feminist organizations inadequately addressed the racism experienced by black women; and, (2) black activist (previously known as black power) groups did not effectively address the gender-specific issues or concerns of black women such as sexism, and free, legal, safe abortions. Thus, the experiences of black women became a legitimate area in which they could organize as women (see Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe 1993[1985]; Williams 1993). The viable solution for these women was the formation of organizations that recognized oppression on all fronts. Black feminism stood for: (1) multiple modes of consciousness that involve contestation, transformation and resistance; (2) attempts to redress, within one framework,

race, class, and gender inequality; and, (3) the creation of racially gendered identities.

During these years, black women's organizations were formed in various parts of England--in the North (Liverpool Black Sisters), the Midlands (Birmingham Black Sisters, Nottingham Black Women's Group), and in the South (Brixton Black Women's Group, Organization of Women of Asian and African Descent, East London Black Women's Organization) (see Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe 1993[1985]).

Brixton Black Women's Group

More precisely, in 1973 an important Black Women's Group, later well known as the Brixton Black Women's Group (BBWG)⁴, was founded in South London. Brixton, located in the South London borough of Lambeth⁵, was a post-World War II locus for many African and Caribbean communities. It was one of London's urban industrial areas that seemed to face a shortage of labor. With this in mind Brixton became an important site in my field research, especially since it was the home of the first black women's grass-roots organization in London.

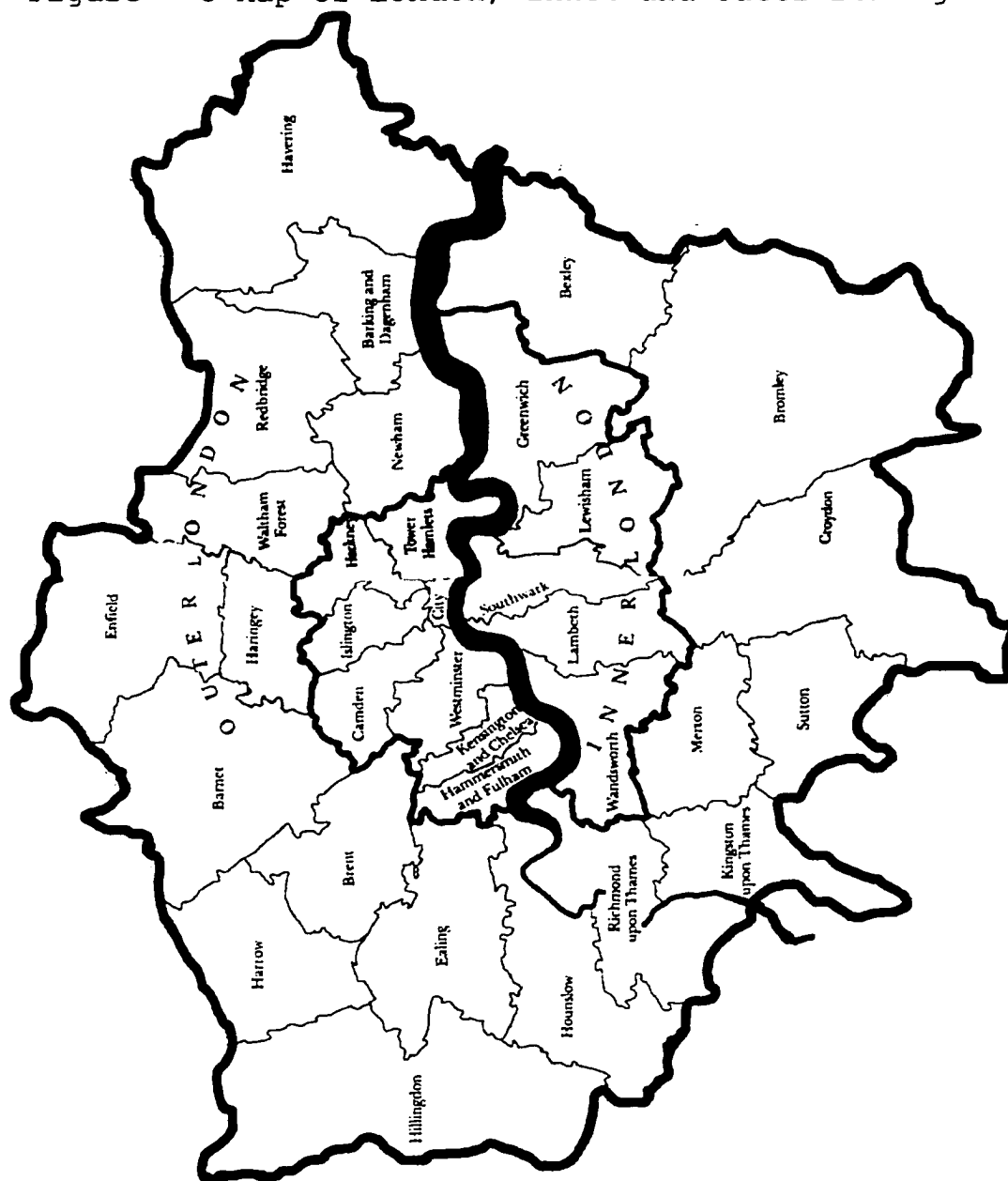
⁴ See Figure 2.

⁵ Brixton is located in the inner London borough of Lambeth, See Figure 3.

Figure 2 - Black Women's Organizational Chart, No.1

Name of Organization	Duration	Location	Name Changes
Brixton Black Women's Group (BBWG)	1973 - 1986/1988	London	Initially known as Brixton Women's Group

Figure - 3 Map of London, Inner and Outer Boroughs



The Brixton Setting

At the dawn of the twentieth century Brixton was an area known for its theatres and music halls, relatively affluent residents, and single-family merchant Victorian and Edwardian houses. By the early 1920s, these mansions had been turned into single-floor flats occupied by artisans and white-collar workers. Between the World War I and World War II inflation and rising repair costs made these homes unprofitable investments and many of them were turned into boarding houses while others were rented on a room-by-room basis. It was then that Brixton acquired a reputation--as neighborhood--mostly known for its thieves, pickpockets, and brothels (Patterson 1959[1963]: 48-49). Sheila Patterson (1959[1963]) noted in her social anthropological study of West Indians in Brixton, that by the 1950s many of these changes had been accelerated by the Second World War (pp.48-50).

With regard to its population, Patterson suggests that in the years before the before the Second World War, Brixton was "fairly homogeneous," its residents were primarily English--meaning, white people born in England (1961[1959]: 52). The influx of Scottish and Irish (from the Republic of Ireland) persons as well as Polish further transformed the demography (Patterson 1961[1959]: 52-53).

After 1948, the year the first wave of immigrants arrived on the SS Empire Windrush, an increasing stream of West Indian migrants moved to Brixton and made it their new home. Not only was Brixton centrally situated in London, relatively inexpensive, and had numerous boarding houses that provided accommodation for West Indians, it was also near Clapham air-raid shelters. For a few years after 1948, these shelters served as temporary accommodation for many West Indians who arrived in London without lodging (Paul 1997: 116; Patterson 1961[1959]: 55).

Cities, particularly those in urban areas, rise and fall, decay and regenerate, sift and segregate. The Brixton area of Lambeth has undergone many changes over the past few decades. Today, it is a highly racially integrated area that is the home of many young, hip, trendy men and women. It is also cosmopolitan, chic, and highly gentrified. Occupied by twenty and thirty-something middle-class residents with media and public relations jobs, members of this generation invest on average about £250,000⁶ for a three-bedroom flat; and, with their growing affluence have been known to invest up to £600,000⁷ for a four-floor house

⁶ £250,000 is approximately \$350,000.

⁷ £600,000 is approximately \$840,000

(*The Guardian Unlimited*, 22, July 2001). Although these residents are approximately ten minutes from central London, they do not have to leave their own area for entertainment. For example, Brixton has a vibrant social scene that includes several bars and night clubs such as the Fridge, and the Dogstar. In addition, it also has thriving markets such as the Brixton Market, (known for its West Indian food stuffs). Although Brixton is still known for its Bohemian flair it, at the same time, it continues to be considered unsafe for women.

Brixton Black Women's Group

In 1973 young women who had been involved in the Black Power Movement formed the organization--Brixton Black Women's Group--to address sexism, work, childcare, housing, education, and police brutality.

During the course of my research I learned that many of the women who were involved in black women's community activism in the 1970s and early 1980s are still in contact with one another. My first encounter with "Jessica"⁸ and "Caroline," former members of Brixton Black Women's Group, was in March of 1999. This was approximately one month after my initial interview with one of the writers from

⁸ I have replaced all names with pseudonyms.

*Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain.*⁹

Sensitive to my research, she was more than willing to make contacts with other former grass-roots activists. The author first contacted Jessica--a former member of BBWG--and then later gave me her contact information. After a telephone conversation with Jessica, she kindly told me that she could arrange for another former member, Caroline, to be present during this interview as well. I was pleased to know that I was going to interview both women. The plans were set and I was to go to Jessica's home, in St. Alban's, Hertfordshire.

On a typically rainy, overcast day in March, I took the Silverlink Train service, one of Britain's regional rail lines, to St. Alban's, Hertfordshire. The journey was approximately one hour and forty minutes outside of London. Upon my arrival at the station I was to phone Jessica who then would pick me up. When I arrived in St. Alban's I initially saw no other "ethnic minorities" at the train station. Shortly thereafter, near the telephones, I saw a tall, strikingly beautiful, slender black woman with clear dark skin and a closely cropped "natural." She was in her late thirties and I later found out that she was Jamaican.

⁹ A groundbreaking work on Black women's lives in Britain written in the mid-1980s.

I made an assumption that this woman had to be my informant, Caroline. She looked at me with a bit of familiarity. My assumption in this case was accurate; she was, indeed Caroline. As we walked outside in the pick-up area she confirmed in a British accent, "You must be Tracy." I later found out that St. Alban's, a predominantly white area, only occasionally has ethnic minorities at its train station, so we didn't exactly "blend in."

It turned out that Caroline's assumption that I was not from England, however, was similar to that of others. On several occasions during my field research, I was told, "You don't look like you are from England." In other instances I was asked, "Where are you from?" As the research progressed I developed ease in explaining, that I was an anthropologist doing field research in London, and that I had come to England from New York, where I was attending graduate school. Just mentioning New York often brought a smile to many faces. People engaged me in conversation about America; they were particularly curious about shopping, food, and most of all, crime in New York. Moreover, I was told that my "American" appearance--a range of nationalistic markers interpreted differently depending on whom I spoke to--was a dead giveaway. For example,

wearing "smart clothes," exhibiting an overall comportment that was "different," and having a discernable sense of style that contrasted with the everyday Briton, on top of my closely cropped "natural" hair, were, apparently revealing. Such markers, I learned, often distinguished me from my informants.

Back at the train station in St. Alban's, Jessica soon arrived by car to pick-up Caroline and myself. In her late forties, she was a slim black Guyanese woman who also wore a closely cropped natural. She had a few gray hairs and looked very distinguished. On the way to Jessica's house we drove through predominantly middle-class neighborhoods, with their detached (single family) homes, groomed lawns, and cars parked in the driveways. Jessica's house looked similar to the others in this residential neighborhood. We went inside and I met her husband, a white English man in his late 40s or early 50s and their 16 year-old daughter, who was Caroline's goddaughter.

While her family members moved around the house doing their daily routines, Jessica, Caroline, and myself began to talk about their involvement in Brixton Black Women's Group in particular, and black women's organizations in general. This conversation took place in the kitchen. Jessica, at times assisted by her husband, prepared lunch,

while Caroline and I started talking about black women's grass-roots organizations.

Caroline, former member of Brixton Black Women's Group, described it beginning as follows:

It came into existence [around] 1970. Some of the women, however, were functioning within the Panthers....Actually there were two organizations. Women started various study groups (within the Black Panthers) and then the Black Women's Group came out of that. In the study groups there were often discussions of Marx and Engels...and many people were trying to grapple with those writings. No white people were in these groups..[the organization was] modeled according to what [it] thought black people in the US were doing--[that is, they were] Black Nationalist (Interview, 29 March 1999).

Jessica added:

In the Brixton Women's Group, 'black' was seen as political. People who were Asian and Caucasian (not white) were in the group. And people use to query why these people were there... Women of BWG worked with white women on issues concerning people of other countries...We worked with women in Ireland, because we felt a certain kinship, because they too were suffering from imperialism, as we saw it then, their struggles we thought were our struggles... We worked very closely with people like that...with [those] white women...(Interview, 29 March 1999).

These interviews reflect the flexibility of racial categories and meanings. As was clearly expressed in Jessica's interview, she did not consider white women from Ireland as *white*. In effect, by using "black" as a political category while simultaneously recognizing

Britain's long-standing colonial dominance over Ireland, she saw Irish women as different from, for example, white English women. The label black was based on shared experiences of colonialism and imperialism, rather than phenotype, race, or color.

Similar to many community activists interviewed, these two women became involved in the Brixton Black Women's Group via other grass-roots organizations. Caroline was drawn in through her active participation in black power and black nationalist groups, Jessica as an active member of a women's liberation group who was subsequently recruited by one of the BBWG's founding members. There were others interviewed whose involvement with grass-roots organizations was something new. As one former member from St. Vincent explained, "well...working together as women was nothing new." "Marilyn" told me that because she had attended an all girls school in St. Vincent, and was, in addition, brought up in a family environment that encouraged working together as women, this form of collectivity (that is, with women) was not new. In contrast, she remarks, "'race'--now that was different...'race' was not a priority until I came to England." She came to London when she was 18 years old in the early 1980s, specifically to join her parents and

attend university. The black women's community organizations during these years welcomed both old and new, veterans and rookies, regardless of previous experiences.

Throughout the 1970s, many unknown or lesser-known women made significant contributions to black women's organizations in England. It was during my interviews with these women and others that the name of Olive Morris was remembered with both laughter and affection. Morris was the "big" person of five-foot stature who initiated the squatter's movement at Sabarr's Bookshop, the first black bookshop in London, as described above.

Born in 1953, Olive Morris came to Britain from Jamaica at the age of eight. Early in her life she embraced a radical, political ideology as exemplified by her involvement in the Black Power Movement and her membership in the Black Panther Party. After the decline of the Black Panther Movement, her activism did not cease. In 1973, she helped form the Brixton Black Women's Group (Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe 1993[1985]: 151-152). According to Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe, "the political perspective she brought to the group helped it to develop a coherent political ideology, based on the needs of ordinary Black people in the community, which made clear links with other anti-imperialist struggles" (1993[1985]: 152-153).

Olive Morris made unforgettable as well as immeasurable contributions to black communities throughout England, being active, for example, in Brixton and Manchester. As a student at the University of Manchester from 1975 to 1978, she was steadfast in furthering the right to education for black people and was actively involved in the National Coordinating Committee of Overseas Students. Furthermore, while in Manchester, she was a tireless advocate for the gender-specific concerns of women. In this regard, she worked with the Manchester Black Women's Co-Operative, helping mothers in Manchester improve the conditions and quality of education for their children by campaigning for a supplementary school as well as a black bookshop (Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe 1993[1985]:153). As one of the founding members of Brixton Black Women's Group, she helped launch the Organization of Women of Asian and African Descent (OWAAD). Formed in 1978, OWAAD was an umbrella organization for black women's grass-roots groups (Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe 1993[1985]: 151-155).¹⁰

An important dimension in the work of Morris was her interest in struggles in other parts of the world. As observed by Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe (1993[1985]: 153),

¹⁰ I discuss the Organization of Women of Asian and African Descent in greater detail in the following section.

Morris saw a connection between "Third World" peoples and those of the white working class; this insight developed further with her journey to China. In addition, Morris will be remembered for her commitment to education.

Unfortunately, Morris died of cancer shortly after the formation of OWAAD at the age of twenty-six (Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe 1993[1985]: 154).

The Organization of Women of Asian and African Descent

My introduction to the Organization of Women of Asian and African Descent was through the work *Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain*, one of whose three authors, the Ghanaian-English writer, Stella Dadzie, who still lived in London. Through my affiliation with the University of Greenwich and its the Department of Gender and Ethnic Studies, I located a graduate student who had previously interviewed this former OWAAD activist. Shortly after I received the details, I phoned, explained the nature of my research and was quickly granted an interview day and time.

On the day of the interview (a cold day on the first of February), I negotiated my way around London and travel on the British Rail as well as the tube (subway); the journey took just over an hour. I arrived at Dadzie's house at about 11:00am. She opened the door, I introduced myself,

and she welcomed me into her home..She spoke in a very soft voice. I appreciated the quietness of her house. I was guided to the sitting room where I admired the minimalist décor--African art, books, and key pieces of furniture. I was called into the kitchen while Dadzie made tea and she explained to me in a hoarse voice that she had lost her voice (from aerobics instruction), and was trying not to over use it. (I realized that it was this activity that disguised her age--she was in her late 40s at time of the interview.) While in the kitchen, I was introduced to her son who was in his late teens.

During this interview, Dadzie, similar to many of the women I interviewed, seemed genuinely concerned about my dissertation. She further put me at ease when she explained her sensitivity to life histories, the importance of my research and the need to document the lives of black women. From that point on she spoke slowly, and I listened intently. In the following section I provide an overview of OWAAD, enriched by Dadzie's memories.

The Organization of Women of African Descent (OWAD) was formed by a small group of young students and community activists who came from black women's groups such as the African Students Union (UK), the Brixton Black Women's Group, the Eritrean Women's Study Group, and the Black

Women's Alliance of South Africa. Initially, the organization's vision was to "engender support for liberation struggles in Africa" (Williams 1993: 159). This central concern shifted during a 1977 conference in Coventry when a critical issue emerged--the need to include South Asian women in the organization. Similar to the Afro-Asian unity expressed in the 1960s, one of the major elements was the recognition of shared historical experiences of racism, sexism, and colonialism between Afro-Caribbean and Asian women. Therefore, in less than a year after the organization's formation (in 1978) its name was changed to the Organization of Women of Asian and African Descent (OWAAD) (Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe 1993[1985]; Williams 1993).¹¹

OWAAD was formed as a national network and some of its most significant aims were: (1) to oppose all forms of racism, sexism, and discrimination against black people; (2) to support working-class as well as all anti-imperialist struggles; (3) to build links with black women's groups; (4) to foster a better understanding of the members' experiences of racial, sexual, and economic exploitation (Williams 1993: 159; see also SPEAKOUT 1984). OWAAD

¹¹ See Figure 4.

Figure 4 - Black Women's Organizational Chart, No. 2

Name of Organization	Duration	Location	Name Changes
Brixton Black Women's Group (BBWG)	1973 - 1986/1988	London	Initially known as Brixton Women's Group (BWG)
Organization of Women of Asian and African Descent (OWAAD)	1978 - 1983	London	Initially known as Organization of Women of African Descent (OWAD)

followers also campaigned against such issues as: police brutality, racist attacks, discrimination in housing policies, and institutional racism. Additional concerns on OWAAD's agenda were meaningful to black men as well as women; these included education, rape and domestic violence, deportation, immigration and law, school exclusions, and healthcare. Former OWAAD member (currently a psychological counselor), Marilyn, told me:

Black men were in prison; many of these were actually young boys. There was no time for navel gazing. [In those days,] Black women ...organized very differently. My life changed in the sense that I was more politicized [than ever before]....(Interview, 17 March 1999)

Most important, perhaps, OWAAD provided black women with the opportunity to discuss, exchange ideas, and lend support to each other on a national level. Thus, it was the umbrella organization for many black women's organizations nationwide. What is more, it served as the catalyst for the further creation of black women's groups throughout Britain.

Theory and Practice, Cross-Fertilization and International Dimensions

In recalling the various aspects of black women's organizations in the 1970s and 1980s, Jessica, former

member of the Organization of Women of Asian and African

Descent suggested:

There seemed to be so much that we had to take on and had to do. Today there are one-issue campaigns--i.e., Greenpeace. During the 1980s, there were political organizations that had a whole range of issues that we campaigned against. One of the strong points of the organizations then was the international dimension... it is very different now. Women were involved in the African National Congress... and there were parallels to the US as well. And women were from all parts of the world... and it kept the women on the pulse of what was happening in all parts of the world....[T]he international perspective was very much part of the organizations...the governing bit... it was a part of [our] politics (Interview, 29 March 1999).

As observed by Sudbury (1998:9), archival documentation in relation to black women's grass-roots organization in England is scattered and not easily accessible. As I discovered during my fieldwork, much archival material has been lost, discarded, or remains in the attics of former members. During my interviews, those who still had documents would have a box waiting for me to sort through. The boxes primarily contained photographs, flyers, and newsletters. As Dadzie explained to me, ultimately she would like her materials to be housed in an archive; until then, they will remain in her attic. Fortunately, both BBWG and OWAAD were two of the early black women's organizations whose struggles and campaigns

are documented in the organizations' newsletters--*SPEAK OUT* (Brixton Black Women's Group) and *FOWAAD!* (Organization of Women of Asian and African Descent).

Despite the scarcity of archival material, the life histories and interviews revealed that there was much cross-fertilization among organizations during these years. In London, women who were involved in OWAAD were also involved in other organizations such as: Haringey Black Women's Center, East London Black Women's Organization, Peckham Black Women's Group. Elsewhere in England they belonged to such organizations as: Birmingham Black Sisters, Liverpool Black Sisters, Nottingham Black Women's Group, and so on. This kind of cross-fertilization is regarded by some as one of the most important elements in black women's organizations. Interaction kept women "on the pulse" of what was happening on a national, local and global scale.

Coupled with this cross-fertilization was a well-developed cross-cultural awareness and identification with other women of color. As noted previously in the work of Olive Morris, during these years, black women's organizations embraced the concerns and issues of black people in the international context. In the second issue of *FOWAAD* (September 1979: 7), for example, there is a human

rights article about a 35 year-old black mother in the US-- Dessie Woods--who was convicted for killing her rapist, a white man. Although brief, the article also documented the high population of black men and women in the US prison system. In its December 1983 issue, the newsletter *SPEAK OUT* (1983:13) calls for international solidarity with women in Namibia and El Salvador in addition to criticizing the United States' invasion of Grenada. At the same time, black women's organizations were concerned with what was happening to women on the local and national front, embracing issues and campaigns in related to race and gender in Britain.

These organizations were also concerned with class oppression, including that suffered by Irish women. Nor did they see the Irish struggle for the liberation of Northern Ireland from England as irrelevant. In the same December 1983 *SPEAK OUT* (December 1983: 13), for example, there is a report from the London Armagh Coordinating Committee which addresses the systematic practice of women's strip-searches (in the presence of both men and women) in Armagh women's prison in Northern Ireland. Also, there is a briefing on the Southall Campaign against the Police and Criminal Evidence Bill that enabled the police to "assert their authority... through random harassment, arrest, detention and

general coercion of the public" (*SPEAK OUT*, December 1983: 10).

The state's increased policing and criminalization of black youth in the late 1970s and early 1980s enraged generations of people in the black community. In particular, black youth were victims of the rebirth of a nineteenth century vagrancy act. Those who were suspected of vagrancy or loitering were on the receiving end of "search under suspicion" operations (better known as 'SUS'). That means black youth were often arrested, found themselves charged--allegedly due to violating this act--and subject to police brutality. Black women's organizations were committed to the SCRAP 'SUS' campaign which involved newsletters, a conference, and reports to newspapers. The ultimate objective was to inform the entire public about the 'SUS' law (*FOWAAD!*, July 1979: 3; Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe 1993[1985]: 160).

FOWAAD!'s third newsletter (November 1979) drew marked attention to the newly elected Tory government's plan to make sweeping cuts in social services, education, and health care. The newsletter notes that conservative government policies would have a "devastating effect on the standard of living of both black and white working class" (*FOWAAD!*, November 1979: 3). For example,

The cuts planned for Education range from nurseries to adult evening classes. Young black mothers in particular will be badly affected by closures and cut backs in council-run nurseries, for these will effectively force them and other working mothers back into their home (their rightful place, according to the Tories)- unless they can afford to pay up to 20 [pounds] per week for private nurseries, of course (*FOWAAD!*, November 1979: 3).

All told, these articles reveal the various concerns of black women's organizations that ranged from a cross-cultural awareness and identification with women in an international context to addressing issues and concerns within the black community in London.

As my interviews and archival data reveal, much of the organizing during these years centered on education and literacy. Education was and remains a critical element in the lives of black people. Most of the women in the black women's organizations were university-educated women. As former BBWG member Caroline states, "many women were trying to get their qualifications...or heading that way...it was certainly a catalyst for many people" (Interview, March 29, 1999). Moreover, it was education that seemed to link women together in different parts of England. Women's networks often included friends who were attending universities throughout England and even in different parts of the world. For these black women, as for many today, education

was seen and understood as a liberating force.

Coupled with their emphasis on political education and literacy, black women's organizations of the 1970s were seemingly marked by their commitment to link theory and practice, often through the framework of Marxist or socialist feminism. As noted above, the emphasis on education was demonstrated in study groups where women read Marx and Engels. It was also confirmed in the newsletters where books by such authors as Angela Davis, bell hooks, and Buchi Emecheta were reviewed.

The politics of the period contributed to shaping the structure of organizations as well as their efforts to link theory and practice. During my interview with Valerie Amos, a Baroness, and current member of the House of Lords and one of the founding members of Birmingham Black Sisters (BBS), she told me, "there was a politics of the period...it ranged from Black Nationalism to a class-based Marxism" (22 March 1999).

Baroness Amos, who came to Britain from Guyana in 1963 at the age of nine, is widely known for her collaborative work on race, class, and gender (see Amos, Lewis, Mama, and Parmar 1984). She currently serves as a primary spokesperson on international development, social security, and women's issues. During our interview, Baroness Amos

suggested that much of black women's grass-roots organizational commitment to link theory and practice stemmed from the left-based academic institutions where women were studying such as, the University of Warwick and the University of Birmingham. Most important perhaps is the political-economic context in which these organizations existed.

Conflict, Contradiction, and Transformation: The Organization of Asian and African Descent and the Brixton Black Women's Group

Despite these years of passionate political mobilization, the Organization of Women of Asian and African Descent had a notably short life span, folding in 1983¹², just five years after its formation. OWAAD was one of the most influential organizations regarding the political empowerment of black women, yet there were difficulties within it. According to an editorial in *SPEAK OUT* (December 1983:3), the rifts and contradictions within OWAAD began to reveal themselves between the second and third national black women's conferences sponsored by the organization in 1980 and 1981. Several issues seemed to undermine this organization.

¹² See Figure 4.

One of the most controversial as well as difficult points of contention was how to organize across African, Caribbean and Asian communities (*SPEAK OUT* December 1983: 4; see Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe [1993] 1985).

[W]hilst we all recognized such unity as an objective reality, we were unprepared to deal with the kinds of differences between us, which resulted from our concrete experiences (*SPEAK OUT* December 1983:4).

Organizing across African, Asian, and Caribbean communities created a complex situation in relation to grass-roots activism. A case in point was where to place priorities. Central to the women from South Africa, for example, were those struggles on the African continent for liberation from apartheid. At the same time, the organization was also concerned with focusing on the political struggles in Britain. In the end, African and Caribbean women realized that they could not address racism in Britain without responding to issues and concerns raised by Asian women. In the beginning this was one of the strengths of the organization but over time, it seemed to create a fault line. In other words, OWAAD found it difficult to address the needs and concerns of all of its members.

In one sense, we were all-embracing, but in another, more practical way we had not widened our base to consciously include all of those who

could and should be involved (*SPEAK OUT*, December 1983:4)

Second, as Williams (1993:159) has noted, OWAAD faced criticisms from those who suggested that the organization was a divisive group within the black community--that it was dissociated from the community, constituting a middle-class and not a working-class mobilization (Williams 1993; *SPEAK OUT*, December 1983: 5-6). As Veronica, an African American from the San Francisco Bay Area,¹³ and former member of BBWG and OWAAD told me:

We found that we were working for working-class people's rights but many of them thought we were a middle-class group of people. Actually, we were... but we didn't want to admit it. We refused to accept the label of middle-class. You know, it was a negative term...and we were saying we identify with grass-roots women. At the same time, the grass-roots women were saying 'You're not like us... I couldn't leave my family week after week and go meet somewhere. I have to cook the dinner, wash the clothes, feed my family, and you are not representing who I am.' Those were hard things for us to come to terms with. It just didn't fit with our persona, you know the 'right-on' activist on the frontline (Interview, 11 May 1999).

In contemplating the past while at the same time questioning my usage of the term "grass-roots," Marilyn gently reminded me that OWAAD was full of young university educated, middle-class women. She suggested that this was a

¹³ Veronica, currently in her forties, moved to Britain in the mid-to-late 1970s.

legitimate basis for criticism. In our interview she told me,

OWAAD was full of middle-class women...we should not romanticize about that. These were university-educated women. You needed to have the ability, time and skills to coordinate. When you look at [the book] *Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain*, all of the women who wrote it were university-educated women (Interview, 17 March 1999).

Third, issues in relation to sexuality also played a role during OWAAD's existence. The struggle for black women to define themselves within the context of battles against racism, imperialism, relations of production and gender, was a challenge to many traditions as well as cultural practices. As an organization, OWAAD "placed gender relations and women's oppression onto the political agenda of black organi[z]ations" (*SPEAK OUT*, December 1983:5). Ultimately, the organization tried to understand sexuality in the context of race, class, and gender while at the same time it resisted the fault lines of making sexual orientation the basis of organizing or division. This approach relegated sexual preference to the "private" sphere and, among other things, contradicted the organization's tenets that both the public and private worlds were indeed one (*SPEAK OUT*, December 1983:5).

The Brixton Black Women's Group did not dissolve until

sometime between 1986-88.¹⁴ My analysis suggests that the reasons for the gradual disintegration of BBWG were fourfold: (1) debates over state funding; (2) generational conflicts; (3) the need to address personal issues; (4) the "flattening of leftist politics." First, in the early-to-mid 1980s Brixton Black Women's Group encountered difficulties related to the funding they received from the state. During these years the group purchased a house through funding from the Greater London Council (GLC) via the Lambeth Council.¹⁵ The house was used to address BBWG's concern with literacy, serving as a site for workshops and reading groups. Moreover, BBWG allowed other grass-roots groups to utilize the space. There was, however, much contention within the organization as to whether or not BBWG should have accepted money from the state. According to Veronica, much of the debate was about the inability of BBWG to criticize the state, because the organization was using its funds (Interview, 11 May 1999). Proponents, on the other hand, claimed that the funding provided the group with the ability to put theory into practice (Interview, 11 May 1999); i.e., they could provide a crèche for women.

¹⁴ See Figure 2 and/or 4.

¹⁵ I provide a more detailed discussion of the GLC in Chapter IV.

After receiving the money for the house, the focus of the organization shifted from various activities and campaigns to running the center.

Second, the dissolution of BBWG can be attributed to the transformations in the nature of organizing within the group. The mid-1980s ushered in a new set of women who were committed to community activism. According to several informants, it was at this point that BBWG encountered generational conflicts and problems due to divisions among members about organizational objectives. In addition, there were disagreements concerning how projects were to be carried out. One significant difference stemmed from the fact that many older members believed that the newer, younger members did not have a real understanding of history. In other words, as Jessica told me:

It was time for many of the women of Brixton Black Women's Group to leave and [as well as] the time for many new people to come in...It was always dynamic...[but] there was a different set of women coming in and there was some conflict. In the beginning there was a lot of continuity, but as new people came in it was, at times, like reinventing the wheel. The house seemed to usher in a new dynamic... a new setting...there was the GLC (Greater London Council) and there were Women's Units and Race Units. Younger women began to come in...more radical women came in with the socialist feminists who were already there. Younger women who came in had no sense of the history...they were fresh out of college and they wanted to change the world...[T]hey expected the group to be a certain way [based on their

personal beliefs]because [they thought it] should be... as opposed to the struggles that made it[the way it actually was]. That kind of appreciation was difficult (Interview, 29 March 1999).

Third, during the last years of BBWG, women expressed the need to talk more about who they were as individuals on a personal level. Many women wanted to discuss their lives and experiences, as women with children, as lesbian women, as black women with white men (Interview, Veronica, 11 May 1999). As a result, Sisters in Struggle (SIS) developed as an offspring of BBWG. It was meant to be a consciousness-raising group. The women tried to incorporate this group into their political activism but they were not as successful as they had anticipated. SIS existed for approximately three years.¹⁶

Finally, the gradual disintegration of BBWG was influenced by the role of the state and the overall context of the "flattening of the Left" in England.¹⁷ After the Tory victory, and especially under Thatcher, there was a substantial erosion of Left politics which changed the way that organizations functioned. Much grassroots activism

¹⁶ See Figure 5.

¹⁷ This term was used by one of my informants. I have retained its usage because it best describes the process by which a radical Left politics diminished in Britain. Later in this chapter I begin a discussion of the flattening of a Left politics, which is explicated further in Chapter IV.

Figure 5 - Black Women's Organizational Chart, No. 3

Name of Organization	Duration	Location	Name Changes
Brixton Black Women's Group (BBWG)	1973 - 1986/1988	London	Initially known as Brixton Women's Group (BWG)
Organization of Women of Asian and African Descent (OWAAD)	1978 - 1983	London	Initially known as Organization of Women of African Descent (OWAD)
Sisters in Struggle (SIS)	Existed for 3 years in the mid-to-late 1980s	London	None

began to fragment during this period. As Veronica told me,

We were fighting a government that had increasingly turned a deaf ear to us and really didn't need to listen to what we had to say... And, they kept being elected. The Thatcher years were very dark years...and when she kept getting re-elected, it was difficult to deal with... it was very demoralizing for anybody who believed in a fair and just society...The Tories really did dismantle socialism in this country. [Ultimately] we felt that we could not continue to "buck" the system in the same way and we hadn't solved all of the problems...(Interview, 11 May 1999).

There seems no question that the flattening of the Left influenced the folding of OWAAD, Brixton Black Women's Group, as well as other grass-roots organizations, specifically those that embraced an anti-imperialist approach to activism.

All told, black feminist grass-roots organizing in England raises a number of controversial issues: How do gender-specific groups organize across racial-ethnic lines? To what extent do these organizations mobilize across local neighborhoods? What type of divisions does this create in black communities? (Williams 1993: 159). Research on women's community activism highlights the complexity of race, gender, and class and how this intersection informs the basis of political action.

The Continuous Shift to the Right: Race, "Riot," and the Seeds of Thatcherism

In Britain, the flattening of the Left has been a continuous process rooted in the shift to the Right. Influenced by the work of Antonio Gramsci, Stuart Hall argues that analyzing the flattening of the Left requires us to simultaneously examine the terrain of Thatcherism, and the ways it grounded itself as a "political project" and "historic bloc." To this end, in "The Great Moving Right Show" (Hall 1988a: 39; see also Hall 1983), an early, yet insightful analysis of Thatcherism, Hall underscores that Britain's "swing to the Right" during the early Thatcher years was a development that can be traced to the 1960s.

The Seeds of Thatcherism

The 1979 election of Margaret Thatcher as Britain's Prime and the years that followed, best known as Thatcherism, are often considered as a radical break in the post-World War II social consensus. As such, beginning in 1979 Britain experienced noticeably intense ideological as well as political assaults on social spending (Pierson 1995:1). There was an intense focus on privatization, budget controls, and a comprehensive restructuring of capital, labor, the state, and the relations between them

(Laybourn 1995: 258). Following both Hall (1988a) and Martin Jacques (1983) I view this as a political project and historic bloc that first developed within the post-World War II context.

Using former Prime Minister Harold Wilson's (1964-1970) term in office as a point of departure, Martin Jacques notes that the mid-1960s represented Labour's first return to office since Clement Atlee's administration (1983:41). During the Wilson years, Labour focused on, among other things, stability and modernization within the government (Jacques 1983; Porter 1994). Labour's emphasis was different from that of the Conservatives, who adhered to the idea of a free, self-regulating market. Labour succeeded in uniting the working classes. But as Jacques has explained, the Wilson government faced many economic difficulties, one of which was Labour's attempts to reorganize industrial capital. As a result, the government attacked "the economic position of the working class, through bouts of deflation, [and] wage restraint. [Ultimately,] this led to growing trade union opposition which further undermined Labour's strategy" (Jacques 1983: 42). At the same time, as discussed in Chapter II, the Wilson government saw a rapidly changing country with regard to an influx of immigrants from Africa, South Asia

and the Caribbean and increasing racism against people from these countries.

Following the Wilson administration was the Conservative Prime Minister Edward Heath (1970-1974). Heath's Tory government--unlike the Labour administration before it, which emphasized modernization through planning--emphasized a self-regulating market and a reduced role of the state while simultaneously reasserting law and order in relation to the working classes, crime, and social unrest. During these years, inflation was approaching an unprecedented level of 25 percent; in 1972, unemployment was at one million (Porter 1995: 332). There were a series of strikes in the early 1970s that were the most troublesome since the late 1920s (Jacques 1983:46) and people began to experience serious economic decline. The growing number of African, Caribbean and Asian immigrants meanwhile created tensions in relation to employment and housing.

It is within this context that the Wilson-Callaghan (1974-1979) administration entered the scene. The Labour Party's return to office took place in the context of working class radicalism coupled with a shift to the Left within the party. However, as Britain sunk deeper into a recession, radical working-class resistance was a less

viable option (Jacques 1983: 50). Unquestionably, Wilson's 1976 resignation weakened the government as well.

Most important, perhaps, during the latter years of Labour's administration a strong anti-Labour sentiment developed, herding the growing shift to the Right in Britain. This type of Right-wing momentum was already evident in the rise of Enoch Powell in the 1960s and was seemingly a backlash to the grass-roots organizations and movements throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Race and "Riot"

There was a shaping of a politics that we could call Black Nationalism. We were very young and felt really radical...and we were really fed up with working with organizations that had nothing to tell us. There were uprisings taking place around that time in different parts of the country. In 1981 we had uprisings in all of the major conurbations...Sheffield, Manchester, Nottingham, and various areas of London...There were deaths in custody, police brutality, unemployment, every single manifestation of racism in its most explicit form was taking place. It was almost as if it was an affront to our communities that this was happening so visibly on our tele[vision]...and the government would refuse to have an inquiry (although we'd find the police guilty)...And the only way [we] could address this was by being very open about our disgust about the way we were being treated...I think black people were becoming increasingly disappointed by mainstream Socialist, white, Left movements who would use our issues for their purposes. So, therefore, we had a lot of support for black self-organization people seeing the political convenient [use of] "black" in a political context. Therefore, embracing the notion of African, Caribbean, and Asian unity. So

in the 1980s that's what was happening
(Interview, 28 January 1998).¹⁸

In Britain, urban uprisings and racist violence marked the 1970s and 1980s. The growing shift to the Right seemed to be the catalyst for such violence. Alongside political activism, as exemplified by grass-roots organizations, Right-wing groups came to the surface. Many of the confrontations were between those at the grass-roots and such Right-wing groups as the National Front and the British Movement. The deadly beating death of Blair Peach on April 23, 1979 is one such example. Peach was an Anti-Nazi League member who died during an anti-National Front demonstration in the densely populated South Asian section of Southall, in London. Over 2,000 Metropolitan Police, who protected the National Front supporters, blocked the demonstrators. As Fryer notes,

Right through the 1970s, Britain's black communities had been under attack from fascists and police. They had been forced to defend themselves, since nobody else could or would defend them... Between 1976 and 1981, 31 black people in Britain had been murdered by racists (1984: 395).

In April 1980, the predominantly West Indian populated

¹⁸ This excerpt is from my interview with Mark, a former member of Southwark Black Communities Consortium and is currently one of the board members of Britain's black think tank the 1990 Trust. There is a more complete discussion of this in Chapter IV.

area of St. Pauls, Bristol was the site for what would later be called a "riot." The Black and White café¹⁹ was one of the few meetings places for black youth and in April of 1980, the police blocked off the area of the café in order to raid it. On this particular day, after years of harassing the black youth in Bristol (see Fryer 1981: 398; Gilroy 1981: 223; Jacobs 1986: 139), the police were unexpectedly on the receiving end of stones, bricks, and bottles. This confrontation lasted for approximately eight hours. All told, 130 people were arrested, 91 were charged with minor offences and one person was found not guilty. From that moment, Bristol would be known as a site of resistance.

In January 1981, 13 young people died in a mysterious fire in Deptford, London. Prior to this occurrence there had been an attack on black people's homes in the area and a community center had been burned down. The black community was understandably suspicious of arson with regard to this particular fire in Deptford. Police investigations, however, rejected the possibility of a racially motivated case of arson. In March of that same

¹⁹ Some residents and former residents of Bristol told me that the Black and White café has for years been known as a "dodgy" (i.e., sketchy, unsafe) place. It has a reputation for harboring the solicitation and use of drugs, namely cocaine.

year, thousands of black people marched from Deptford (South London) to Central London demanding an end to racist murders and injustices. This tragedy coupled with introduction of what was known as Operation Swamp 81--"the extensive application of police powers to 'stop and search' people on the basis of 'reasonable suspicion'" (Jacobs 1986: 142)--was a significant factor in the Brixton uprising of 1981.

On 6 April 1981, a special patrol group of the Metropolitan Police, Operation Swamp 81 was introduced in Brixton and its application included raids on homes and cafes. For one week, 120 plain-clothed police officers walked the streets and stopped "suspects." The relations between the black community and the police grew increasingly tense as more than 1,000 people were stopped, over 100 arrests were made, and plain-clothed officers were found beating a man in front of one of the local schools (Gilroy 1981: 224). Within a couple of days, plain-clothed police officers were found beating and dragging another young black man into a police van. After this incident, youth in the black community began to retaliate. That same evening, police cars and two local pubs--the Windsor Castle Pub and the George Pub--were set on fire.

All told, the Brixton uprising lasted for over a week,

revealing the black community's growing frustration with the state and more specifically with the Metropolitan Police and its treatment of black people. Furthermore, the uprising sheds light on a political-economic context that included not only radical Left grass-roots organizations but also a Right-wing racialized state.

Articulations of Race

One of the more important transformations in the gradual shift toward the Right is the changing context of race, class, and gender. During the last 10 to 15 years of the twentieth century research on race has underscored the following: (1) the inseparability of race, class, and gender (see Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill 1990; Mullings 1997); (2) the flexibility and heterogeneity of racial categories and meanings (see Goldberg 1990; Dominguez 1987); (3) the complexities of race, class, gender and nation (see Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992; Balibar 1990; Williams 1989; Stoler 1989); (4) the construction, formation and (re)articulation of racial ideologies by those in positions of power (see Omi and Winant 1982; San Juan 1992); as well as (5) how racialized groups appropriate, contest, and subvert imposed racial meanings (Marx [1998]1999; Sivanandan 1982). Influenced by theories of political economy these social scientists have asserted

that the current manifestations of race and racism assume new forms and reconstructions. Paul Gilroy confirms this in *Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* by telling us that

Today's British racism, anchored in national decline rather than imperial expansion overseas, does not necessarily proceed through readily apparent notions of superiority and inferiority. The order of racial power relations has become more subtle and elusive than that ([1987] 1991: 40).

Harrison (1995) and Marable (1995) also argue that a unifying discourse of race obscures other contradictions, such as stratification by class and gender. Such studies reveal that the prevailing manifestations of race are ever more complex, elusive, and pervasive (see Mullings 1995). All told, they emphasize the diversity, fluidity, and complexity of race and racism.

Despite anthropology's recent attention to race, Harrison (1999) reminds us that *within* the discipline, work on race has remained on the periphery of scholarship (1999:609; see also Harrison 1988). In addition, Viswesaran (1998) convincingly argues that the discipline's lack of attention to race is based on the belief that anthropologists have long been in the vanguard of discussion and debates. Yet, racism's ability to mask, reinvent, as well as disguise itself requires social

scientists to cultivate more nuanced analyses of race and racism and at the same interrogate the new forms and reconstructions by which power is distributed and concentrated.

For example, in Britain, and more broadly in Western Europe, arguments about culture and "the insurmountability of cultural differences" may operate as a mask for racism (see Balibar 1991: 21). As Harrison suggests, this possibility put forward by Etienne Balibar in 1991,

challenges anthropologists to carefully 'unravel culture' vis-à-vis the country's underlying racial hierarchy...so that we can discern and detect 'race' when it is positioned at the deep level of shifting subtextual meanings" (Harrison 1999:610).

In a related manner, the shifting meanings of race are precisely what I wish to draw attention to in my discussions of Britain's "hierarchy of belonging" (see Chapters I and II). A subtext of difference underscores Britain's inclusion and exclusion of persons over time, although at given historical moments, "difference" is expressed as cultural, while at other moments as biological. Furthermore, such beliefs are embedded in constructions of the nation.

Blackness as a Contested Terrain

Within the British context, contrary to an essential,

deterministic, biological notion of blackness, the term "black" has been a site of resistance and inventiveness. As stated previously, there are several significant reasons why Britain's Black Power groups employed this term in the 1960s. Much of its popularity was due to the United State's usage of the term during the height of the Civil Rights/Black Power Movement, as well as to the independence struggles of African and the Caribbean countries (Sivanandan 1981). Through the media, Britain witnessed an African diaspora that reflected compelling images of revolution and change. These events, coupled with racist violence in its own backyard, empowered "Afro-Asian" unity. Furthermore, the umbrella of "blackness" continued to be used throughout the 1970s and 1980s as a way to fight racism and discrimination. As argued in this chapter, however, Afro-Asian unity with regard to "black" women's organizations was also problematic, and a source of conflict within the Organization of Women of Asian and African Descent.

Times have changed, leading to marked shifts in the way in which "ethnic minorities" define themselves. The term "black" as an umbrella category may no longer have the political significance it once had in previous decades. In other words, the political resonance of "black" has

shifted. Some of the change in usage is due to the changes in the larger political-economic context, creating new contradictions. Former Southwark Black Communities Consortium²⁰ activist Mark told me,

I think generally that just no matter what we say, in most of our communities "black" means African or Afro-Caribbean people. Asian people just use [the term] politically when it suits them. I think people involved in the struggle can see the basis for seeing "black" not as a descriptive term, because as soon as you start being descriptive then you start having problems. Members of our community will say...'I'm not black, I'm African, Nigerian...' (Interview, 28 January 1999).

He further argued that the label "black" was used as a divide and rule tactic in the popular press and media.

The Commission for Racial Equality, (in the 1980s) printed a big news release that said Asian people don't like to be called "black." They would rather be called Asian...and the popular press picked up on it (Interview, 28 January 1999).

In large measure, these shifts are due to backlash from academics and community activists in the 1980s, some of whom, like Tariq Modood (see 1988, 1990), have argued that the usage of "black" denies recognition of Asian identity, and that it creates a hierarchical ranking in which Asians become ambiguous or secondary blacks (Modood 1988:399). In addition, as Sudbury (1998) notes, the shift in the usage

²⁰ This organization is discussed in Chapter IV.

of "black" is also related to the influence of the United States. African American cultural production tends to "[equate] black identity with African descent" (Sudbury 1998: 110).

It may be useful to think about the shift in "blackness" in terms of Stuart Hall's observations in "Frontlines and Backyards." According to Hall (2000[1997]), in the 1980s Afro-Caribbeans and Asians were treated so much alike that they were easily subsumed under one political category. Today there is much of what he calls "cultural segmentation." In addition, he suggests that there are "internal frontlines" and divisions that have been generated by black British youth and the development of black British culture (Hall 2000[1997]): 127). According to Hall,

Black British culture is today confident in its own measure in its own identity--secure in a difference which it does not expect, or want, to go away still rigorously and frequently excluded by the host society, but nevertheless not excluding itself in its own mind. Blackness in this context may be a site of positive affirmation but is not necessarily any longer a counter identity (2000[1997]:127).

Indeed there is much cultural segmentation and I would agree that black British youth have carved out a space and made marks that have influenced British culture at large. Moreover, black transatlantic communication has shaped

black British identity tremendously. The notion that blackness is no longer a counter identity, however, should be questioned. Particularly in a country where nationalism is ever-present and discussions of race are at times whispered, I would argue that black is still embraced by many as a counter identity, even if not in the same way as 10 or 20 years ago. It is a complex situation nonetheless.

In Britain "English" is still used to describe or refer to those of (white) Euro descent born in England. It is used neither to refer to nor to describe a person of, for example, African or Asian descent born in England. On the contrary, persons of African or Asian descent are described according to the nationality of their parents as African, Asian etc., not referring to their place of birth. This distinction became even more of a reality through casual discussions I had with my friends and flat mates, as well as my interviewees. The phrase, "I'm not English," "I'm Jamaican, West Indian...I'm black, I'm "mixed race" or "half-English" was a shared collective identity. All told, the license to call oneself "English" has deep roots firmly planted in the mythical garden of Englishness. This myth is dependent on race and it is reserved for those who are white. The notable exceptions are those who are "mixed race." Also, as discussed in Chapter II, not just any

whiteness fits the mold for Englishness. I have shown that both Irish and Jews have been racialized as other than white. It is within this context that the use of "black" is embraced as a counter as well as a collective identity.

As discussed in this chapter, the formation of "black" grass-roots organizations in England was in response to a particular climate--one in which the state, with regard to "immigrants of color," had already to begun exercise a vice-like grip after the Second World War (see Chapter II). It was this environment, coupled with the much broader set of struggles for independence and uprisings against Empire that produced such anti-imperialist groups as the Universal Coloured Peoples Association and soon after, such gender-specific groups as the Brixton Black Women's Group. These organizations called for Afro-Asian unity, a political nationalism rooted in the quest for justice and equality, and were also determined to wage campaigns against the system. More specifically, this form of politics underpinned the formation and existence of black women's grass-roots organizations during the 1970s and 1980s. The changed political context of the Thatcher period, coupled with conflict within the organizations themselves, contributed to their gradual disintegration. As explained in the following chapter, that new climate allowed for some

new organizations to emerge.

Chapter IV:

State Transformations, Shifting Left and Right: The Iron Lady, the Loony Left, and the Grass-Roots

Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, a conservative shift to the Right alongside radical grass-roots activism characterized the 1970s and early 1980s. This chapter considers the second of three overlapping periods of grass-roots mobilization. Its focus is what Stuart Hall calls the "historic bloc" of Thatcherism. It begins with Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's rise to power in 1979 and spans through the late 1980s.

As discussed in Chapter III, urban uprisings occurred in the 1980s and during this period many grass-roots organizations disbanded. Others, however, emerged. This was the context for the formation of the Black Women's Action Group. At the same time, the gradual conservative shift to the Right was in full swing and Britain experienced strong anti-Labour sentiment. In other words, two contradictory

yet simultaneous developments underwrite this period: (1) the conservative move to the Right on a national level; and (2) the development of radical Left politics at the level of the local state, that is, local government. It is in the second phase that we see the Greater London Council's role as it interfaced with grass-roots activism. At the same time, these years are also marked by a gradual shift from a radical Left politics characteristic of the 1970s and early 1980s to a more diminished form of politics. This diminished form of politics is, perhaps, even more apparent in the following chapter.

In sum, Chapter IV has three major parts. In the first segment I discuss the state: Thatcherism, the structure of local government, and the Greater London Council. In the second section, through introducing Black Women's Action Group, I provide an ethnographic account of how state initiatives such as community consultation were actualized at the level of the grass-roots. In the final segment of Chapter IV, I analyze (1) the seemingly entangled relationship between the state and the grass-roots, (2) the tenuous connections between white Left and black community activists, (3) community organizations' ties to state funding, and (4) the suppression of Left-wing thought in Britain.

Thatcherism and the Iron Lady¹

Margaret Thatcher and the Conservatives came to power in May 1979. What Thatcher wanted was radical conservative transformation. In order to accomplish this, she steered a conservative administration to make radical changes with respect to, among other things, trade unions, public spending, taxes and police powers (Porter 1994: 359). Thatcher's path to modernity was rooted in neo-liberal politics. Her proposed form of survival in an increasingly international commercial market was the rediscovery of Victorian ideology. In particular, she wholeheartedly embraced the values of hard work, thrift, and personal responsibility (Porter 1994:364). But, the neoliberal version of Victorian ideology with respect to the state's control was in marked contrast to that of the nineteenth century. Thatcher embraced a free, self-regulating market *and* a strong state--one that had tough laws, strong policing, and was centralized (Porter 1994: 364-365).

As previously discussed, the rise of Thatcherism is rooted in the contradictions of Labour in the 1960s and 1970s as well as the economic recession of the 1970s. Buck and Fainstein (1992) note that inner London's sharp decline in manufacturing during the 1960s had reached Greater

¹ A term commonly used to describe Margaret Thatcher.

London by the 1970s. Overall, between 1961 and 1974 over 500,000 manufacturing jobs were lost in London (Buck and Fainstein 1992: 57). As Andrew Gamble suggests, Thatcherism pinned economic recovery on two key elements--the family and the state (1983: 121). Moreover, as Hall convincingly argues below, the mission of Thatcherism was the reconstruction of society on political, ideological and cultural levels.

Politically, Thatcherism is related to the recomposition and 'fragmentation' of the historic relations of representation between classes and parties; the shifting boundaries between state and civil society, 'public' and 'private'; the emergence of new areas of contestation, new sites of social antagonism, new social movements, and new social subjects and political identities... *Ideologically*, Thatcherism is seen as forging new discursive articulations between liberal discourses of the 'free market' and economic man and the organic conservative themes of tradition, family and nation, respectability, patriarchalism and order... *Culturally*, the project of Thatcherism is defined as a form of regressive modernization--the attempt to 'educate' and discipline the society into a particularly regressive version of modernity by, paradoxically, dragging it backwards through an equally regressive version of the past (Hall 1988a: 2).

For Margaret Thatcher, the political-economic context within which she came to power was critical. For example, Thatcher's rise to power is set within the context of Britain's deterioration: industrial decline, high levels of unemployment, insufficient growth and a vulnerable pound

(Porter 1995:354), on top of the loss of Empire. In addition to Britain's decline as an international world power and its chronic economic crisis, the country had seen struggles abroad for independence, and at home by the working classes as well as grass-roots organizations that threatened class and social alignments and challenged the established ideologies. Taken together these changes produced a "crisis of hegemony" (see Hall 1988a; Jacques 1983:52).

Another aspect of the context in which Thatcher rose to power stems from the shift that society was making towards the Right while it simultaneously experienced a decline in Left-progressive thought. For as Porter states,

Britain was becoming a more violent society domestically, with crimes of violence doubling during the course of the 1970s²; racist attacks in immigrant areas; picket-line battles; various cultural expressions of a new positive liking, even for aggression and anger (action films, the fashion for militaria, body-building, close-cropped hair styles, 'Punk rock' popular music); and on the far-right edges of the political world, a recrudescence of Nazi-style fascism in the guise of the burgeoning 'National Front' (1995: 357).

In addition, Porter draws attention to the growing affluence of the 1960s and suggests that it contributed to British society's shift from Left to Right. Individualism,

² See also *Annual Abstract of Statistics*, No. 117 p.1, (London, 1980).

for example, alongside growing prosperity of the 1960s fostered an anti-collectivist sentiment. The increase in acquisition of such material goods as automobiles and private homes, interpreted as anti-social trends, existed alongside the decline in manufacturing and industry. Overall, such individualistic attitudes undermined the common interests between people and the structures that developed out of such interests, i.e., trade unions and the welfare state (Porter 1994: 360-361). It is within this context that Britain experienced a "flattening of the Left."

Background and Structure: London's System of Local Government

Important to understanding the seeds of Thatcherism and the "flattening of the Left" is an awareness of Britain's system of local government. Local government in Britain is neither simple nor easy to understand. Much of its complexity is due to the frequent and substantial changes in Britain's Local Government Acts since the 1960s. For our purposes, there are two important Acts (passed in 1963 and 1985) that specifically changed London's local government structure.

London's unique system of local government reflects

the "exceptional character of the London region" (Flynn, Leach and Vielba 1985:46). London, the capital of Britain is also Britain's center of finance, business, tourism and culture. Characterized by intense urbanization (Flynn, Leach, and Vielba 1985:46), the city has a population of approximately seven million (Byrne 2000:110). Its rapid, ever-growing numbers have posed difficulties in determining exactly what and where London is (Byrne 2000: 110).

I begin this discussion of London's system of government at the end of the nineteenth century (1888), when Parliament created the London County Council (LCC), a governing body over the area of London responsible for, among other things, sanitation, housing provision, and street improvements. Just over a decade later, Parliament passed the London Government Act of 1899, which created metropolitan borough councils for the London area.³ This Act created a two-tier governmental system in which (1) the LCC

³ Borough refers to "mainly urban local authorities [councils] entitled to have a mayor (or provost) instead of a chairman of the council" (Byrne 2000: xii). Boroughs differ in geographical size; outer ones tend to be larger. See Figure 3.

A council, also known as a local authority, is a group of people "who are elected to be councilors and form a council, a body which takes authoritative decisions for the local areas" (Byrne 2000: 240). The term "local authorities" is also frequently used when referring to a member of the local government.

had responsibility over the whole metropolitan area as well as specific responsibility for education, health and welfare, and planning; (2) 28 boroughs (covering roughly the area of present-day inner London's 12 boroughs) had responsibility for public health and housing (Byrne 2000:34; Flynn, Leach, and Vielba 1985: 47).

In the midst of these changes, the City of London (also known as the City or the City Corporation)--a small area in the heart of London--was left as a separate authority governed by functionaries, such as justices, as in ancient and medieval times (Byrne 2000:110-111).

Over the next 50-60 years, London would outgrow its nineteenth century local structure. Concerns with regard to population growth in inner and especially in outer (greater) London, alongside an increase in commuting between the previously mentioned areas, were the impetus behind the Royal Commission's investigation into Local Government in the metropolitan area (Byrne 2000: 116). In 1960, the Commission unanimously recommended that the city-wide administration of London's two-tiered structure should be responsible for such services as public health, planning, housing and transport. These services, however, were to be concentrated and delivered by borough councils, except when they could be better performed by a greater,

umbrella body--what was to be known as the Greater London Council (Byrne 2000: 116).

From the London County Council to the Greater London Council

After the 1960 report and subsequent recommendations by the Royal Commission, Parliament passed the London Government Act of 1963(it went into effect in 1965). The Act called for the abolition of the London County Council and the Middlesex Council, both to be replaced by the Greater London Council (GLC). In effect, the following three major changes were to occur: (1) The Greater London Council would be an elected body of 100 councilors and 16 aldermen.⁴ (2) The geographical areas of London⁵ would be divided into 32 boroughs (12 inner + 20 outer) plus the City Corporation, each with an elected council constituting councilors and aldermen. (3) In terms of responsibilities and functions, the Greater London boroughs would be

⁴ Councilors are elected to represent a ward or district and are expected to have special interests in their respective local authority area. The number of councilors elected to the ward depends on the size of the electorate. Byrne states that aldermen were special non-elected councilors chosen by the council. They tended to be older, and had greater prestige and experience than the average member of council, and most aldermen were former councilors. Aldermen were abolished in the GLC in 1977 and the London boroughs in 1978 (2000: 117).

⁵ See Figure 3.

responsible for "local services of housing, health, welfare, libraries and non-major roads" (Byrne 2000: 116-117), while the GLC would have "wider, strategic functions of fire, ambulances, main roads, and refuse disposal" (Byrne 2000: 117). In addition, a special committee of the GLC was established, known as the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA), and that entity would specifically control education. The ILEA would include members of the GLC from inner London, plus a representative from each of the 12 inner London borough councils (Byrne 2000: 117-118). All told, London's system of government was a two-tier authority structure: the Greater London Council and the London metropolitan boroughs. The Inner London Education Authority was a special committee of the GLC.

Turning Local Government Upside Down: The Municipal Hub of Radical Left Politics

During the period of heightened grassroots community activism (as discussed in Chapter III), there was a "shaping of a radical politics" in the local government, particularly in London. In the decade following the London Government Act of 1963, a diverse group of men and women,

frequently nicknamed the "Loony Left" or "Urban Left,"⁶

emerged. Prominent among them were:

younger Labour councilors, community activists and radical professional local authority workers who came to prominence in local government in the early 1980s. The origins of this emergence of local socialism can be traced back to the events and shifting ideas of the late 1960s (Stoker 1988: 193 as cited by Jacobs 1992: 135).

How did this radical activism take shape at the level of local government? According to Lansley, Goss, and Wolmar (1989:6), much of the Urban Left emerged from the young, mostly student-radical-activists of the 1960s, who took part in anti-Vietnam demonstrations in Europe, particularly London and Paris. Others hailed from their activist experience in socialist and Marxist groups of the 1960s and 1970s. Many were also anti-nuclear, anti-NATO organizers. The majority of the "New Urban Left" political activists, however, emerged from their involvement in trade unions, the Anti-Nazi League, and many played an active role in anti-apartheid movements as well as the other grass-roots movements which, protested issues of race and gender

⁶ Several informants referred to this period and its radical supporters as the "Loony Left." Initially, the term carried a negative connotation, i.e., loony = crazy. Although during my interviews, the term was embraced for its association with radical politics. Both the "Loony Left," the "New Urban Left," and "Urban Left" were used by my informants as well as in the literature on local government in Britain (see also Byrne 2000; Goss 1988; Jacobs 1992; among others).

inequality (Lansley, Goss, and Wolmar 1989: 6).

By the late 1970s, increasingly these activists became involved in the Labour Party. By doing that, the Left base of the Labour Party was strengthened. This was important, especially after the Conservatives won the national election in 1979, marking the first of Margaret Thatcher's eleven years (1979-1990) as Prime Minister. As a growing conservative Right-wing sentiment began to increase at the national level, local councils seemed to be the ideal place for any type of leftist politics (Lansley, Goss, and Wolmar 1989: 66). More specifically, for Labour to dominate London at the local level was seemingly in direct challenge to the Conservative government at the national level.

In other words, it was during the 1980s that on the local level the Labour party increasingly dominated many of the councils. These councils were viewed as being in "the trenches" and they defended public services and jobs as a counter point to the overall general decline in services and local economies (Jacobs 1992: 135). According to Lansley, Goss, and Wolmar, "the Left was not just interested in running local councils, it was determined to change them...[The new councilors] were determined to turn government upside down, and to reintroduce 'socialist' objectives" (1989: 66).

Given that there were in effect, two parallel developments--on the one hand, Thatcherism and on the other hand, the "Urban Left"-- the latter represented the Left-wing local state and the former represented the Right-wing central state. In the end, however, Thatcherism as a "political project" and "historic bloc," as Stuart Hall has so fittingly described it, would beat the local state into submission and this defeat would ultimately adversely affect the grass-roots organizations. One interviewee summed up the situation as follows:

At that time, Thatcher made abundantly clear her views of black people. In a number of speeches she would say that there was a fear of being swamped by these outsiders, there was no room for ambiguity.... you knew where you stood (Interview, 24 January 1999).

In London, the Greater London Council was the backbone of the Left local state. In the early 1980s London's current Mayor, Ken Livingstone, led the GLC. A long-time member of the Labour Party, Livingstone had been involved in local politics since the late 1960s when he was in his early 20s (Forrester, Lansley, and Pauley 1985: 35). Throughout the 1970s he was elected to Lambeth Council; served as vice chair to the Housing Committee in Lambeth for a period of two years; was elected to serve on the GLC;

became a Camden⁷ councilor and served as Chair of Housing for two years (Forrester, Lansley, and Pauley 1985: 35). But, it wasn't until 1981 when Livingstone was elected as leader of the GLC that his role would shift from a minor politician to a public figure.

"Interfacing with Oppression Politics"

The shifts in the local government occurred at the time of the uprisings throughout the country (see Chapter III). It was then that the local government began to think about how it could, as Linda, a white English woman who is currently an employee of the London's Southwark⁸ council but was for many years a member of the Communist Party, put it "interface with oppression politics; and that culminated in local administrations" (Interview, 12 May 1999). As Kalbir Shukra (1990) tells us,

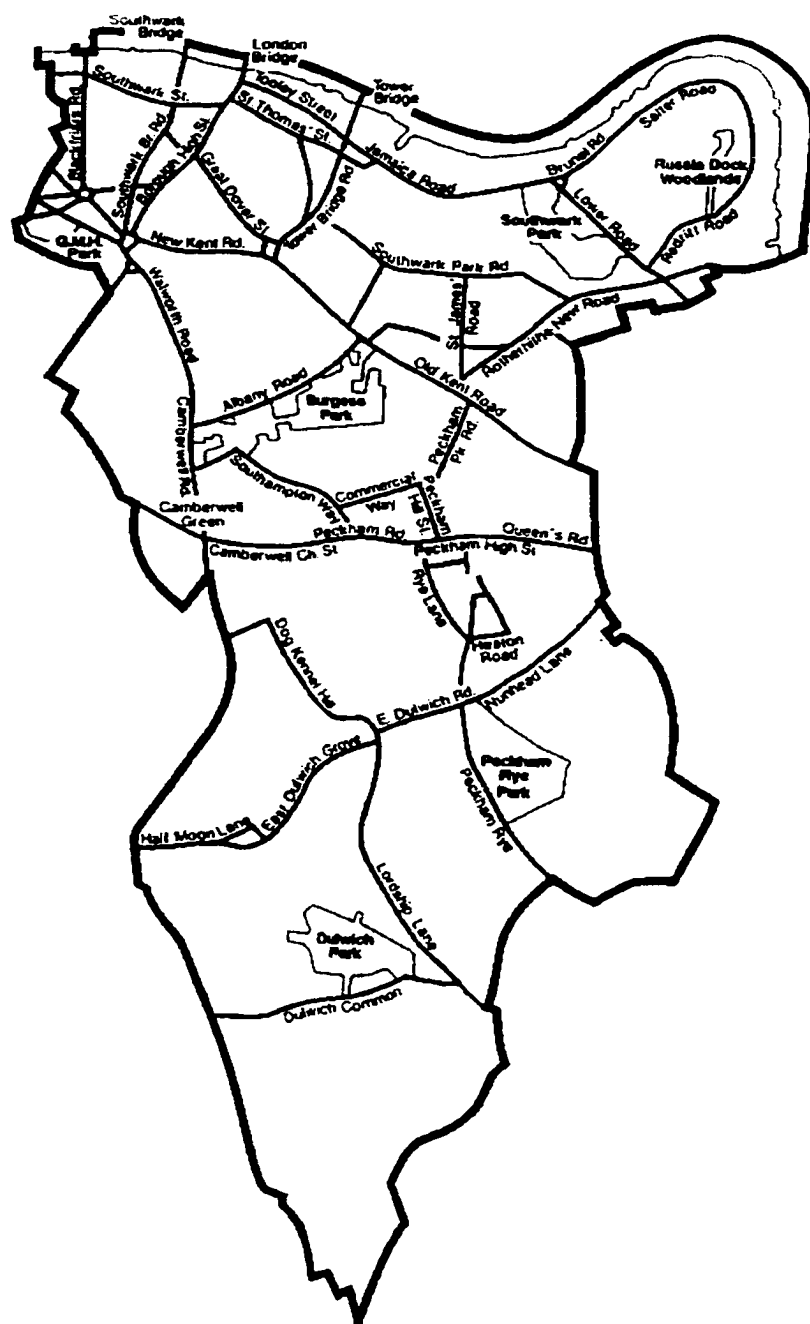
One of the ways in which the new [L]eft-wing councilors hoped to benefit working class people was by 'opening up' local people to local 'control.' [The GLC] "implemented its philosophy to open up decision making by trying to involve people they thought were directly affected by the work of the respective committees (1990:169).

Subsequently, in 1981, the GLC created an Ethnic

⁷ Camden is an inner London borough located north of the Thames River. See also Figure 3.

⁸ Southwark (pronounced "suthuck") is an inner London borough located south of the Thames River. See Figure 3 and 6.

Figure 6 - Map of the London Borough of Southwark



Minorities Committee and one year later a Women's Committee (1982). These committees were used to put race and gender on the local and national political agenda in a way that had not been done before. The Ethnic Minorities Committee was concerned with such issues as: reducing discrimination, changing internal recruitment and employment as well as lack of access to services; while the Women's Committee focused on discrimination and gender specific issues such as childcare (Forrester, Lansley, and Pauley 1985: 45). Similar to other GLC policy initiatives, both committees were allotted a budget for anti-discrimination campaigns in addition to grants for various ethnic minority and women's groups and their projects. To this end, in 1983 and 1984 the GLC Ethnic Minority Committee had a budget of 2.9 million pounds and the Women's Committee had one of 5.9 million pounds (Forrester, Lansley, and Pauley 1985: 48).

Putting race and gender on the local and national agenda, or in other words, "interfacing with oppression politics," required that these GLC umbrella-like-committees, with the London boroughs, create Women's and Race Equalities Committees within various localities. Borough councils consulted with community organizations in order to foster communication, and to involve the organizations in decision-making processes and the delivery

of services. In the process of consultation, councils either co-opted community members⁹ to serve on the committees or created consultative panels for the committees (Prashar and Nicholas 1986: 12).

According to Lansley, Goss, and Wolmar councils varied in terms of their degree of commitment and in the policies they adopted (1989: 125). In their words,

Most [councils] appointed race advisors; some established new committees with responsibility for race, and introduced some form of ethnic monitoring; others introduced the concept of the 'race dimension' into policy making, introduced equal opportunity training, and altered the disciplinary code to outlaw discriminatory behavior; nearly all declared themselves 'equal opportunity employers' (Lansley, Goss, and Wolmar 1989: 125).

Overall, however, the necessity to address individual as well as institutional racism led committees to tackle discrimination along with improving access to employment and services. Some of the pioneering London Borough councils that implemented these objectives were Lambeth, Lewisham, and Hackney; having paved the way, they were later joined by the boroughs of Southwark, Greenwich, and Islington. The boroughs tried to make significant changes by instituting such policy initiatives as race monitoring

⁹ There is a more detailed discussion of co-opting community representatives later in this chapter.

procedures and "positive action programs" (Lansley, Goss, and Wolmar 1989: 122-124).

Race monitoring came in the form of record keeping. Application forms for staff in all of the departments were distributed in order to get a baseline assessment racial and ethnic under-representation. Several informants as well as social analysts Stewart Lansley, Sue Goss, and Christian Wolmar have noted that race monitoring was very controversial because many local authorities, staff, departments, and other officials believed that there was no discrimination (1989: 124).

In a related matter, "positive action programs" (a term coined from affirmative action policies in the US), were created to "redress past imbalances, promote equal opportunities and ensure that any special needs of the black community were met" (Lansley, Goss, and Wolmar 1989: 123). To this end, under-representation in housing allocation was addressed; the council promoted the recruitment of foster care and adoptive parents from the black community; and, among other initiatives, racial awareness training was put into practice for staff, with recruitment possibilities.

In a similar development, women's committees were established in an attempt to counter-balance the under-

representation of women in local government. Moreover, women's committees addressed the state's reinforcement of gender discrimination as well as the dearth of women's involvement in decision-making processes, despite the fact that they were the primary consumers of a range of council services.

Similar to race committees, women's committees had several policy initiatives on their agenda such as monitoring recruitment and hiring practices and ensuring that local services provided for women's needs (Lansley, Goss, and Wolmar: 145-147). For example, women's committees instituted maternity leave provisions and in some cases nurseries for city employees. Moreover, women's committees looked within their own council's history to determine whether or not it was employing women.

Making sure that local services were provided to women, an additional concern of the women's committees, was approached by recording people's experiences as expressed in public meetings and by distributing questionnaires. Both were pursued in order to determine women's needs. Such studies revealed that households headed by poor or working-class women faced discrimination. Lansley, Goss, and Wolmar drew attention to the London borough of Southwark where, for example, single-headed households were

disproportionately allocated flats (apartments) in the worst council estates.¹⁰ More specifically, single, poor and working class women in need of accommodation were allocated one-room bed-sits that they had to share with their children, while couples were entitled to two bedrooms (1989: 147).¹¹

Taken as a whole, most of the attempts to improve the quality and condition of black people's lives (through race committees), as well as those to address discrimination toward women (via women's committees) were opposed by the Conservatives and the Right-wing of Labour. In particular, with regard to the race committees, council staff was suspicious of the new changes, as well as of the status, higher salaries, and clout given to race advisors (Lansley, Goss, and Wolmar: 123-124). Most of the Right-wing attacks against the race and women's committees stemmed from the fact that the GLC allocated substantial sums of money to

¹⁰ A council estate is a group or cluster of (often times high-rise) public, government-owned apartments--more commonly known as council flats. These estates are under the jurisdiction of one's borough.

¹¹ Depending on availability, a poor or working-class person seeking accommodation may be directed toward temporary housing in a bed-sit. That is typically a room in a shared house, with communal areas such as the kitchen and bath. Those who occupy bed-sits are often waiting for a council flat. Some bed-sits are properties of, and run by, the local borough council.

fund issue-related groups and projects, as previously noted. The GLC funds distributed to women's and race committees were in effect part of the Left's wider commitment to community groups.

However, as I discuss later in this chapter, as the GLC provided funding to many community-based organizations, grass-roots groups began to change. Through a gradual transformation in grass-roots mobilization, some community-based organizations folded and others emerged.

In the next section, I provide an ethnographic account of one of the organizations that emerged during the early 1980s--the heyday of the Greater London Council and of radical Left politics at the level of local government. This discussion will enable us to see how some GLC initiatives were carried out at the grass-roots level, and their effects on the actual activities that black women's grass-roots organizations were engaged in.

**From the Grassroots: The Center in the Borough of Southwark
Black Women's Action Group¹²**

Black Women's Action Group was formally constituted in

¹² As noted in the Chapter V, in the early 1990s Black Women's Action Group changed its name to Southwark Black Women's Centre. See also Figure 7.

Figure 7 - Black Women's Organizational Chart, No. 4

Name of Organization	Duration	Location	Name Changes
Brixton Black Women's Group (BBWG)	1973 - 1986/1988	London	Initially known as Brixton Women's Group (BWG)
Organization of Women of Asian and African Descent (OWAAD)	1978 - 1983	London	Initially known as Organization of Women of African Descent (OWAD)
Sisters in Struggle (SIS)	Existed for 3 years in the mid-to-late 1980s	London	None
Southwark Black Women's Centre (SWBC)	1983 - present	London	Previously known as Black Women's Action Group (BWAG)

1983. Its origins are in some ways similar to the black women's grass-roots anti-imperialist organizations (see Chapter III) that were founded in the early 1970s. As discussed, groups such as Brixton Black Women's Group formed in response to being overshadowed by men in Black Power organizations. Issues of gender and race were paramount to these women and they needed to address such concerns. There are some similarities in the ideological origins of Black Women's Action Group.

The story of Black Women's Action Group begins in the early 1980s when a small group of women, initially part of a group known as MAMA YEABO, decided to meet independently. Overshadowed by men, these women felt both unheard and dismissed in MAMA YEABO, whose members included African, Caribbean, and black British men and women. Similar to their predecessors of the previous decade, the women's definitive decision to break away from the group was made during a period in which people felt a heightened sense of politicization. The interlocking issues of gender, race, and class, as manifested through inequalities, exploitation, and differential access to resources, were central in the lives of these women. Such concerns served as the basis for collective action, and the result was the formation of a women's grass-roots organization known as

Black Women's Action Group (BWAG).

The small group of founders--women from St. Lucia, Trinidad, Jamaica, and Nigeria--frequently met in the coordinator's flat located in the surrounding housing estate, the Aylesbury. As the groups grew in membership and participation, they began to utilize space in one of the local schools. Ultimately, in 1985, with the help of seed money from local authorities allotted for women's organizations, combined with public funds known as Urban Aid, Black Women's Action Group leased and renovated an abandoned house from Southwark Council.¹³

"We Were Ordinary Women in Our Homes..."

The charter women differed from the women who had formed the Organization of Women of Asian and African Descent, Brixton Black Women's Group, and other grass-roots organizations of the 1970s. Indeed, there are two overlapping, plausible reasons why Black Women's Action Group had no relationship or cross-fertilization with OWAAD--the umbrella organization for black women's groups during this time. The first possible explanation is related to class, age, and motherhood; and, the second is linked to BWAG's lack of involvement with feminism.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the lifespan of

¹³ The house was not completely renovated until 1986.

OWAAD was brief. After its second conference in 1981, several issues seemed to undermine the organization. Particularly important was its lack of groundedness in the community as well as its middle-class membership and mobilization.

In comparison, the charter women of Black Women's Action Group were not middle-class or university-educated. They were working-class women, some of them mothers in their mid-to-late twenties, and they lived on the Aylesbury Estate¹⁴ in Walworth, London located in the borough of Southwark. Katherine¹⁵, one of BWAG's founders and the organization's current coordinator, described the charter members as follows: "we were ordinary women in our homes" (14 September 1998). At least one of the charter members had attended university at the time BWAG was founded. But, even she was not a traditional student in that she had attended university at a later age.

A second, related possible reason why there was no cross-fertilization between the women of BWAG and those of OWAAD stems from the fact that Black Women's Action Group, unlike several of the women's grass-roots organizations of

¹⁴ The Aylesbury Estate, some have suggested, is the largest council housing estate in Europe.

¹⁵ She is discussed in greater detail in Chapter V.

the 1970s, did not identify as a *black feminist* organization--despite the fact that its work was within the realm of what one may consider modern-day feminism. As I discuss later in the dissertation, the lack of identification with the labels "feminist" and "feminism" was a problem that grass-roots organizations faced in the 1970s and is still prevalent today.

At the same time as the (more widely known) Organization of Women of Asian and African Descent was facing a gradual disintegration, Black Women's Action Group quickly made links with other organizations such as the Southwark Black Communities Consortium (see below), a non-state-funded umbrella body which consisted of various "ethnic minority" organizations in the borough of Southwark. It also made links with such groups as the Africa Center, an organization of men and women in Central London with whom it was actively involved during several anti-apartheid marches and movements. Finally, it began to establish links with two other women's organizations in the borough of Southwark--Peckham Black Women's Centre (PBWC) and Southwark Women's Centre (SWC). BWAG's involvement with these and other organizations created community ties. These linkages laid the foundation for Southwark Black Women's Centre's current reputation as an organization with strong,

long-standing community networks. Overall, BWAG's working relationship with these groups reflects its radical ideological position during these years.

Southwark Black Communities Consortium

Southwark Black Communities Consortium (SBCC), one of the groups that BWAG worked closely with, continues to be recognized by several community residents and former members as one of the most powerful entities in the borough of Southwark. It was a coalition whose membership included grass-roots organizations as well as ordinary, working-class women and men from a diverse range of "ethnic minority" communities who were not otherwise connected to any type of group or collective. Hailed also as radical, SBCC garnered support from various Asian, African, Caribbean, Turkish, and Greek communities. There were just a handful of founders of SBCC but those perhaps most notable are known as "the three musketeers."¹⁶

"The musketeers," (John, Daryl, and Mark [who I quote in Chapter III]), three young ambitious, black British men from Manchester, Liverpool, and Sheffield, as well as other members on the forefront of SBCC, argued that the only way for "the struggle" to go forward was to actively engage

¹⁶ This name was used by one of my informants. She fondly labeled them "the three musketeers" because of their radical, uncompromising challenge to the system.

with the system. Engaging with the system was believed to be a process. As opposed to mere confrontation, it was a strategy that required one to learn about the system and then use its arguments to make changes. As I discuss later in this chapter, this was exemplified by encouraging black people to join the local Labour party. In addition, many believed that members of the community needed to have information at hand when arguing for changes in policy on the local level (Interview, Mark, 28 January 1999; Interview, John, 1 February 1999).

As John, the Mancunian¹⁷ Musketeer and founder of SBCC (currently a chief political figure involved in the 1990 Trust, "Britain's leading black anti-racist policy development think tank") suggested, the problem grass-roots organizations faced at this time was twofold. First, black people lacked an understanding of bureaucracies and how decisions were made; second, organizations required the aforementioned knowledge in order to be able to make informed political contributions to different levels of decision-making. Coupled with mass mobilization, these problems had to be tackled in order to affect change. Ultimately, those at the forefront believed that you have

¹⁷ A person from Manchester is often referred to by this name.

to mobilize communities in order to give legitimacy to the politics pursued at a local level (Interview, John, 1 February 1999).

While engaging with the system during these years, many members of grass-roots organizations such as SBCC, lobbied for the election of Labour black councilors and Ministers of Parliament. To this end, they embraced an idealistic black nationalist, race-based politics of empowerment, founded on the idea that black politicians would advocate for, as well as communicate the needs and concerns of, black people. It was anticipated that this kind of politics would produce two strands of empowerment, one in the hands of newly elected black politicians and the other at the level of grass-roots organizations. Anthias and Yuval-Davis refer to this type of black political activity as "entryst strategy," defined as

a strategy to enter a party while still continuing to hold another ideology or belong to another organization, which attempted to fight racism as well as gain them professional and political positions via a new network of community organizations both in the public and the voluntary sector (1995[1992]: 162).

Not surprisingly, the black nationalist, race-based, identity politics did not hold. SBCC disbanded in the late 1980s. Ideological differences and diverging political agendas were the primary cause of its collapse. Despite the

belief by participants that SBCC was one of the most powerful entities in the borough, it is also argued that there was continued conflict (several interviewees labeled as "in-fighting") both within and between African and Caribbean communities.

Much of the conflict was due to competition for funds. This kind of competition created divisions on a larger scale within the various ethnic minority communities as well. The competition was reinforced by the role of the local authorities in the distribution of funding.¹⁸ At the same time, the state in its reproduction of difference sabotaged or weakened attempts at identity politics. During an interview, the former treasurer of SBCC (and current chair of Southwark Black Women's Centre), Sara, commented on two significant problems faced by the organization. She said,

With SBCC, the problems began when the money started to roll [and] a power struggle developed. We were able to get along in the consortium when there was no money. But, because we were black people from various parts of the world we could not sit down [together]. Even though we were black...we had different ideas...and that was within the organization...But some of those councilors as members of the council, well...they didn't even know that they were black! In the early 1990s we had the balance of power...black power in Southwark, we could have controlled the borough!

¹⁸ There is a further discussion of funding later in this chapter.

But we didn't! As black people we can't come together... Without any question...that's why there is no grass-roots movement. Those who know this are going to exploit us (Interview, n.d. November 1998).

Her comment underscores the conflicts and assumptions associated with essentialized, identity-based politics, the heterogeneity within the black community, as well as problems in relation to receiving funds from the state.

Black Women's Action Group had an instrumental role in the development of the Southwark Black Communities Consortium; and, it was part of the SBCC coalition. As one musketeer expressed during an interview, BWAG's coordinator provided SBCC with constructive criticism and was extremely supportive of their efforts. My interviews reveal that the musketeers highly regarded the insight, comments, and criticism they received from BWAG's coordinator. Not only did BWAG provide basic resources--meeting space, photocopier, telephones; they were integral in focusing the lens of SBCC on race and gender, as it confronted such issues as housing and employment. Despite this, however, the question still remains: to what extent did BWAG privilege race over gender during its involvement with SBCC? The answer to this question was not completely clarified by my research. But the question loomed large particularly due to the SBCC's foundation, rooted in a

Black Nationalist ideology.

All told, the contributions BWAG made to SBCC have been regarded as most valuable. Indeed, BWAG's contributions resulted in a long-standing working relationship and friendship with "the musketeers" after the demise of SBCC; this relationship continues to this day.

Community Consultation in Southwark: The Women's Equality Unit

Similar to its relationship with Southwark Black Communities Consortium, Black Women's Action Group established good working relationships with other organizations in the borough. BWAG, however, was seemingly different from Peckham Black Women's Centre, which was perceived as "radical," and Southwark Women's Centre, which was not specifically for black women. In reference to the relationship Black Women's Action Group had with Peckham Black Women's Centre and Southwark Women's Centre, Katherine, the current coordinator and charter member of SBWC told me, "we fitted in, complemented one another, and worked well together" (Interview, 25 May 2000). Much of the contact between the organizations stemmed from the fact that the women's groups often found themselves on the same borough committees.

As discussed previously, during these years many of

London's Women's Equality Committees in the boroughs co-opted or appointed women from the community to serve as members. One of the principle objectives was to have community representation within the Women's Equality Unit. So much was this the case that women delegates from such organizations as the Black Women's Action Group and Southwark Women's Centre often found themselves with the official title of "Co-opted Councilor" in the Southwark Women's Equality Unit.

Several interviewees mentioned the positive aspects of having co-opted councilors from the community. As previously discussed, in an effort to address, while at the same time end, much of the rampant nepotism (also referred to as "Tammany Politics") throughout London's boroughs, the GLC, via the creation of Women's and Race Equality Committees, co-opted councilors from the community. A former co-opted councilor and current coordinator of Southwark Black Women's Centre, Katherine, remembered the active participation of co-opted councilors as follows:

As a co-opted councilor, you could go to committee meetings...it was really nice. You found out what was happening in the borough. You could meet with other women involved in organizations and find out what recommendations [the Unit] was going to make. You were even granted voting rights (Interview, 25 May 2000).

Co-opted councilors bridged a gap between the

community and the local government. In so doing, Black Women's Action Group also addressed issues of both race and gender. A concern among many black families, for example, was the lack of attention to the fostering of black children. Many fostering and adoption procedures seemed to overlook black families. This was in part due to the fact that the council did not have black employees in the Department of Social Services. During the same period, the Women's Equality Unit in Southwark pressured the council to hire as well as promote women. Through Katherine's position as co-opted councilor, in addition to her involvement with SBCC via BWAG's grass-roots activism, Black Women's Action Group lobbied for black women employees to help change the adoption and fostering procedures and challenged social service's hiring policies. Through the experience of being a co-opted councilor, BWAG's coordinator established relationships with other women's organizations in the borough as well as with the local authorities.

Notes on Shifts and Transformations at the Grass-roots

The case of Black Women's Action Group demonstrated the significant transformations occurring at the grass-roots during the early 1980s. It highlights the manner in which state-funded black women's organizations emerged during a period when some grass-roots groups were

undergoing shifts and changes in relation to funding, while others were slowly facing disintegration.

The final sections of this chapter provide an analysis of three inter-connected, overlapping shifts that occurred during the 1980s by examining: (1) community consultation and co-opted councilors; (2) race, politics, and the Left; and (3) grass-roots organizational changes. In so doing, I draw attention to the pitfalls, fault-lines, and shifts that occurred within as well as between the Left and "the grass-roots;" the complexity of race as articulated through politics and political parties; and the ways in which grass-roots organizations began to have a patron-client relationship to the state. In addition, while keeping in mind the political project of Thatcherism at-large, in the last section of this chapter I address Thatcherism's ability to silence Leftist voices in Britain.

Dangerous Liaisons: Co-opted Councilors and the Local Government

The relationship between the state and the grass-roots is complex. As cited by Havassy and Yanay (1990:215) in "Bridging Between Local Needs and Centralized Services: Co-optation or Co-production?" "the issue of [s]tate schemes co-opting popular action is an important, if not new one."

This rings true for black women's grass-roots organizations in Britain. This relationship differs from one black women's organization to the next. Much of the complexity is due to the relationship each organization has with the state. Here I am concerned with the relationship between the local government and the role of the co-opted councilor. As mentioned previously, grass-roots organizations saw the role of the co-opted councilor as beneficial and constructive. Having said this, it is important to examine the possible fault-lines and dangers of co-opted councilors.

Grass-roots organizations during the early-to mid 1980s, due to the Left-wing position of Labour at the level of local government, were faced with members being co-opted as community representatives in order to take part in the decision-making processes and changes in policy in the local borough council. The local government's practice of including grass-roots representation by way of "co-opting councilors" raises a number of interesting questions: to what extent were the co-opted representatives at the grass-roots actually part of the state's strategy to maintain control at the level of local government? In being co-opted to work within the state, can grass-roots organizations effectively challenge the state? Also, to what extent do

local authorities, taken together with grass-roots representatives, in effect express the needs and concerns of the community? When considering "co-opted councilors," three issues immediately present themselves: (1) the ironic title; (2) the state's control of the grass-roots; (3) the issue of divisiveness.

A point of departure is the irony of the title of "co-opted councilor." The title suggests that community representatives were working *within* as well as *for* the state. Although the majority of my informants saw the role of co-opted councilors as positive--meaning, they were working solely for the community organization--the sarcasm embedded in the title suggests otherwise. The irony in American usage of the term is reflected in the contradictions of working for the state and representing oppositional community organization. While grass-roots organizations saw the "co-opted councilor" role as a way to bridge the gap between the community and the local government, it is indeed probable that the state created and implemented the role as a way to appease organizations and maintain subtle authority over them. What is more, for the local government to co-opt representatives from the grass-roots gives the appearance of community decision-making when in actuality these contributions were most

likely limited and local government was dominant (see also Havassy and Yanay 1990).

Although many current and former members of organizations reminisced about the role of co-opted councilors as inclusive and positive, two informants spoke about the contradictions of working within the structures of the state. Mark, one of the "three musketeers," said

With a bit of hindsight, [and] hindsight can be wrong sometimes, but we [actually] had one foot in the grass-roots and one foot in the state...But [that's because] there was also the urgency and the arrogance of youth (Interview, 28 January 1999).

And Linda, former leader of Southwark's Women's Equality Committee told me,

I mean obviously when you're working for the State it drives you nuts. You know you're really annoyed, people are screaming at you saying you're not doing this and you're not doing that and you're not doing the other (Interview, 12 May 1999).

In the words of Usha Prashar and Shan Nicolas "there [were] conflicting views about [consultation] and differing expectations...[Some] say that it [was] just a way of making token concessions to the communities and a way of legitimiz[ing] their decisions without really giving them anything. It [was] a way of pacifying the black and ethnic minority communities" (1986: 49).

The same authors also draw attention to my third concern--the divisiveness that co-options cause between women as well as among ethnic minority communities. After the local government decided on co-options, one of the main questions many councils faced was how to co-opt and on what basis. While some councils wrote letters to organizations and asked them to identify co-opted representatives, others directly co-opted individuals from different ethnic minority groups (Prashar and Nicolas 1986: 13) or women's organizations. Lansley, Goss, and Wolmar note that single, young middle-class articulate women were often chosen to "represent" the community. This undoubtedly caused conflict and dissention about who was most appropriate as a representative (1989: 155). In addition, co-optees were often chosen on the basis of ethnicity, not on the basis of expertise in a specific area such as social services. This also contributed to creating a wedge between groups (Prashar and Nicholas 1986: 47).

All told, the question of co-optation is complicated by the context in which this relationship between the grass-roots and the local government occurred. As discussed elsewhere in this chapter, the committees for racial and gender equality were created because the Greater London Council, a Left-wing arm of the government, wanted to

"interface with oppression politics." The co-opted councilors and Women's and Race Equalities Committees emerged shortly after the urban uprisings, between 1980 and 1981. This raises the question of the relationship between white Left socialists and the black community.

Unstable Alliances: Race, Politics, and the Left

During my field experience, many interviewees characterized the 1980s by its high levels of activism particularly in response to racist violence. There was heightened mobilization by many black people who were trying to build national coalitions of blacks outside of the political party of Labour. At the same time, there was an attempt to increase black representation in the Labour Party. All told, there was a great deal of mobilization across England.

As John Solomos and Les Back have observed in "Race, Politics and Social Change," understanding the growth of black participation and involvement in mainstream politics beginning in the 1980s is complex (1995: 67-68). Two factors seem particularly significant. First, as previously discussed (see Chapter III), black grass-roots organizations of the 1980s were inspired and shaped by anti-colonial and civil rights movements in the 1960s and

1970s. This type of transformational politics was, among other things, an attempt to change the conditions of people's lives in the larger social, political, and economic context. Many protests were a consequence of and in direct response to, the racist violence and urban unrest throughout England.

Second, much of the impetus behind opening up the political machinery was due to the changes transpiring within the major political parties themselves. As discussed elsewhere in this chapter, during the late 1970s and early 1980s, there was a great deal of activity within the Labour Party by those who aligned themselves with its emerging Left power base. It is within this context that the growth of black participation and involvement in mainstream politics must be understood.

Kalbir Shukra (1990: 165) observes us that following the Second World War, the significant numbers of African, Asian and Caribbean people who came to Britain were concentrated in Labour controlled, working-class areas. She further contends that for black people their main access to people with political power was through the Labour party that had already (both locally and nationally) established relationships with the working class (1990:165).

During the late 1970s early 1980s there was

significant black self-organization within the Labour Party. Motivating this self-organization was the lack of black political representation coupled with the desire to change the party's organizational structure. Struggles for organizational change were evident in the desire to create black sections of the Party, which many thought were needed in order to adequately address the interests and needs of black people (Shukra 1990).

The main reason we want to see Black Sections recogni[z]ed is because we believe the only way that appropriate strategies for overcoming racism will be devised, is when we as Black people come together and decide on effective anti-racist policies which we can take to a wider political audience. As victims of racism, we have a right to be in the forefront the of the anti-racist struggle (Labour Party Black Sections 1988 as cited in Jeffers 1991:63)

Ultimately, this black political mobilization challenged the fundamental tenets of Britain's political culture.

In London, for example, struggles for organizational change culminated in 1987 with the election of four black MP's (Ministers of Parliament), all members of the Labour Party: Diane Abbott represented Hackney North and Stoke Newington, London; Bernie Grant was elected in Tottenham North London; Paul Boateng in Brent South, West London and Keith Vaz in Leicester East. In describing these years, Mark told me the following:

What was happening on the national level? Well, you had the black section of the Labour Party organizing in order to get black members of Parliament in, nominated by the Labour Party, and elected as members of Parliament. So you have Bernie Grant, Keith Vaz, Paul Boateng [and Diane Abbott] you had four black MPs at the time that and happened on a national level. On the local level, the same thing was happening there was encouragement for black people to join the local Labour party. In particular, to get themselves put forward as councilors. So what you have in Southwark were quite a few [black] councilors, people like Pam Smith, Winston Stafford, Orbin Graham, Debbie Welsh, Margarite Enriquez, Sonia came on...It was really, how can we work with these black councilors? How can we work with these black councilors to empower them in terms of using the knowledge base that we had of the system? To make them more powerful in their own right as local councilors but also to address issues of concern to black communities? And how can they empower us through the access that they have in the system to be doing things better for our communities (Interview, 28 January 1999).

Nevertheless, another Southwark borough grass-roots activist, John, also argued,

You had to have black self-organization outside the political party arena in order to get the things you wanted in the political arena... You see, everything was party focused and viewed in terms of trade unions and Marxism (Interview, 1 February 1999).

For many black community activists, the emerging white Left power base of Labour had conceivably viewed everything in terms of trade unions and Marxism, and that was problematic. The relationship between Left movements and grassroots activists and organizations was complicated at

that time and continues to be thorny. Many black community activists, suspicious of the white Left Socialist power base of the Labour Party, feared British working-class racism and sexism. Attempts by the white Left to increase black representation were often seen as both disingenuous and suspect. Furthermore, the Labour Party's politics was perceived as problematic. According to Mark,

Those white Liberals, as they do now, used race as a trump card. What they sought to do was to work to hold out the olive branch, to work with black people for as long as they said the kind of thing that they wanted them to say (Interview, 28 January 1999).

Furthermore, during our interview which took place at the 1990 Trust, John, the Mancunian Musketeer stated:

[Ultimately,] the politics of the Left can be as much of a problem in the pursuit of race equality as can be the politics of the right. We did not believe in party politics we believed in black self-organization outside the party political arena to give weight to those things you wanted in the party political arena...What you actually need is a mass movement outside the party to strategize and give weight to any infiltrative efforts within a party (Interview, 1 February 1999).

While members of Left-wing organizations often view themselves as radical proponents of "people's movements" and revolution, others may view them as racist elements of the mainstream. As Jenny Bourne has observed, the traditional Left has not come to terms with the engrained

nature of British working-class racism (1983:6). Until this is recognized, the underlying racist and sexist ideologies will persist in both the Left and more specifically in the Labour Party.

We felt that we shouldn't be reverential in any way shape or form but we should be intelligent in the way we do things. What carried us through was the desire to learn about the system. At the time there were a lot of people shouting abuse or making criticism about the system, but it wasn't intelligent or an awareness or a detailed knowledge of how that system works and why it was wrong. We wanted to use [the state's] arguments to dismantle the system. So we spent a lot of time sitting down learning about it and talking to people...(Interview, John, 1 February 1999).

Patron-Client Relations and a Cycle of Dependency: Grass-roots Organizations, the State, and Funding

BWAG emerged during the hey-day of the GLC and from the beginning it was a local state-funded organization. Thus, from its inception it has had links with the state. As discussed previously in this chapter, the GLC's budget for policy initiatives such as Race and Women's Equalities Committees funded issue-related projects, campaigns, and community organizations via the committees in the borough councils. The important point here is that many grass-roots groups which had previously been non-state-funded entities began to receive funding from race and/or women's

committees for various projects; and in the process, they slowly became more institutionalized arms of the state.

As discussed in Chapter III, throughout the lifespan of Organization of Asian and African Descent (1978-1983), it was without state funds. Organizations such as Brixton Black Women's Group, however, which initially formed as entities independent of the state, experienced a gradual transformation once they applied to the state for resources.

For example, former members (Jessica and Caroline) of BBWG recall the purchase of the organization's house as follows:

[Initially,] Brixton Black Women's Group was out of pocket, [we paid for everything]. The house came from Lambeth Council (Stockwell Road). [Then] at some point...There was some funding involved. There was some funding that had to be applied for. When BWG got the house there was funding for a paid worker, and there were plans for a drop-in center. This was around 1981 until early 1990s, I think. When the funding came, BWG functioned as a committee and they employed people... and they did not want to go in the [same] direction as other funded groups in terms of their financial accountability... etc. [But] When Brixton Women's Group sought funding from the Council, it (that is, funding) became a pre-occupation.... (Interview, 29 March 1999)

Another BBWG member, Veronica, stated that when they received resources from state, "then we [the organization] became employers and a management committee in terms of

running the center." She further explains, "at the same time we tried to continue to do all of the work we had done before, around campaigning and organizing" (Interview, 11 May 1999).

According to former OWADD member Marilyn, things were better before the organization accepted state funding:

With the introduction of the GLC (Greater London Council) there was a change in Black Women's organizations. The GLC had a Women's Committee and the committee was responsible for allocating grants. There became an emphasis on receiving money for grants. To seek funding, black women's groups had to decide whether or not to organize with men. That's why we need to use the term "Black Feminism." White women needed to stop and think carefully or else they would never understand the world. One of the things about black women's organizing was that we did it ourselves and it influenced younger generations (Interview, 17 March 1999).

Upon receiving funding from the state, grass-roots organizations were put in a precarious position. Moreover, the relationship between the state and the voluntary sector changed. The liaison between the state and grass-roots organizations raised the question: What is the relationship between identity politics and organizational resources? Once an organization receives funding, then it is also presented with a new set of obligations and responsibilities. In other words, not only is the organization obligated to fulfill the needs of the

community; in turn, it must justify the usage of these funds. BBWG, for example, then had to justify its existence, as well as the creation of a drop-in center, and the management of the organization's house. As a result, there was a decline in the organization's political activity. Some argue that the state played a conscious role in sabotaging grass-roots political activity. As former BBWG/OWAAD activist Jessica said: "it's easier to say 'we've been providing a free pregnancy service' than to say, well [we've] been campaigning in front of #10 Downing Street" (Interview, 29 March 1999).

As the aforementioned illustrates, some black women's organizations, like other grass-roots groups, were initially independent and then during the high-point of the GLC were supported by government grants. This was in the early 1980s. By the mid-to late 1980s, however, Thatcherite policies produced drastic cuts in this funding. Some organizations, therefore, have been forced to disband though others have persisted. Moreover, despite the drastic cuts, new organizations, such as Black Women's Action Group, continued to emerge.

There is an over-reliance [in] the black community to receive local government or central government funding and you can't get black equality by that route alone. You have to, as a community, demonstrate your own integrity and

respect and have organizations that are not just local authority funded (Interview, John, 1 February 1999).

The issue of funding grassroots organizations is a contentious one. Such scholars as Solomos and Back (1995) have identified a relationship between state funding of black community organizations and the depoliticized tenor of group activities. For grass-roots organizations in general, and black women's organizations in particular, there were many arguments to support either accepting or declining state funds. Such issues contributed to the shifting dynamics within black women's grassroots organizations. Often seen as a potential barrier to activism, state funding is believed by many political activists to be a strategy to manipulate the grass-roots. Interviews with several women who were community activists from the 1970s and early 1980s reflect their belief that funding was a way for the state to control political activity. Funding inevitably raises questions with regard to the state's co-optation of the grass-roots.

Many current and former women activists argue that applying for and receiving state resources creates a vicious cycle of dependency. Linda, former leader of Southwark Women's Equality Unit stated the following:

Yeah. Cause, I mean, in some ways it was always

ambivalent for the state to be funding that sort of activity. There were always elements of co-option about it as well, inevitably, although a lot of it was done for very positive reasons. You know everybody in it was highly altruistic and so on.... The community itself has not reassessed the degree to which it has to go back to its grassroots. And it seems to me that, some...now I don't know how [Katherine] sees it, so I'm not really talking about her particularly, or her project particularly, but I think that some of those groups that grew out of that early stage have not really reassessed themselves (Interview, 12 May 1999).

Moreover, the dynamism that many organizations seem to have had, particularly in relation to political activity, changed once they applied for and received funding. As the data indicate, the funding process is quite rigorous. With this in mind, instead of employing energy to fight causes, organizations used energy to apply for grants. Overloaded and inundated with paperwork in order to receive funding, organizations experienced a decline in political activity. Also, as the data indicate, many organizations' priorities changed, becoming more short-sighted and limited by what leaders could envision doing with a certain amount of funds. Thus, organizations found themselves dependent on the local authority's resources for support as well as in a precarious position in which they did not want to challenge structures within the state because it might affect their funding. Former OWAAD activist, Marilyn told me the

following:

There has been a movement from self-help. Now people organize when they have a grant. The organization must prove [their objectives] to the council. Once there is an issue, the organization starts looking for a grant. [It's the] dependency syndrome, [A form of control-- a move from self-help to dependency...(Interview, 17 March 1999).

Despite the arguments that suggest that there are elements of co-optation when a community organization receives state funds, some, such as Sudbury (1998) put forward the idea that there is a more nuanced way to examine the relationship between the grass-roots organization and the state. Sudbury (1998: 83) argues that when we accept the "idea of a simple casual relationship between funding and political censorship" we have failed to see the political acts of those highly mobilized groups, which are, in effect, claiming rights to such funds. Ultimately, those organizations are in fact doing what Craig (1989) calls working "in and against the State."¹⁹

Beaten to Submission: The Local State on Trial

Abolition of the GLC

During the late 1960s and 1970s the International Monetary Fund (IMF) required that Britain reduce its public

¹⁹ I provide a discussion of this in Chapter V.

expenditure and develop a monetarist policy (Allen 1993: 230). The financial strategy to achieve this plan had two components--housing and local authority. In other words, Britain needed to accomplish two goals: (1) "to force local authorities to restructure the administration of their housing stock by effectively setting up housing as an independent non-profit business within the local government, while progressively removing housing subsidies (Allen 1993: 230);"²⁰ and, (2) control the spending of the local authorities by restructuring of government.

The proposal to abolish the Greater London Council was submitted in 1983 and it went into effect in 1986. In the 1983 White Paper, *Streamlining the Cities* (Department of Environment),²¹ several reasons why the GLC should be abolished are noted. In addition, according to the central government, it had fallen short of its responsibilities. These recommendations for abolition are related to: (1) profligacy (see DOE 1983, paragraph 1.3-1.5, 1.13-1.16); (2) lack of a strategic role (see DOE 1983, paragraph 1.11); (3) conflict within the system of local government

²⁰ Allen cites Ball, M., M. Harloe and M. Martens (1988) *Housing and Social Change in Europe and the USA*.

²¹ See Department of Environment (1983) *Streamlining the Cities: Government Proposals for Reorganising Local Government in Greater London and the Metropolitan Counties*.

(see DOE 1983, paragraph 1.11-1.12); (4) meeting the needs of the area served (see, DOE 1983, paragraph 1.9).²²

Significantly, wastefulness, over-expenditure, and extravagance constituted one of the principal charges the central government made against the GLC (see Byrne 121: 2000; Flynn, Leach, and Vielba 1985: 57-60; Lansley, Goss, and Wolmar 1989: 60-65; among others). The government, according to Lansley, Goss, and Wolmar, argued that abolition of the GLC would save them up to 10 million pounds. More important, however, the arguments with regard to saving money had less to do with actual savings and more to do with ideological differences about public policy. The GLC neither embraced nor supported Thatcher's policies, such as monetarism and privatization. Instead it believed in "public spending as a means of regenerating the economy, reducing unemployment and alleviating distress" (Flynn, Leach and Vielba 1985: 60).

The second charge against the GLC was its lack of strategic planning. In fact, however, the GLC was highly strategic in its interests in, among other things, ethnic minority communities and women. The GLC's strategic role was related to its concern over the redistribution of

²² See also Flynn, Norman, Steve Leach and Carol Vielba (1985) *Abolition or Reform? The GLC and the Metropolitan County Councils*.

resources to communities and groups who have traditionally been provided with fewer resources despite greater needs. As Flynn, Leach, and Vielba note, prior to Ken Livingstone as leader of the GLC, those who benefited from the policies of both Labour and Conservative administrations were generally white working or middle-class people (1985: 63).

Conflict within London's system of government, the third charge against the GLC, was supposedly based on the upper-tier's (the GLC's) search for a wider strategic goal that the boroughs would have to adhere to and implement. It was suggested that abolition of the GLC would end this conflict. But, this raises the question as to whether or not the conflicts within the two-tier system as a whole were endemic; or was the discord based on certain tasks and particular local authorities? (Flynn, Leach, and Vielba: 66; see also Byrne 2000: 51).

The fourth charge against the GLC was its failure to meet the needs of the area it served, coupled with inaccessibility and remoteness. Undoubtedly, Ken Livingstone's campaign and the Labour-led GLC victory were visible, particularly because of his anti-government stance on such issues as: building new council housing, reducing unemployment, and poverty. Livingstone's administration was popular not only because it was recognized nationally, but

also because the GLC was the voice of many Londoners.

The Thatcher government's approach to *Streamlining the Cities*²³ and control over local authority expenditure was the impetus behind the abolition of the Greater London Council

and the Metropolitan County Councils (MCCs)²⁴ in 1986, and the subsequent disintegration of Women's and Race Equalities Committees during the late 1980s. In this shrewd act of gerrymandering, responsibilities of the GLC and the MCCs were transferred to the boroughs, ad hoc joint boards, and the City of London Corporation. Furthermore, during the final year of Thatcher's administration, the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) was abolished (1990) and its responsibilities were transferred to the inner London boroughs (Byrne 2000: 121-123). These radical changes contributed to the institutionalization of Thatcherism and

²³ See Department of Environment's 1983 proposal *Streamlining the Cities: Government Proposals for Reorganising Local Government in Greater London and the Metropolitan Counties*.

²⁴ The London Government Act of 1972 created six metropolitan counties: Greater Manchester, Merseyside, West Midlands, Tyne and Wear, South Yorkshire, and West Yorkshire. Within these counties, 36 metropolitan districts were created which were responsible for many social services, such as housing and welfare. Also, the councils of these respective counties were responsible for environmental services (planning, transport, and highways) (Byrne 2000: 47-48.)

the erosion of the Left in Britain.

Put most directly, the Left local state was forced out of power by a conservative agenda that was politically, culturally, and ideologically neoliberal. Shaping both Britishness and Englishness, the agenda centers around regressive modernization, decimating the radical political platform of the voluntary sector.

As further explicated in Chapter V, in Britain, Janus-faced Thatcherite policies in the post-Thatcher era loom larger than ever before. In a humorous quip, Helen (a forty-something Jamaican woman who has lived in England for over twenty-five years), currently the director of Southwark Council for Community Relations told me "some people would argue that Blair is Margaret Thatcher's natural heir." Regressive modernization--by embracing Victorian ideological values, neoliberalism, in addition to themes of family, respectability, and nation--continues to shape Englishness and Britishness. It is within this political, ideological, and cultural context that "black" women's grass-roots, self-help advocacy organizations struggle to survive.

Indeed, grass-roots organizations were always ambivalent about funds from the local state. The source of the funding, however, was the Left-local state. As stated

previously, however, Thatcherism beat the Left-local state into submission. Some have argued that as the radical local state began to collapse, voluntary organizations did not adequately reassess their position at the grass-roots.

As I will explain in the next chapter, as the radical local state began to collapse, organizations were needed to provide services that were once the responsibility of the local state. It is precisely this shift that I wish to underscore. Thus, organizations have undergone transformations from highly mobilized, radical, politically active entities to service providers who work in and against the state structure. As such, they embrace a different form of politics.

Chapter V:
Post-Thatcherism, Grass-Roots Organization, and Empowering
the Community Through Service Provision

Introduction

This chapter analyzes the third and final phase of grass-roots organizing covered in this dissertation. The third of these overlapping periods spans roughly the latter years of the 1980s, through the last decade of the twentieth century--the post-Thatcher years. Embracing the end of Margaret Thatcher's term as Britain's Prime Minister, it shows, above all, the implications of a "flattened Left" for Britain's black communities.

Within this context, the valuable role of state-funded grass-roots organizations as service providers is also discussed. Such organizations provide services to the community in the face of severe cutbacks in state welfare. Despite the return of a Labour government, in the post-Thatcher years, resources allocated to grass-roots groups have actually eroded. I have demonstrated in the previous chapters that there is a syncretic relationship between the

state and the grass-roots. The shifts that grass-roots organizations made from highly mobilized entities in the 1970s and 1980s to today's espousal of a more diminished form of politics occur within the context of radical transformations in the state. Organizations in Britain today struggle to exist in the aftermath of Thatcherism. Community-based organizations in particular, and societal institutions in general, are trying to survive within the context of Thatcherite-like policies and a waning welfare state.

The concerns of this chapter are threefold. (1) As a point of departure, I begin with a discussion of what is happening at the level of the state in the post-Thatcher era. Thus, the chapter examines the policies of Britain's last three prime ministers, Margaret Thatcher, John Major, and Tony Blair. (2) Within this context, I draw attention to black political activism in Britain; and, in so doing call for a broader framework that allows us to understand different strands of activism. With this in mind, broadening one's framework, or rethinking political activism, is underscored throughout the chapter. This broader framework also enables one to understand grass-roots organizations such as Southwark Black Women's Centre. (3) In the final sections, I discuss various dimensions of

political activism such as: how women become involved in grass-roots issues and the struggles and conflicts involved in community activism.

Thatcher Continued..

During Thatcher's second term in office, from 1983-1987, her ability to dictate public policy as well as strengthen the state was evident. As stated in the previous chapter, the White Paper's justification for the abolition of the GLC was presented in 1983 and went into effect in 1986. Abolishing the GLC and the metropolitan authorities enabled the central state to have more control through ad hoc committees of central government. Moreover, attacking local government was a way for the Conservatives to cut public expenditure while at the same time, reduce the public sector.

Privatization, as Brendan Evans (1999:85) points out, was Thatcher's central objective during her second term in office. One of the central dimensions of privatization was denationalization, which involved the selling of "assets owned by the state; [and,] it involved shifting private utilities into the public sector" (Evans 1999: 86). This was exemplified in the early 1980s by the sale of council houses to resident tenants.

Between 1979 and 1983 council house sales had increased from 55,000 to 204,000 (Evans 1999: 86). Not only did the sale of such assets raise money to sustain tax cuts; Thatcher and the Conservatives hoped that it would also extend the ownership of property to the voting majority (Evans 1999: 86). Overall, "the moral dimension of priv[a]ti[z]ation was encapsulated in the idea that it would increase individual enterprise and personal vigor" (Evans 1999: 87). Moreover, as Laybourn states, the sale of council houses (at a discounted rate, based on the number of years in occupancy) occurred alongside the Conservative government's infringement on the prerogative of local authorities to build new ones (1995: 259). Privatization, in effect, rolled back socialism. Thatcher's pursuit for radical neoliberal reform during her final years in office (1987-1990) was evident in the National Health Service (NHS), an area of, what Evans calls, "hyperactivity" during her final term in office (1999: 101).

A Major Transition?

On 22 November 1990, the Iron Lady resigned as Prime Minister. During that time the Tory party abandoned her for, among other things, her increasingly domineering manner and the party's unpopularity as a consequence of the poll tax. By and large she was an electoral liability. Her

successor, John Major, began what would be the first of two terms as Prime Minister. Major was thought to be a friendly, moderate, compromising person (Porter 1994: 383) who was faced with the impossible task of simultaneously pleasing those who wanted a pure, undiluted form of Thatcherism to continue and a mass majority who did not agree with Thatcher's strategy and values (Evans 1999:140).

Despite being characterized as one with a compromising demeanor, most of my informants did not make distinctions between the John Major and Margaret Thatcher years. In fact, Major's years were considered to be simply a continuation of Thatcher's.

Blair, New Labour, and the Third Way

The election of Tony Blair as Britain's Prime Minister on 1 May 1997 was considered a landmark victory for the Labour Party in British politics. Prior to Blair's election, the Party had experienced an unprecedented succession of four major defeats, conceding to Tory rule in 1979, 1982, 1987, and 1992 for a total of 18 consecutive years. Blair's victory however, was won on the platform of New Labour, meaning, that the Labour Party had to modernize itself internally and with respect to policy (Mullard 2000: 38).

An Individualized Approach to Social Policy

Modernizing the Labour Party as New Labour is evident in its approach to issues of employment and ultimately, the notion of productivity. As Maurice Mullard (2000: 45) has so accurately observed, the focus of Labour's social policy has shifted. Rather than address structural problems of inequality in the society at-large, New Labour's approach tends to individualize forms of poverty (Mullard 2000: 45). I draw attention to this Thatcherite-like approach to welfare reform because it is extremely problematic.

The individualist discourse that accompanies this approach tends to emphasize personal responsibility, rights, and the individual experience. For example, it is the individual who is responsible for finding and securing employment. Such an approach de-emphasizes the range of variables (i.e., race, class, and gender) often articulated through "difference" that are critical in structuring, institutionalizing, and justifying inequalities. What is more, it leaves the individual solely responsible for his/her place in society and does not consider the importance of history, the role of the state, or shifting social, political-economic conditions. This approach to welfare reform is, in reality, not a break from

Thatcherism, but rather a continuation of neoliberal forms of policy.

These neoliberal forms of social policy fall within the context of New Labour's "Third Way" approach to reform. The Third Way is described as an alternative to both the Tories and Old Labour (*The Guardian Unlimited*, 9 January 1999). In other words, it is an alternative to both the liberal strategy that embraces privatization and, the welfare state commitments dating to World War II--universal health care, universal education, universal pensions, and social assistance (Mullard 2000: 59). The Third Way approach has been both janus-faced and ambiguous. Guardian correspondent, Mark Lawson aptly describes such ambiguity as follows:

In economic matters, a new route is being found between 'the old left's belief in a trade-off between growth and inflation, and the old right's throwing people at the mercy of change'. The second example seems to involve the fact that welfare has been cut but also reformed: 'People believe in a strong society. But they want strong rules, too.' The third example given is: 'Freedom and liberty. A broader idea of freedom than that of the old right: a freedom to do things, as well as a freedom from things.' These phrases - as euphoniously opaque as 70s rock lyrics - reveal how vague the Third Way is (*The Guardian Unlimited*, 9 January 1999).

In that excerpt, Lawson's keen analysis describes Blair's approach to welfare reform as vague and ambiguous. Yet, as

stated previously, it is also doubled edged. For in that same article Lawson asserts that Blair's Third Way "makes with a straight face the claim to be both left and right simultaneously" (*The Guardian Unlimited*, 9 January 1999). Within such a context black women's grass-roots organizations struggle to survive.

Rethinking the Political

As Sudbury observes (1998: 50-51) by examining black people's voting patterns, their participation in grass-roots organizations, as well as their political leadership, contemporary studies of black political participation in Britain have challenged the notion that black people are passive victims. These studies have revealed that black people are active agents involved in social transformation. Studies of electoral behavior, for example, by such scholars as Miles (1988) and Solomos and Back (1995), have emphasized diversity, questioning assumptions of a homogenous black vote in Britain. Other studies, for example by Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992) and Werbner (1991), have underscored the significance of local community organizations. All told there has been a heightened sensibility with regard to the significance of independent black organizations in Britain.

Nevertheless, the majority of studies neither call for us to reconceptualize different strands of political activism nor require us to "rethink the political" within the context of black women's grass-roots organizations in Britain, as I explain further below. The groundbreaking work of Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe—*The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain* (1985), and the more recent critical sociological study of black women's organizations in England by Julia Sudbury (1998), are notable exceptions.

Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe's (1985) work about black women's organizing was written during a period when the majority of writing about black women was based on personal experience and presented in narrative form (Ngcobo 1987). Similarly, in the US context, much of the early writings (produced in the late 1970s and early 1980s) about the lives of African American women fell within the same genre. In describing African American women's existence as well as experience, these early writings (see Bambara 1970; Hull, Scott, Smith 1982; Moragá and Anzaldúa 1981; among others) emphasize the need to write black women into the historical record (Mullings 1997:3). Although a larger body of theoretical work (mostly written in the 1990s) about black British women exists today (see Mirza 1997, Ifekunigwe 1999) Sudbury has noted that studies about black women's

organizing have been "at most a backdrop rather than a subject deemed worthy of in depth analysis" (1998: 17).

One must also place the scarcity of scholarship on black British women's organizing in the wider social-political context. In doing this, we must take into account the exclusion of black British women scholars from the larger academic world of intellectual production. What is more, we must also consider what is and is not perceived as legitimate knowledge (Sudbury 1998). Overall, the aforementioned sheds light on the dearth of scholarship on black women's organizing in Britain. With this in mind, I will underscore the theoretical, as well as empirical significance of this problematic and in so doing, "rethink the political."

As is the case for the many black women's organizations in Britain, it is their everyday struggle to survive, coupled with their challenge against the unequal access to and distribution of resources that enables us to broaden our definition of what is political. Bookman and Morgen's use of the term "empowerment" as it was applied to the political activism of US working-class women in the 1970s and 1980s is appropriate in furthering our understanding of group mobilization.

[Empowerment is used to] connote a spectrum of

political activity ranging from acts of individual resistance to mass political mobilizations that challenge basic power relations...[It] is a process aimed at consolidating, maintaining, or changing the nature and distribution of power in a particular cultural context (1988:4).

This definition of empowerment contributes to our understanding the black women's grass-roots organizations in England. More specifically, it is useful in understanding the women (employees, volunteers, and clients, etc.) of Southwark Black Women's Centre.

From Black Women's Action Group to Southwark Black Women's Centre

The central issues are women first...to educate and help. The women who come to the Centre are vulnerable in society, so there is no discrimination against any women... There are very few white women who come to the Centre. Black people have done something for themselves; there is a place where people can go. The Centre doesn't put financial gain first; instead people are [a priority]...this is the way the Centre continues to thrive. People know our organization is for black women, there is no other organization like it in the borough.¹

Southwark Black Women's Centre (SBWC) is a government-

¹ Interview, Ruth, St. Lucian, SBWC advice worker, 8 September 1998.

funded organization of long standing located in South London. With an emphasis on self-help and advocacy, SBWC is concerned with such issues as: domestic violence, improving access to employment, education, and healthcare as well as those of human rights. As noted in Chapter IV, single black mothers (from St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Jamaica, and Nigeria), formally launched the SBWC (initially called the Black Women's Action Group) in 1983, a time of many contradictions. It was a time of conservative retrenchment, racial tension, protest, urban uprising, as well as radical activism. Emerging two years after the British Nationality Act, which restricted Asian citizenship in Britain, it mobilized women of color across racial and ethnic lines from its inception.

Southwark Black Women's Centre (SBWC) was the primary site for my research. As discussed in Chapter IV, the history of Southwark Black Women's Centre began with a handful of black women who were marginalized and overshadowed by men in the grass-roots group, Mama Yeabo. In 1983, these women, who lived on the surrounding council housing estate, the Aylesbury, formed their own organization--Black Women's Action Group (BWAG).² Seed monies from Southwark Council and the Greater London

² See also Figure 7.

Council enabled the organization, then known as BWAG, to lease and renovate a house, which to this day serves as the site for the group's main operations.

As noted, throughout the 1980s, Black Women's Action Group took part in various community-based activities and established links with other grass-roots organizations throughout the borough. But, together with shifts in Britain's political economy, there was a "flattening of the Left," including the demise of the GLC and marked shifts in community activism. Organizations slowly but surely experienced a more diminished form of politics.

This marked shift is reflected in the early 1990s when Black Women's Action Group changed their name to Southwark Black Women's Centre. The name change mirrors the socio-political context in Britain because, as Ruth, the advice worker and long-standing member told me, "in the 1980s, black women needed to take action" hence the name, Black Women's Action Group (Interview, SBWC, 8 September 1998). This statement speaks to the need for black women to be active participants in transforming the conditions of their lives. At the same time, the name change echoes the conflicts of being associated with feminism and was, in this sense, a part of the organization's self critique.

According to Nefari,³ one of SBWC's charter members, the organization changed its name to Southwark Black Women's Centre to shed its alleged association with militancy, feminism, and feminist ideals. Several members concurred with this and further suggested that the name, BWAG, might have turned people away. In addition, I was reminded that the organization was formed to address issues and concerns directly related to the family and a name such as BWAG did not effectively communicate that to working-class groups.

Despite such changes, the organization, at the time of its inception, and to this day is a state-funded entity that maintains a focused lens on issues of race and gender; and, it embraces service provision as a form of empowerment. In this chapter, I provide a current ethnographic account of Southwark Black Women's Centre, discussing its context, as well as its members, services, and clients.

The Setting

The Centre is located in London's borough of Southwark.⁴ Today, almost forty-five percent of Britain's "ethnic minorities" (e.g., Caribbean, South Asians, and

³ Nefari is a St. Vincentian unmarried mother of two who has lived in Britain since the age of eight.

⁴ See Figure 6.

Africans) reside in London. In the borough of Southwark, nearly 25 percent of the 200,000 residents are considered "ethnic minorities." Single-headed households make up 8.2 percent of the total household--nearly twice the average of London at-large; meanwhile, 51 percent live in council housing (1993 Information Technology and Research, Planning and Economic Development Division, Development Department, Council Offices).

Within Southwark borough there are many different areas, also known as villages. These include such areas as: Nunhead, Honor Oak, Dulwich, Peckham, Camberwell, and Walworth. Located south of the River Thames, the borough stretches from the Thames to the village of Dulwich (Southwark Council n.d.).⁵ The borough is characterized by its diversity. For example, since the Elizabethan years, the area of the borough closest to the river has been the site of performances of the plays of William Shakespeare. Today, it is also the home for the newly remodeled Shakespeare Globe Theatre. In addition, within a short walking distance of the Globe, is the recently opened Tate Gallery of Modern Art (2000). The Globe and the Tate Modern, located near Southwark Bridge, are some of the more

⁵ See n.d. *A Guide to the Borough of Southwark*. London: Southwark Council.

popular cultural sites and tourist attractions in the borough. Southwark, however, is a "borough of contrasts" (Southwark Council, n.d.); and, similar to other boroughs it also has sections that may never be visited by tourists.

For example, adjacent to one of South London's most thriving markets--East Street, where two-bedroom flats sell for £150,000⁶ (*The Guardian Unlimited*, 29 September 1999)--is the Aylesbury estate. This estate, located in the Walworth section of Southwark, was described in the same *Guardian* article as having "smelly staircases, disused garages, and enormous blocks of flats." The estate is described as one of the largest in Europe, and is home to 10,000 residents (*The Guardian Unlimited*, 29 September 1999: 3). On the estate, literacy levels are low; 37 percent of 16 to 19 year-olds have no qualifications (high school degree), and unemployment stand at 17 percent (*The Guardian Unlimited*, 29 September 1999: 1). The crime rate is also high. Approximately half of the estate's residents have been there for over ten years and most of them are either elderly or families with young children (*The Guardian Unlimited*, 29 September 1999: 2). In recent years, the Aylesbury estate has been the site of much discussion, particularly during the 1997 electoral campaign. The

⁶ £150,000 is approximately \$210,000.

estate, together with 42 other neighborhoods, is part of Prime Minister Blair's regeneration project--New Deal for Communities. The plan includes an 800 million-pound investment in bridging the gap between the local authorities and the community (*The Guardian Unlimited*, 29 September 1999: 1).

In the Walworth section of Southwark, more specifically on a small street in an area surrounded by the Aylesbury, is Elsted Street, home of Southwark Black Women's Centre. Elsted Street is both narrow and unassuming. Located between the Walworth and the Old Kent Roads, it is in close proximity to one of London's notable markets on East Street. Elsted is not a busy street and one could actually walk past SBWC without noticing it. You really have to know the area or look very carefully when walking down the street in order to see it. Situated between a funeral home and a pub, as I discovered, many people walk by the Centre not even knowing that it exists. This is particularly true of car services that often say that they drive by the house several times before realizing it. Despite this, however, many persons in the community and the borough know it.

The house-turned Centre has been home to members, employees, and clients for nearly 14 years. As stated

earlier, in 1985, with the help of seed money from local authorities known as Urban Aid, the then named Black Women's Action Group leased and renovated an abandoned house from Southwark Council. The Centre has four floors. Despite its size, however, it feels rather small, due to the narrowness of the staircase and the high volume of traffic that often occurs throughout the course of the week.

There are several rooms in the house and the organization as a whole is trying to take advantage of all of its space. With the help of members, workers, volunteers, (and the anthropologist), in April of 1999, the Centre received a "spring cleaning" and several rooms were painted. The main reception room is the first room that one sees upon entering the Centre. Located on the ground floor, it is a small room with a main desk, one table, a few chairs and a telephone. It was, at one time, too crowded due to a photocopy machine and file cabinets which have since been placed in other parts of the house.

In the reception area there is an "information bank"-- a rack/stand that has flyers, pamphlets, and leaflets advertising a wide range of workshops, programs, events, conferences, and education courses as well as other grass-roots groups/advice centers. Many of the flyers (which are

also posted on the walls) are intended to increase community awareness about issues of racism, domestic violence, childcare, immigration and asylum seekers, school exclusions, gender discrimination, healthcare, community council meetings, university and college courses. The front window in the main reception area is covered with some of the previously mentioned leaflets and flyers. There are so many leaflets that one may initially feel completely inundated by them. At first glance, I thought that these leaflets had been hanging there for ages. Upon taking a closer look, however, I realized that they are changed and updated on a regular basis. This information is useful to many of the clients.

Administrative workers answer phone calls in the reception area. The administrative workers do not have any clients. Known as "admin" workers, they do, however, service the clients as they enter the Centre. In addition to answering phones, they make photocopies, and schedule appointments. Besides the main reception area, the ground floor also houses the crèche or children's nursery. From the children's area one can go into the garden, which is large enough for children to play. There is a stationary slide for the children as well. The rest of the multi-story house is used accordingly. While the coordinator has

a central office and there is also a central office for the fax/computers, the other rooms in the four-floor house are multi-purpose rooms/offices utilized primarily by volunteers and employees. The central room on the second floor, for example, is frequently used for such activities as programs and meetings. The kitchen, which is located on the second floor, although small, frequently serves as the place for good food, "a cup of tea," interesting conversation, and relaxation. On Fridays, when the Centre workers are not inundated with clients, the women of the Centre often cook and eat lunch together.

Members, Constituents, and Services

There are approximately 75-100 members of Southwark Black Women's Centre. Similar to many organizations in general and more specifically those at the grass-roots, SBWC has a core group of members, approximately 35 women in their late 30s through mid-50s. There is also a handful of younger members in their 20s. The organizational membership is divided into two categories: (1) Staff; and (2) Management Committee--the governing body. Members of the staff include: the coordinator, an advice worker, two administrative workers, two volunteers, and six workers for two specific organizational projects--Southwark Parent and Child Educational Scheme and Sure Start. There are also

three adjunct staff counselors who are employed by an outside agency. There are 17 members of the Management Committee, which is the governing body of the organization. The Management Committee is steered by a Chair, Vice Chair, Treasurer, and Secretary. The remaining committee members are on the organization's various standing committees i.e., Programming and Events, Outreach, Black Women's Awards.

The staff and Management Committee meet together every six weeks throughout the year. The organization also has an Annual General Meeting (AGM) that is open to all of its members, usually held in the Spring or Summer. As a form of "checks and balances," all decisions made by the organization must be approved and accepted by the Management Committee. Also, to avoid a conflict of interests, staff members are not granted voting rights.

The Centre, as previously stated, is well known throughout the borough. Of SBWC's core members, the coordinator and chairperson are probably the best known. I conducted life histories both abbreviated and in-depth with members of the Centre. The following information gives an idea of the lives of the Centre's staff at Southwark Black Women's Centre.

The coordinator, Katherine, on many occasions while walking throughout the neighborhood, is stopped by or she

stops others to say a hello. An extremely generous, committed, and warm-hearted person (I discovered quite early in my research), she is, unquestionably, a well-respected member of the Southwark community. Katherine has established a long-standing good reputation in the community. Some of this popularity stems from the fact that she previously lived, as she proudly told me, in the Aylesbury Estate.⁷ Her pride seemed to be based on two factors: (1) her accomplishments since her years in the estate; and, (2) her long-standing relationship with members of the Aylesbury community.

Katherine, one of the founding members of Southwark Black Women's Centre, was 48 years old at the time of our first interview. She is a St. Lucian woman who came to England in the late 1950s when she was just eight years of age. She, along with her siblings and other extended kin, arrived by ferry with her grandparents, since her parents were already in England. She is the product of two hardworking parents who had come to England to work as civil servants--her father at Croydon airport and her mother at what is now known as TSB bank.

She has lived in London nearly all of her life with

⁷ Today she lives in Brockley, an area of South London that may be characterized as middle class.

the exception of a brief return to St. Lucia during her early twenties. She thought she had returned "home," but was surprised to learn that her home was England. She had grown accustomed to her life in England and was amazed when the small community in St. Lucia began to refer to her as the "English girl."

As she told me in one of our interviews, Katherine believes that she was destined to serve the community. Her life as a single mother of four small children changed dramatically once she began attending community meetings at the Aylesbury estate. Since the decision to break away from Mama Yeabo 17 years ago, when the use of Katherine's flat as a meeting place was necessary for the women "making a change," she has, according to Ruth and Patricia⁸, among others, been the moral fiber of the organization. She states that her life was not complete until she made the transition from office work (during her early twenties she was one of the few women buyers employed at a paper company) to serving the community. Since entering community activism, it has dominated most of Katherine's life for almost twenty years.

The coordinator, similar to the chairperson (discussed

⁸ Ruth and Patricia are long-standing members of SBWC. They are discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

below), is on the front lines and is in "the trenches" at all times. She is the primary liaison for the Southwark Black Women's Centre. In addition to overseeing the organization, Katherine takes on a number of responsibilities: she attends meetings, is the public relations representative, applies for grants, creates as well as reinforces alliances and coalitions with other groups, sees constituents, and handles the majority of correspondence with the local authorities. Along with her numerous responsibilities are her long hours: for Katherine, being at home before 8pm is an accomplishment.

The current chair of the SBWC, characterized by her feisty personality, is a South African woman who came to England in 1961 during her early 20s. She was 60 years old at the time of our interview. I will call her Sara, known as the one who sews. Sara's father was a white South African and her mother, a black woman from Scotland. She came from an affluent family and Sara, unlike many of the other members of SBWC, has a history of activism that precedes her life in England. Not having personally experienced racism during her childhood years, upon attending university in Johannesburg, her life as a political activist had just begun. She then became actively involved in anti-apartheid struggles and movements in South

Africa, more specifically the African National Congress Youth League. During our interview, she commented on the strikingly different forms of racism--British as compared to that of South Africa. She said,

When I first came to this country I remember thinking...the racism here is unbelievable! The racism in South Africa I could deal with because you knew the whites were racists...But the racism here...people pat you on the back and [at the same time] stab you in the back (Interview, 3 November 1998).

She became involved in politics in England in the 1980s through her commitment to various grass-roots organizations in the voluntary sector. Her path crossed that of the coordinator of Southwark Black Women's Centre (then Black Women's Action Group) via such grass-roots organizations as Southwark Black Communities Consortium, Southwark Council for Voluntary Organizations, and Southwark Black Workers Group.

Both Katherine and Sara were co-opted councilors in Southwark during the 1980s. While Katherine was serving on the Women's Equality Unit, Sara was co-opted to serve on the borough's Race Equality Unit. Comparable to other interviewees, she argues that the Women's Units and Race Units bridged the gap between the objectives, policies, and intentions of the local authorities and the grass-roots. According to Sara, "there seemed to be more of a connection

to black people as a whole. We were able to monitor various items on the council's agenda" (Interview, 3 November 1998).

In addition to the coordinator and chairperson, one of the most important positions in SBWC is that of the advice worker. The advice worker holds the organization together in a different way than that of the coordinator or the chair. The advice worker must be well versed in areas related to housing, welfare benefits, and immigration. With that knowledge, she provides counsel, gives recommendations, tries to clarify situations for the clients and is often the liaison between the client and the local authorities. She is, undoubtedly, a key member of the organization.

SBWC's primary advice worker is a St. Lucian mother of three, who came from to England as a child in the late 1950s and has been a member of SBWC since its inception in 1983. I will call her Ruth. She is a woman with a many grandchildren, a jovial laugh, a smoker's cough, as well as an excellent cook. Ruth who was 54 years old at the time of our first conversation, is known for her fascination with American politics. Our conversations were numerous particularly because, during my field research, former US President Bill Clinton faced impeachment and was under much

scrutiny due to his extra-marital sexual activities.

Ruth has only been employed at SBWC for the past five years. In theory, she is a part-time worker. In reality, she works far more hours than her part-time schedule would dictate. Similar to many of her colleagues, she had no previous involvement in black women's organizations but thought that the coordinator's (who is, also her cousin) idea of having a black women's organization was "brilliant." According to Ruth, "in 1983 there was nowhere to receive advice in the community... women had no help in the community" (Interview, September 8, 1998). More than this, while reminiscing about her early years in England, Ruth remembers the following... "When I was younger there was nowhere or one to turn... to seek help. And that was difficult, I had no one to show me how this country worked" (Interview, SBWC, September 8, 1998).

Ruth provides advice and assistance in relation to such issues as housing, domestic violence, and immigration. She is perhaps best known for her outreach efforts in the South Asian (specifically the Bengali) community. Ruth helps many Bengali constituents who often express a reluctance to seek help from some of the local Asian community organizations. Although they may share cultural similarities with these organizations, differences in class

propel many of them toward SBWC because, as one Asian woman told me, "they treat us as equal...they do not judge."

Known here as "Naja," this Bengali wife and mother of five children, frequently stopped by SBWC. She did not work outside of the home, but rather received public assistance and lived in the Aylesbury housing estate. Although Naja spoke very little English, most staff at SBWC believed that her regular visits to the Centre were due to loneliness.

The SBWC has an Asian Women's Group that meets weekly at the Centre and the number of women who attend this gathering has increased substantially from its initial one or two. At the time of my fieldwork there were approximately 20⁹ women in the Asian Women's Group. Many of these Bengali women live on the Aylesbury estate.

"Nilana," a Bangladeshi woman in her 40s, is a volunteer who teaches ESL (English as a Second Language) classes to the Asian Women's Group at SBWC. She was born and raised in Bangladesh, where she completed her undergraduate training in political science. Nilana has lived in London for the past 22 years and has been employed as interpreter there for nearly 12 years. During our

⁹ This is somewhat of a conservative figure in comparison to the number of users listed in the SBWC 1999/2000 Work Program. In the Work Program the number of users is 30. The group membership changes from week to week and attendance often depends on the women's weekly schedules.

interview, Nilana noted that the Centre provides a comfortable atmosphere for many South Asians in the Aylesbury housing estate. Moreover, the Centre's proximity coupled with the fact that Asian women do not experience racism there is what continues to encourage them to use the organization's services.

Ruth's outreach to the Asian community is directly related to a larger issue--the increase in SBWC's cases of domestic violence in the Asian community. In recent years, many Bengali women have turned to SBWC seeking refuge. Some women fear that reports of domestic violence to an Asian center will not be kept confidential and will ultimately be revealed to the larger Asian community, which considers the issue "taboo," an aspect of life that should not be openly discussed. Indeed, Asian women who suffer from domestic violence are perceived as disobedient in the eyes of the community.

As Ruth expressed to me, domestic violence is deemed by some as part of the "Asian culture" or Asian religion. Regarded as keepers of tradition, family values, and gender specific roles, Asian women often find themselves as victims of domestic violence while at the same time, they are dependent on their violent husbands (in many instances Asian women do not work outside of the home). Women are

often beaten when they are perceived to have been disobedient or to have brought disgrace to their family. For women to expose their husbands, therefore, is a breach of domestic privacy or in other words viewed as "airing dirty laundry."

Whether it is cases of domestic violence or immigration, over the past few years much of the increase in South Asian usage of the Centre is coupled with Ruth's outreach. SBWC has made concerted efforts to meet the needs of its surrounding Asian community. The Centre also helped facilitate the newly formed Bangladeshi men's group. In addition, SBWC provides space for English language classes for Asians; these are taught on a weekly basis. Interestingly, despite such outreach, in my research I found that South Asian involvement in SBWC is limited. South Asians primarily use the Centre in order to receive services but are not politically active in the organization.

One of the two administrative workers is originally from Jamaica, and came to England in the 1960s when she was nine or ten years of age, accompanying her parents who sought work. I will call her Patricia. In her late 30s, she too works part-time, and is known for her precocious three-year old son whom she often brings with her to work.

Patricia's initial involvement with Southwark Black Women's Centre began ten years ago as a volunteer working two or three days a week. Upon the birth of her second child, she yearned to become involved in community work outside of the home. One day, a resident of the area introduced her to the Centre and from that moment, Patricia became involved with the Centre's drop-in crèche and other activities. She also became actively involved with the classes that were held or sponsored by the Centre e.g., women's self-assertiveness classes and crèche workers courses. Remembering her years at the Centre Patricia told me,

During this period (the early years) there was much more funding, so there were more things going on...and the Centre needed as much help as possible...Now you can't get money for anything, you are just getting basic funding to run the Centre" (Interview, SBWC, September 9, 1998).

As several members revealed, in previous years, the organization tended to have more programs that focused on children. The Centre provided after school projects, play schemes, a "drop-in" day care or crèche program for mothers and children. Several interviewees remembered the many parents who utilized the crèche.

The Centre previously had funding for a formal crèche. Today, children primarily use the area as a "playroom" when

they come into the Centre with a parent who is seeking advice or help. This area is well stocked with toys and books donated by users of the Centre and the Inner London Probation Service which, a few years ago, provided toys made by persons on probation. There is a bathroom in the back (accessible to the elderly and those with special needs) and also a room with a washing machine (this room is not in use).

At present, the Centre is trying to renew its focus on children. During my fieldwork, several proposals to local outside agencies were prepared in order to receive more funding for children's services. More specifically, the Centre is taking an aggressive approach in its preventive measures to decrease the level of exclusions¹⁰ of black children. To this end, in coordination with Southwark

¹⁰ The term exclusion is used loosely to refer to a wide range of practices barring children from school. For that reason, precise meaning is, at times, unclear. Nonetheless, exclusion from school ranges in degree and severity. For example, one can be sent home from school for defying school dress codes. In other instances, some children are barred from school for a limited number of days. In more extreme cases, children (mostly boys) can face permanent exclusion for disruptive behavior; and they become labeled as "out of control." Many severe cases of exclusionary practices against children are due to racism and discrimination. School exclusion discrimination frequently occurs in cases of mental illness (See The Guardian Unlimited, 20 October 1999, "Lost in Space". See also, 14 April 2000, "Children From Hell.")

Somali Refugee Council (SSRC), Southwark Black Women's Centre has developed a new initiative known as the Southwark Parent and Child Education Scheme (SPACES). Today, SPACES, a Lambeth, Southwark, Lewisham Joint Financed Project,¹¹ addresses such issues as parenting skills, children's emotional and behavioral difficulties as well as providing advice to parents of those children who have been excluded. SBWC's objective is to do the following:

Take preventative as well as remedial measures to decrease the level of exclusions of black children, [as well as] provide support for both parents and children to re-establish the [excluded] child into the educational system (n.d. informational leaflet).

The Sure Start project is another way in which SBWC attempts to address children's needs. Sure Start is part of other government initiatives such as the Single Regeneration Budget Program--Aylesbury Plus, and the New Deal for Communities, which aim to address issues of social exclusion, community safety and "building better communities." The project "aims to enhance the opportunities and life chances for young children and their

¹¹ Lambeth, Southwark, Lewisham, three boroughs in South London, are geographically situated near one another. See Figure 3.

families living in the Aylesbury area of Southwark.¹²

By using a combination of outreach services, home visits, and innovative learning techniques, this project aims to provide support, advice, information and assistance to low-income families and children. Sure Start focuses on the needs of children from birth to four years of age. As the coordinator, Katherine, suggested,

These are the formative and critical years in a child's life. The idea is that families have perhaps the most influence during children's lives both educationally as well as socially (Interview, SBWC, 25 May 2000).

The Centre is open from 10:00am to 5:00pm Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. On Thursdays it remains open until 7:00pm for counseling sessions. During my fieldwork, it was a rare occasion, however, when any of us left the Centre at 5:00pm. In fact, Katherine and Ruth would on many occasions see clients after 6:00pm.

Although there is much variety from one day to the next at the Centre--for example, some days are extremely busy and others are slow--Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays tend to be the busier days. I have observed that the Centre's busiest months are those between November and late

¹² The Sure Start area includes the Aylesbury estate and five smaller surrounding estates that comprise most of the Faraday ward in the London Borough of Southwark. A smaller area may be selected given the results of a preliminary survey.

March. More specifically, following the Christmas holiday season, the coordinator has observed that there seem to be more documented cases of domestic violence.

The surrounding area near Elsted Street is home to corner shops--two newsagents, two fish & chips shops, dry cleaners, and the sub-post office. The area is the home of many "diverse communities" or ethnic populations, each of which is geographically concentrated.¹³ Many of the organization's constituents are from low income and unemployed families. Similar to many other residents in the borough, its users receive public assistance in the form of child benefits or income support, or low rent estate housing. In other words, many of SBWC's clients are "on the dole," or have "signed on." Because of this, one of SBWC's main foci is its emphasis on women's access to employment. To this end, the Centre encourages personal development skills, interviewing techniques, résumé preparation, and back to work skills. The organization would also like to provide information technology training as well as vocational instruction in dressmaking, design, and other

¹³ The census data collected by Southwark Council shows that the number of Irish (16%), Caribbean (29%), and African (25%) residents in Southwark is greater in comparison to London at-large. In comparison, the South Asian population, particularly Indians (4%) and Pakistanis (1%), is fewer than that of London at-large (see 1993 Southwark Council: Information from the 1991 Census of Population).

art related skills.

Service delivery counseling is one of the organization's main objectives. Counseling at SBWC has grown over the years as a result of the increasing number of referrals that the organization receives from such outside community agencies as the Southwark Police Domestic Violence Unit and Southwark Council for Community Relations (SCCR). During my research, there were three councilors at Southwark Black Women's Centre. Although not employed directly through SBWC, they were contracted for through an outside agency. The councilors are qualified working practitioners who also receive continuous training and are supervised by the agency. Seeing clients twice a week, they provide individual one-hour sessions on either a long term or short-term basis. There are a few cases in which long-term group counseling is available, particularly in cases of mental illness.

Southwark Black Women's Centre receives women of all ages. Many are young girls in and out of temporary housing who need services. As Patricia told me,

The asylum seekers tend to be African women...Somali women. The issues are the same for all women, regardless of race and ethnicity...white women with mixed-race children have similar issues because their children are classified as black...we don't get a lot of white women coming in here but...[they] do come to the Centre, they hear

by word of mouth really...Or, they'll go to some agency and [the organization] will refer them on...we are advertised in the local directory...(Interview, SBWC, 9 September 1998)

The organization's constituents are of all ages and their needs are quite diverse. Younger women "are able to manage and negotiate the system better than older people" (Katherine, SBWC, n.d. September 1998). Also, in many instances older women require home visitation. Over the years, the Centre has witnessed an increase in the number of older women and families who need its services. As a result, it has created an older women's group that includes a small cluster of seniors who are able to gain support from one another and in turn provide mentoring to younger women. Through their connection to the Centre, the seniors then become part of an extended social network, which becomes especially valuable during one's later years in life.

The next section draws attention to the various dimensions of black women's grass-roots activism from a theoretical perspective. It addresses the how and why women become involved in community activism, the processes of politicization, as well as the tensions and conflicts in coalitional politics.

Women's Activism, Processes of Politicization

In general, black women's grass-roots organizations have undergone many transformations over the years. These changes have contributed to different forms of politicization. In the course of my fieldwork I explored the ways in which women from different racial, ethnic, cultural, and class backgrounds in Britain (more specifically, London) came to identify and then challenge relations of power that circumscribe their lives. I asked such questions as: why do these women engage in such activism? What contributes to the processes of politicization? Some organizations such as Amina Mama Wa Afrika (AMWA) have conceptually broadened their vision by making the decisive shift from a local community group in the voluntary sector to becoming a feminist non-governmental organization (NGO) with many transnational links (AMWA Capacity Building Seminar, 28 April 1999; Interview, 9 June 1999). Others such as the long-standing East London Black Women's Organization (ELBWO) (formed in 1978) have shifted from more a politically active program to an emphasis on service provision (Interview, 14 May 1999).

Useful cross-cultural comparisons with regard to processes of politicization are found in the work of

sociologist Nancy Staples (1998: 330-332). She has identified several key elements in understanding women engaged in diverse political struggles, including their battles waged for economic security and social justice in New York City, Philadelphia and the small rural town of Midtown, Iowa. She argues that women's political sensibilities are embedded in and developed in relation to others. For example, how women see themselves in relation to community is significant in understanding how they interpret the conditions of their lives. She further contends that through particular experiences and struggles, women grass-roots activists often develop a broader conceptualization of how these battles are structured within the larger political, economic, and cultural context. In other words, an everyday life experience of injustice at times "opens spaces" for oppositional consciousness and activism.

Similarly, in England, the processes of politicization vary from one individual or organization to the next. For Southwark Black Women's Centre, for example, organizational activity and involvement during the early years is often contrasted with the Centre's current focus on service provision. Current coordinator and charter member Katherine remembered the initial politicization and stated the

following:

[In the 1980s,] we were learning to be political. There were marches protests, meetings. You see, before our involvement [in Black Women's Action Group] we were ordinary women in our homes. Nobody had ever gone to protest marches...[I] n the 1980s you could speak up about issues and there was a lot more black self-organization. It was new and exciting and you thought you could make a difference...The mood has changed...Organizations are now on the outside. At least when [the GLC] was in place we felt like we were a part of something... and that the arguments we had to say were taken on board. Now it's very different. (Interview, SWBC, 14 September 1998).

Unlike other black women's organizations, for example, the Organization of Women of Asian and African Descent and Brixton Black Women's Group, whose members had previously been involved in black power groups or women's consciousness raising groups, the women of Southwark Black Women's Centre were different. By virtue of their inexperience in relation to community organizing in general and black women's organizing in particular, the members of the then named Black Women's Action Group were undergoing processes of politicization. The above-mentioned quote reveals the formation of black women's consciousness during the early years.

Here I return to the issue of class. As mentioned previously (see Chapter IV), the women of BWAG were working-class. Not attending university, they lived on the

nearby housing estate. This is in noticeable contrast to the OWAAD women, and illuminates their resistance to embracing feminism.

As Sandra Morgen (1988: 103) has noted in her study of a cross-class, multiracial coalition of women in New England, studies of activism often fail to address how participants define or socially construct political activity and meaning. Ultimately, these constructions affect choices of political action as well as the development of a political consciousness. This is certainly true of Southwark Black Women's Centre which has never fully embraced or identified with the label "feminist" despite the fact that its issues, campaigns, protests, and activism fall within the domains of modern-day feminism. Interestingly, members often refer to the Peckham Black Women's Centre (PBWC) as both feminist and political "in a traditional manner"-- meaning, that it addressed issues affecting women rather than those of the family in general.

By contrast, SBWC has, since its inception, addressed issues and problems affecting not only women but also their families. In addition, several members emphasized that the organization's ability to grow politically has been the result of its keeping a "low profile."

All told, as the years have passed, SBWC has

maintained its commitment to supporting the community through service provision. As Katherine told me,

What we do is political in a non-traditional way. Many people, however, may not see our work as a form of political activity. We enlighten people about local authorities, policies, the government and things like that...It's a way of politicizing people (Interview, n.d. September 1998).

The ability to provide long-term service to the community in spite of shifts in Britain's political economy is, in part, what distinguishes SBWC from other black women's organizations that folded during the period of its inception. This emphasis on service provision has been a powerful vehicle for the politicization of both its members and clients. As a form of politicization, the commitment to service provision has been SBWC's main priority. According to Katherine,

Some of the other organizations were very political in terms of women's issues. I think we left a lot of that to them...we supported them...but those campaigns...they folded. Because you've got nothing else after that...you haven't got any grass-roots support. Because women at the end of the day will come to you with a problem and they don't want for you to just say to them...'well I can't help you today, I've got attend a protest march...' They want day-to-day help...I think it's a huge part of why we're still around. You have to reflect the community you're in and the people you're helping. You can't dismiss people's problems. You can't say 'well you might be evicted tomorrow. But we're out there protesting about South Africa and that's more important...' For that person who's being evicted tomorrow, the protest is not more

important. You know, the reality is...yes, a lot of black people would turn up at anti-apartheid meetings...but the political people from organizations, they would turn up. For black people it's the everyday living, it's hard enough and that's what they're concerned about. They're not saying that they support the racists or wouldn't want people to think they're not supporting the anti-racist march but the day to day living for most black people is so dire... most people haven't got the time or the energy to do that kind of work (Interview, n.d. October 1998).

Challenges and Struggles, Conflicts and Cleavages: We Need a Different Vision

There were many organizations in the early 1980s but they've all died out. Now it's very hard to get funding. Perseverance keeps Southwark Black Women's Centre running and hard work on [the coordinator's] part. The Center is needed...it really is needed...[The coordinator] will fight to keep the Center running, she's got a lot of contacts, she's well connected in the area and in all boroughs...to continue growing you have to be like that (Interview, Ruth, SBWC, 9 September 1998).

As Bookman and Morgen (1988:316) have noted in their edited volume of women's grass-roots organizing in the United States, there is neither one path to political activity nor a specific pattern that will guarantee collective action. This holds true in part because of the heterogeneous membership characteristic of organizations. In other words, members of organizations are diverse and each brings a different set of social and political networks to the group.

Grass-roots organizing in general, and women's grass-roots organizing in particular, are dependent upon relationships with institutions and groups. It is, at times, networks of the members that ultimately shape how an organization operates at a given moment. As case in point, Southwark Black Women's Centre (SBWC) has an intimate working relationship with the Southwark Somali Refugee Centre. Much of this is due to SBWC's treasurer, who was instrumental in creating a women's division of the Southwark Somali Refugee Centre in 1991. Prior to 1991 many Somali refugees sought advice and assistance through Southwark Black Women's Centre. The needs of these women, however, were greater than SBWC could handle. Therefore, the arm within Southwark Somali Refugee Centre was based on demand as well as the greater needs of the Somali community at-large. As mentioned previously in this chapter, organizations must recognize the needs and demands of the community as well as its constituents. Although the social and political networks are important, how these relationships are used in the community is the point that must be examined.

Building on the work of Anthony Leeds (1973), the valuable work of urban anthropologist, the late Delmos Jones (1987) has shown us there is an important

relationship between urban localities and the structure and function of community organizations and their linkages in the larger society. The data elicited from life histories coupled with individual interviews and participant observation enabled me to see that critical points of collision and convergence within and between women's grass-roots organizations are related to the various linkages to the larger society that leaders maintain (see also Susser 1988).

It was clear from my participant observation and interviews that women who are members of grass-roots organizations are politically knowledgeable. Their understanding of the dynamics concerning the larger political economy is reflected in their local struggles in relation to such "bread and butter" issues as education, housing, domestic violence and child-care. Their various linkages to councilors or other people among the local authorities, for example, often provided benefits to their respective organization, e.g., improvements in delivering, or in clients receiving, services. At the same time, however, there are limitations to small-scale localized struggles.

Contentious Ground: State Funding Revisited

In the context of neoliberal policies, the role of the

state in providing social services is dramatically declining. Neoliberal decentralization policies, which call for reductions in health care and social service provisioning, are a reflection of what Sonia Alvarez has referred to in the Latin American context as "municipalization" (1996: 141). More specifically, that term refers to processes in which government policies shift the responsibilities of public administration from the state to the local and regional levels. Within this context, receiving state funding continues to be a controversial issue. I return to a discussion of state funding so that I may draw closer attention to the complexities and contradictions involved in receiving state aid.

As stated in Chapter IV, while social scientists Solomos and Back (1995) have analyzed the role that funding has played in co-opting grassroots struggles by turning activists into service providers, Sudbury (1998: 82-85) argues for a more critical analysis and suggests that organizations which receive state funds are often engaged in a dynamic relationship with the state. For example, organizations that receive funds from the central government are often able to challenge the local authority. This, in turn, requires us to take into account the

differentiation of the state (Sudbury 1998: 83). Sudbury points to the fact that there are highly mobilized groups that do receive state funding. Taken together, both approaches reveal the complexities as well as the contradictions involved in receiving state funding.

Black women's grass-roots organizations today, particularly those that receive funding from local authorities, seem to be bounded by their locality. This sense of restriction is different from those organizations in the 1970s and 1980s that attempted to engage with struggles in the larger national and global context. In addition, in the relationships with the local authorities, organizations do not demand that the councilors or members of the council take their issues to the next level in government.

As explained previously, receiving state funds was a controversial issue for autonomous black women's organizations formed in the 1970s; and the same remains true for state-funded organizations such as Southwark Black Women's Centre. For state-funded groups, there are several administrative requirements that are a necessary dimension of receiving funds; and several informants spoke about this time-consuming process. During my fieldwork, for example, there were ongoing projects that SBWC had to complete in

order to satisfy the requirements of the funding they had received. The coordinator, in particular, had to (1) evaluate SBWC's achievements; and, (2) develop a year-long plan for the upcoming year in order to receive approximately £70,000¹⁴ from the local authority. In addition, the coordinator went to several meetings/workshops in order to find out about joint finance projects--meaning, collaborations with other grass-roots groups (see later in this Chapter). These activities were completed over the course of several months. By following such procedures, organizations are often inundated by paperwork alone.

Some of the circumscribed politics within organizations is related to diverging views on political activity. As previously demonstrated, dissimilar views often create cleavages and, at times, irreconcilable differences within grass-roots organizations. Nevertheless, a broad-based coalitional politics for some women in the voluntary sector seems to be the solution needed to promote change on a larger scale. Several women interviewed spoke of the need for a "pressure group" and were, at the time of my research, in the planning stages of forming a coalition.

¹⁴ This amount changes each year, a yearly increase of approximately 1,000 pounds is provided due to inflation.

Such a group would include some who are and some who are not involved in the voluntary sector. It would also be an organization that would not be restricted by funding from the local authorities, but maintain a focus on changing policy. During one of their initial meetings the group leader explained:

The purpose: political pressure well, we...need to be powerful. The group mustn't get funding. Without the money, we have a very powerful organization. We know organizations have limitations because they receive, but they are needed in a functional capacity. If we don't receive money then we establish political clout... and that's what we need (n.d. March 1999).

Even though this collective was in its nascent stages at the time of my field research, the women (who were Caribbean, African, and Asian) had a vision; that is, to exist without funding from the state. As the abovementioned quote suggests, these women realize the implications of receiving state funds and therefore want to create an organization that is free from funding ties. Interestingly, they tended to envision themselves as similar to Southwark's umbrella community organization of the 1980s-- Southwark Black Communities Consortium.

Recruitment, Retention, and the Rejection of Feminism

As demonstrated, today many black women's grass-roots organizations tackle some of the same challenges that

confronted groups in the past. For example, organizations are challenged by the difficulties of recruiting new, young members. Former members of OWAAD, BBWG, and Birmingham Black Sisters (BBS), in critiquing previous years of political activism, spoke of the need to train younger women. Some women spoke of the inability of organizations to have foresight in the area of recruitment. Others who were actively engaged in political activism during the 1970s and 1980s expressed concern in relation to "battle weariness," the need to start families, and general fatigue.

Contemporary black women's organizations are confronted with these same problems. This was especially evident during Amina Mama Wa Afrika's Capacity Building Seminar (28 April 1999).¹⁵

Here I briefly draw attention to the grass-roots organization Amina Mama Wa Afrika.¹⁶ In 1985, four African women (who were involved in grass-roots political activism in the 1970s) formed Amina Mama Wa Afrika which, in Swahili means solidarity among African women. During the first couple of years of its inception, AMWA benefited from

¹⁵ This was a one-day conference that included several black women's organizations in London. Liverpool Black Sisters also took part in this event.

¹⁶ See Figure 8.

Figure 8 - Black Women's Organizational Chart, No. 5

Name of Organization	Duration	Location	Name Changes
Brixton Black Women's Group (BBWG)	1973 - 1986/1988	London	Initially known as Brixton Women's Group (BWG)
Organization of Women of Asian and African Descent (OWAAD)	1978 - 1983	London	Initially known as Organization of Women of African Descent (OWAD)
Sisters in Struggle (SIS)	Existed for 3 years in the mid-to-late 1980s	London	None
Southwark Black Women's Centre (SBWC)	1983 - present	London	Previously known as Black Women's Action Group (BWAG)
Amina Mama Wa Afrika (AMWA)	1985 - present	London	None

funding provided to the black grass-roots organizations in the voluntary sector by the Left-led GLC, and it was an organization funded by the London Borough of Camden.

Today, AMWA is an NGO and this fact distinguishes the organization from the black women's groups it invited to its one-day seminar. For example, AMWA does not receive state funding and it has also established transnational links between Africa and the UK. The capacity building seminar focused on three key issues that are considered common threads among black women's grass-roots organizations that are trying to survive in the UK. They are as follows: (1) conceptual clarity, (2) institution building, and (3) leadership development.

In terms of conceptual clarity, AMWA recommended that organizations have a clear understanding of their goals and objectives, groups should continue to be centered in relation to issues of gender and must link theory and practice as did black women activists of the 1970s.

AMWA saw institution building--the second key issue--as important because they believe that organizations need to be strategic in both thinking and management. In addition, organizations must be focused in developing programs that are based on the needs of their clients, and community-based organizations must utilize all resources

and diversify their funding base.

The third concern discussed was leadership development. AMWA urged organizations to emphasize the significance of gender in leadership positions. In this light, they emphasized the significance of having women as leaders in organizations that envision a transformational agenda by confronting the political-economic system. Moreover, women's leadership must be rooted in addressing social welfare issues such as poverty, healthcare, childcare, and unemployment.

In this regard, AMWA pointed out that leadership development is a necessity and an investment that ought to include training and opportunities at all levels of membership in community-based organizations. At this particular point in the seminar, women from various organizations in the voluntary sector commented on problems associated with leadership and training as it relates to recruitment and commitment, suggesting that women's organizations have given considerable thought to sustainability--a severe and widespread problem. In other words, several women noted that organizations experience difficulty focusing on leadership and training when they have been challenged by more immediate concerns--of recruitment and commitment--both of which have remained as

issues in community-based organizations for decades.

As a case in point, during our interview, Veronica--former BBWG/OWAAD member--told me that one of her greatest regrets is that the black women activists in the 1970s and 1980s were not able to pass on "in a real way," the principles that they learned to a younger generation of black women. She said, much of this is due to the fact that "somehow we were not able to bridge that gap...they [young black women] were turned off by black feminism" (Interview, 11 May 1999) a term frequently used within social science literature (see Carby 1992[1982]; Collins 1991; Mirza 1997; Parmar 1990). The data from interviews and participant observation, however, motivated me to question this category, probing the extent to which women at the grass-roots level identify with this label.

I found that the rejection of black feminism during the 1970s and 1980s came from women of the same generation. Veronica further said, "black women would say things like 'I'm not a feminist,' but I want equal employment!" (Interview, 11 May 1999). She stated that black women activists were, perhaps, most unsuccessful in translating their ideas; in fact, challenging such issues as equal employment was *precisely* what black feminism was about.

As was the case for black women of different

generations during the 1970s and 1980s, in the present day US, associating the label feminist with radicalism has a divisive potential within "black communities," and this has inhibited usage of the term in many instances. Sociologist Patricia Hill Collins addresses this point in her more recent work,¹⁷ where she explicates the various contradictions associated with the terms *Black feminism* and *Black feminist*. For example, she tells us that the use of the term the US context is useful because, among other things, (1) it reminds people of the inherent racism and the assumed whiteness associated with the term (1998:67); and (2) it positions African American women to think about their struggles in a global context (1998:66).¹⁸ At the same time, there are difficulties in using the term because black women are working within a white feminist framework (1998:68); and because of its association with lesbianism (1998: 69). Jackie,¹⁹ SBWC's current treasurer, confirmed this point by stating the following,

¹⁷ Collins, Patricia Hill, (1998) Chapter 2, "Coming to Voice, Coming to Power: Black Feminist Thought as Critical Social Theory," Pp 44-76, *Fighting Words*.

¹⁸ See also Davis, Angela (1989) *Women, Culture and Politics*; James, Stanlie and Abena Busia (1994) *Theorizing Black Feminisms*.

¹⁹ Jackie, a thirty-something black British mother, is a longstanding member of SBWC.

It shouldn't matter what you are, it doesn't matter if you are a lesbian women or whatever. You're a black woman and that's all we care about. But I still think that people think oooh there's one of those [lesbian] women's groups (Interview, 10 February 1999).

In her discussion, Collins also refers to Heidi Safia Mirza's anthology, *Black British Feminism* (1997). Collins' discussion is important, but she too (as do the authors in this volume), draws our attention more to the use of the term "black" as it applies to the British context than to the use of terms *black feminism* or *black feminist*. Thus, we are left to think about how "black" is being manipulated as the basis for collective action--given the histories of colonialism, imperialism, and migration--rather than how *black feminist* is understood in this context. This leads me to ask: to what extent do people outside of the academy utilize the term *black feminism*? It is my contention that there is much disagreement with regard to the use of the terms *black feminism* and *black feminist*, even in the British context. In general, many black women are much more comfortable with such terms as "black activist." As a result, we must recognize the significance of how people in everyday life really define themselves, as well as the alliances they make based on these definitions.

I began this section by addressing the challenges and

struggles black women's organizations have faced over the last few decades. My data suggest the following: (1) Organizations that receive funds from the state must fulfill the state's administrative requirements in order to justify their funds. Leaders are often overworked and are inundated by bureaucratic steps necessary to complete such tasks. Yet, in a rather contradictory way, I have found that organizations are aware of their precarious position when they receive state funds. And, as a result, far from being co-opted, organizations often use subversive tactics and imaginative strategies in order to accomplish their greater goals while they receive the state's monies.

(2) Black women involved in the grass-roots activism of the 1970s and 1980s recognized the lack of attention given to training and recruiting the next generation of women to uphold their vision; this too is a problem for present day activists. (3) Related to this, the difficulties of embracing the term "black feminism" have limited and constrained the recruitment of many new activists.

(4) In addition, in several interviews, many community workers remarked on the ways in which constituents currently perceive black women's organizations. These views are extremely different from those in the past. During my

interview with Amanda, a staff member at East London's Black Women's Centre, I was told that the relationship between organizations and their constituents has obviously changed over the years (14 May 1999). For example, many people rely on the organization solely as a "business provider." "People use the organization to provide them with services, they receive their product and then they leave. Therefore, the connection is not as deep rooted as it use to be" (Interview, 14 May 1999).²⁰ Moreover, as my informant continued, even though the organization has greater numbers of constituents (based on the greater number of services it provides), "there is less concentrated involvement [in the organization] by those users"(Interview, 14 May 1999).

This speaks to the difficulty of recruiting new members to black women's community organizations from their respective constituencies. Coupled with this is the problem that organizations face when they do indeed recruit members from their constituencies--that is, the problem of retention. Through participant observation, active participation as well as several interviews (e.g., 9 September 1998; 10 February 1999; 8 September 1998), it became clear that cultivation and maintenance of a "core"

²⁰ See Figure 9.

Figure 9 - Black Women's Organizational Chart, No. 6

Name of Organization	Duration	Location	Name Changes
Brixton Black Women's Group (BBWG)	1973 - 1986/1988	London	Initially known as Brixton Women's Group
Organization of Women of Asian and African Descent (OWAAD)	1978 - 1983	London	Initially known as Organization of Women of African Descent (OWAD)
Sisters in Struggle (SIS)	Existed for 3 years in the mid-to-late 1980s	London	None
Southwark Black Women's Centre (SBWC)	1983 - present	London	Previously known as Black Women's Action Group (BWAG)
Amina Mama Wa Afrika (AMWA)	1985 - present	London	None
East London Black Women's Organization (ELBWO)	1978 - present	London	None

membership is vital to black women's grassroots organizations. It is the "core" group that works late hours, makes seemingly unending sacrifices, and is the "glue" that holds the organization together. As Jackie told me,

Unfortunately, a lot of women don't stay long. A lot come in...but they don't stay long. Even though when you come in here we accept you as one of us instantly, I don't think we make any body *feel* as an outsider, but they feel that way as they actually start to come [regularly]. And then they don't stay. It's difficult for an ordinary person to come and stay. Most people get what they need and then leave. That's why you have the same 'core' group of members (Interview, 10 February 1999).

In a final point, many of the challenges organizations face stem from their own internal conflicts and resistance to change. For example, one member of a women's grass-roots community organization informed me that she has distanced herself because of the organization's resistance to change. She argued that her black women's community organization did not do enough outreach or any outreach for that matter. She critiqued the internal structure of the organization, and said that the leadership needs to change. More than this, according to Nefari,

The clients need more than what [this organization] is providing. Their organization does not do outreach...there needs to be job bulletins all of the time, basically it [the

organization] is a bit stagnant right now. And one more thing... it does not take too kindly to non-heterosexual women (Interview, 12 August 1998).

Many of the internal conflicts within "black" women's organizations are also based on issues of race. For example, in many organizations whose constituencies include white women with mixed race children there are conflicting views. In a discussion with one active member of a black women's grass-roots organization, she said the following:

I don't believe in that [race mixing], personally. The less I have to do with them the better. If you're on a normal level then that's acceptable to me. We have a few that come through though. And in terms of the Asian women, well many of them have their own groups now.

These examples reveal the difficulties with regard to organizing across race, class, and gender.

I began this chapter with the challenge to "rethink the political." To do so requires that we look at black women's grassroots organizations and their emphasis on service provision with a different lens, a political one. Black women's community organizations such as Southwark Black Women's Centre whose foundation is based on providing services to the community calls for us to change our way of thinking about politics, gender, race, class, and community. Their role as service providers fits within the context of the devolution of state welfare. Moreover, black

women's grassroots organizations provide a route to social transformation.

Today's organizations are undoubtedly different from those in the past but ironically share some of the same problems. Much of the difference in black women's community activism, as I explained in this chapter and elsewhere in the dissertation, is due to changes in the larger political economic context. Grassroots "organizations occupy an interface position between the local population that they attempt to represent and the higher level institutions concerned with coordination, administration, and the maintenance of order" (Jones 1987: 100). With this in mind I have demonstrated, organizations need to continue to get funding but the consequences are great, they must meet the agenda, i.e., service delivery, of the body/institution distributing those resources.

The national, conservative commitment towards privatization has also contributed to a shift from political activity to service provision. There seems to be, for example, a focus on the quantity not quality of services. Helen, the current director of Southwark Council for Community Relations (SCCR) stated:

The changes tie in to a large extent with the national agenda and the way that people work. There's been a very Conservative ethos, the way

the things have gone over the past 15 years; not the whole of the 15 years but the last 10 or so. You've seen a lot of private practices coming to the voluntary sector, and that's affected the way that people approach the work that they do or the funding they get, and so, therefore, lots of innovative and exciting work has dried up; people don't tend to do that anymore. It's very business focus...it's very outcome lead. It tends to focus on quantity rather on quality...it's really about bums and seats...how many people walk through and how many people walk out. Very rarely are there any qualitative assessments of the impact, they tend to be quantitative assessments...[For example,] 'How many people did you help? How many people did you give advice to? How many people phoned?' There's no assessment in terms of the policy that you develop. How does that change the perception of people... That kind of stuff. There's no evaluation of that, in that sense. Also, because of the funding a lot of the black organizations that survived tend to be those that deliver direct services; whereas before you had a lot of political organizations that developed (Interview, 11 November 1998).

Finally, because the local state is always on trial by the central government, it no longer sees itself in the role of fostering a political campaign. The local government's primary support for the voluntary sector, unlike during the latter years of the GLC's lifespan, is to deliver services, to help people negotiate their way through the system, not to empower them.

Conclusion:

Race and Nation, Gender and the State: Black Women's Grass- Roots Political Activism Revisited

I began my dissertation research in Britain by focusing on the ways in which women of different racial and ethnic backgrounds come to assume a "black" identity. I discovered, rather quickly however, that studying such grassroots organizations as Southwark Black Women's Centre ultimately provided me with a lens to explore the larger complexities of race, class, and gender, a shifting political economy, the transformation of the state and the devolution of state welfare, alongside of grass-roots transformations in Britain. Moreover, the research also enabled me to take a closer look at the early history and beginnings of black communities in Britain. It is through this more in-depth examination that I began to realize the complexity of race and nation as it applies to the British context. My research, then, is set within the context of the declining welfare state and the national framing of the question of "race" or "race relations."

In this dissertation I have attempted to demonstrate both the significance and complexity of state actions. The state often serves as a way of explaining both historical and contemporary processes. Viewing the state through the focused lens of race and gender reveals the contemporary forms, assumptions, and reconstructions of how power is distributed. As is the case for such countries as the US and Brazil, race and nation in Britain are inextricably linked and have been so for centuries. As explained in Chapter I, throughout the history of England, a myth of "Englishness" has delimited the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion of persons based on race, gender, ethnicity, class, and color. The state's inclusion and exclusion of individuals has resulted in the creation of a hierarchy of belonging. Ultimately, both the hierarchy and the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion have contributed to the ideological underpinnings of race and nation in Britain.

This foundation ultimately influenced the overlapping, multiple British histories explored in Chapter I—agricultural, industrial, and colonial. As is argued, these histories contributed to the foundation of the ideological myth of "Englishness." Moreover, these particular historical moments are critical in understanding (1) acts

of dispossession and dislocation; (2) the production of immigrants; and, (3) the processes of marginalizing persons. They perhaps best point to colonialism at home and abroad. In the end, they laid the foundation of the British Empire. It is through these histories that the patriarchal and paternalistic structures of the state are revealed. All told, it is here where a template for Britain's modern-day race relations lies.

As discussed in Chapter II, race and immigration are integral to the state's restrictions regarding the "free" entry of persons into the United Kingdom. One's status as subject, citizen, or migrant, is critical in Britain's attempt to secure itself as a world power and nation-state. It is in this chapter that, perhaps, the most visible signs of the conflation of immigration and colonialism are revealed. Race, class, gender, and nation are significant elements in Britain's myth of imperial equality throughout the empire. A Britishness was geographically, spatially, and politically circumscribed produced an imagined community of Britishness.

Moreover, the state's ability to manipulate both inward and outward migration and nationality, as underscored by Kathleen Paul (1997), strengthened Britain both demographically and geographically. This form of

manipulation was evident in the recruitment of migrant laborers from Europe, as contrasted with the from commonwealth countries. As Britain strengthened its imperial ties, it subsequently tightened its immigration flow from the former colonies. Thus, it sought to control and preserve a socially constructed, ideological notion of British politics, culture, and nation--all white.

In the years following World War II, we see a reformulation of older racial hierarchies. Africans, Caribbeans, and Asians were needed as an inexpensive form of labor. Contemporary models of color and racial hierarchy are often based on this post-World War II hierarchical ranking of populations.

In Chapters III, IV, and V I analyzed three overlapping phases in the development of black women's organizations. Although state actions were significant in understanding historical and contemporary processes, it was also important to realize that in the process of making history there was always agency, struggle, and protest. Therefore, while the state attempted to reinforce its hierarchy of belonging through immigration legislation, political activism, resistance and collective action were also emphasized during this period.

As discussed in Chapter III, following World War II,

South Asian, African, and Caribbean people have a more heightened awareness of the fact that they are linked, not necessarily by color, but by experiences of colonialism, imperialism, and racism. While the state imposes the category "black," as well as formulates arguments in relation to culture and difference, the previously mentioned racial and ethnic groups embrace a racially conscious "political nationalism" under the umbrella of "blackness." All told, a transformation of the state, a tightening of immigration legislation coupled with racist violence, was the impetus behind the creation of "black" grass-roots organizations.

This anti-imperialist stance, however, is not enough. As a political platform it fails to address issues of gender. As seen in the third Chapter, it is here that the seeds of black women's grass-roots activism were sown. The women's organizations that followed were created out of a need to address issues of both racial and gender inequality. They too challenged the state's actions.

Not only is this period distinguished by black women's grass-roots activism it was also marked by the seeds of Thatcherism. With the election of Margaret Thatcher, the political climate in Britain shifted to the Right; and, there was a noticeable conservative sentiment that

followed. As racism boiled to the surface, the anti-racist uprisings that occurred throughout the country, were clearly in response to Right-wing racist sentiment. Within this context, the coalitional use of blackness as a political category by Africans, Asians, and Caribbeans began to decline, and yet, at the same time, the Left-wing local state came to power.

The second phase, discussed in Chapter IV, is marked by the rise of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher to power; and is also characterized by contradictions. In this chapter, I attempted to address the entangled and at times confusing relationships between the state, the grass-roots, and the Left. Thatcher's ascendancy was paralleled by the development of a radical Left-wing form of government at the level of the local state. The role of the Greater London Council, while Ken Livingstone was its leader, highlighted these seemingly radical tendencies as they interfaced with the grass-roots. This relationship, was however, questioned on the grounds that many grass-roots organizations underwent radical transformations once they received funding from the GLC. As I have demonstrated, organizations during this phase slowly but surely declined into a more diminished form of politics. Receiving funds from the GLC before its collapse in 1986, they shifted from

being autonomous entities to state funded groups. Within this changing political-economic context, there was a flattening of the Left and rise of the Right which also affected organizations such as the Southwark Black Women's Centre (then named Black Women's Action Group).

In Chapter V, which covered the late 1980s to present, I underscored the notion of "rethinking the political" and the significance of service provision as a form of activism as well as empowerment. Furthermore, Britain's Prime Minister, Tony Blair, was viewed as promoting of neoliberal reforms firmly planted during Thatcher's term. Within this context, state-funded organizations such as Southwark Black Women's Centre must continue to provide social services to women, a diminished form of empowerment.

In the last sections of this chapter I attempt to draw attention to the various dimensions involved in black women's grass-roots organization.

Barriers to Political Activism and Arenas of Contestation

Over the past few decades, community based organizations have faced various internal and external conflicts and contradictions that have contributed to the destruction of grass-roots groups. The interrelated arenas of contestation I will discuss are three-fold: class,

vision, and co-optation. Though these themes have been discussed throughout the dissertation, I revisit them again to draw attention to their significance.

(1) The role of class as it is mediated in grass-roots organizations is complex. As first seen in Chapter III, the issue of class is a determining factor in the shape of a grass-roots organization. The women of Brixton Black Women's Group, for example, were criticized for their middle-class orientation. Working-class women told BBWG members that the organization's objectives echoed those of the middle-classes. Significantly, it seems, except in one or two cases, the young women of BBWG did not have any children at the time. This too, is an indicator of a specific form of activism; unknowingly BBWG women were not greatly concerned with women within the group who had children. More specifically, study groups that included readings from Marx, in fact, reflected a university-educated organization of women who were concerned about issues of race, class, and gender but who were, at the same time, perceived as being dissociated from the community.

The relationship between class and the use of the terms feminist and feminism, and more specifically *black feminist* and *black feminism* as discussed in Chapter V, also contributes to the complexity and diversity within

community-based organizations. Many women have expressed what I call a dis-identification with feminism. This was an interesting point of discussion within the context of Southwark Black Women's Centre, an organization made up primarily of working-class women. The feminist label has different meanings depending on whom one is speaking to. For example, not only is there the association with lesbianism, or radical activism; my research suggests that many black working-class women tend not to identify with any of the labels--feminist, feminism, black feminist, or black feminism, for the simple reason of their divisiveness within the black community. This limits the use of the concept "feminist" to engender black women's grass-roots mobilization.

(2) In a related matter, issues with regard to vision seem to plague community based-organizations. Diverging political views tend to create cleavages within organizations. Much of this is directly connected to issues of power, as well as to the recruitment and retention of members. Overall, community-based black women's grass-roots organizations have not found a way to effectively recruit and retain younger members. This particular issue was raised in the 1970s with such organizations as Brixton

Black Women's Group and as I have stated continues to be problematic even today.

Having said that, organizations with a "core group" of members are overworked. Yet, they find that it is imperative to teach and pass on the skills, political consciousness, and solidarity to a generation of younger women. How an organization effectively does this remains obscure, especially since this has been an issue for decades. One possible solution is to actively recruit women, possibly establishing a branch within the community-based organization that is specifically directed to include younger women as active participants in the organization's activities over a period of time.

(3) The role of financial and political co-optation of organizations continues to be an arena of contestation. Overall, state funding seems to undermine activist, oppositional organizations. This first appears in Chapter III within the context of Brixton Black Women's Group, but is also seen on Chapter IV in the discussion of Southwark Black Communities Consortium. As a case in point, BBWG began to operate differently as it became preoccupied with funding, specifically, financial support from the state. More broadly, as the GLC's Women's Units and Race Units distributed money to grass-roots groups the community

organizations were then in a precarious position when they critiqued the state. In addition, organizations also became less politically active and more aware of their responsibilities--such as providing accountability for state funds--that went alongside of receiving financial support. Previously autonomous organizations that received financial support found themselves with new time-consuming obligations; and, overall, they experienced a diminished form of activism. This point is clearly underscored in Chapters III, IV, and V.

While financial co-optation with regard to community-based organizations is significant, so too is the role of political co-optation. The issue of co-opting councilors is discussed at length in Chapter IV, but should also be noted here because of its implication in undermining political activism. As part of the state's efforts to have community consultation, co-opted councilors literally had one foot in the state and the other in the grass-roots; to a degree, they became extensions of the state. The lack of uniformity with which they were chosen and the uncertainty as to what role they actually had, compounded their dubious relationship to black political activists, white Left socialists, and the state, alike.

Transformational Politics: In the Face of Struggle and Resistance

Since their inception in the 1970s, black women's grassroots organizational knowledge of the larger political economy has contributed to campaigns and struggles in several "bread and butter" arenas--housing, domestic violence, immigration. Simultaneously, their struggles have transformed politics. Black women's organizations have called for us to redefine spheres of politics and at the same time have required that we think about new forms of political activism. The organizations in the 1970s and 1980s (more so than those today) called for an inclusive "black" women's politics, which integrated South Asian, African, and Caribbean women. These organizations were characterized by an anti-imperialist stance that attempted to recognize difference and diversity. My dissertation research provides additional insight into the kinds of decisions, events, and catalysts that lead women to select and negotiate racial and ethnic identities.

We have recently entered into the twenty-first century and are constantly reminded that women confront most of the issues and problems that they faced at the end of the twentieth century. As Bookman (1988) keenly noted us over 10

years ago, the impact of political mobilization can be measured neither by mere election results nor by the number of demands that were actually won in a campaign. Nevertheless, political activity and commitment creates change. Black women's organizations in Britain entered the political arena in the early 1970s. Although many no longer exist, others continue to demonstrate the resilience and determination they did in previous decades. Despite the various critiques of black women's organizations, their ability to survive is evidence of their power to deal with the complex realities of black women's lives. This is true for the women earlier involved in such grass-roots groups as the Organization of Asian and African Descent and Brixton Black Women's Center; and it remains true for women who are still involved in Liverpool Black Sisters, Southwark Black Women's Centre, Amina Mama Wa Afrika, and East London Black Women's Organization.

All told, black women's grassroots organizations provide a unique context in which to pursue the intersections of race, class, and gender, as they also interact with the state. In Britain, they represent a tradition of organizing that does not define itself based on narrow definitions of identity, gender, or race. Ultimately, the challenge for black women's grass-roots

organizations in Britain is the ability to respond to a changing global economy. These organizations must build on struggles that link women of color in a global transnational context.

In Britain's current political and economic climate, it is clear that women face an uphill battle. Their everyday struggle to survive in the face of a waning welfare state and eroding social guarantees is what enables us to broaden our definitions of what is political. In Chapter IV I discuss the breakdown of state welfare and suggest that consequently much grassroots organizational activity today tends to focus on service provision. Such organizations as Southwark Black Women's Centre are marked by their years of service provision and their insistence on building political solidarity and consciousness. They are also confronted with some of the issues and concerns of their sister organizations of previous decades.

The emphasis on service provision represents a shift from more traditional forms of community activism and at the same time represents changes in Britain's welfare state. Since much of the work that organizations perform today is closely linked to servicing the community, many differ in form and function from those in the 1970s and 1980s. This shift in what organizations do is fundamental

in broadening our understanding of what is political.
Ultimately, it is through an examination of grassroots
organizations that we may learn about strategies of both
survival and resistance.

Glossary

AMWA	Amina Mama Wa Afrika
BPM	Black Power Movement
BBS	Birmingham Black Sisters
BWAG	Black Women's Action Group
BBWG	Brixton Black Women's Group
BWO	Black Women's Organization
BUFP	Black Unity and Freedom Party
CARD	Campaign Against Racial Discrimination
CRE	Commission for Racial Equality
DOE	Department of Environment
ELBOW	East London Black Women's Organization
FLC	Foreign Labour Committee
GLC	Greater London Council
ILEA	Inner London Education Authority
LBS	Liverpool Black Sisters
LCC	London County Council
MCC	Metropolitan County Council
MP	Minister of Parliament
NCCI	National Committee for Commonwealth Immigrants
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
OWAAD	Organization of Women of Asian and African Descent

PBWC	Peckham Black Women's Centre
RAAS	Radical Action Adjustment Society
SBCC	Southwark Black Communities Consortium
SBWC	Southwark Black Women's Centre
SCCR	Southwark Council for Community Relations
SIS	Sisters in Struggle
SWC	Southwark Women's Centre
UCPA	Universal Coloured People's Association
UK	United Kingdom
UKC	United Kingdom and Colonies
UNRRA	United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration

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