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## Race at the Margins: A Critical Race Theory Perspective on Race Equality in UK Planning

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### **Abstract**

Despite evidence of the growing ethnic diversity of British cities and its impact on urban governance, the issue of racial equality in UK planning remains marginal, at best, to mainstream planning activity. This paper uses Critical Race Theory (CRT) to consider the reasons why the ‘race’ and planning agenda continues to stall. CRT, it is argued, offers a compelling account of why changes in practice over time have been patchy at best, and have sometimes gone into reverse.

**Keywords:** Race; ethnic minorities; racism; urban planning; colour-blind policy; Critical Race Theory

## **Introduction**

This paper argues the need for a different theoretical approach and framework for understanding the persistent recalcitrance of the UK planning system to injunctions, advice and analyses promoting race equality. It suggests that Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides a promising approach. The paper's arguments are illustrated with empirical material drawn from existing literature; if adopted, a new theoretical approach could help frame distinctive research projects, but it is not the aim of this paper to develop these or report on new empirical work. Its primary contribution is to the theorisation of planning in a racialized UK. The paper emerges from the authors' research into UK planning over several decades, but the plausibility of its argument has implications well beyond the UK environment: if CRT has purchase in explaining aspects of UK planning then there is every reason to suppose it also has explanatory value in other countries in the Global North. No detailed knowledge of UK planning is needed for understanding the arguments of this paper, but it will be helpful to appreciate that: a) the UK remains a very centralized polity; much of planning policy is framed by the national governments responsible for planning – the UK government in respect of England, and the Scottish Government, Welsh Government and Northern Ireland Executive in relation to those three nations/regions; b) there is some scope for local sensitivity in planning policy, and this allows local councils (local planning authorities) to devise their own policies and make independent decisions, and also decide most applications for permission to develop; c) planning decisions and policy-making at all levels are in principle within the purview of elected representatives (ie politicians), though they can delegate these powers to officers in some circumstances. Understandably, planning matters are often the subject of lively local political debate.

The population of England and Wales has pluralised steadily in recent decades, with residents of ethnic backgrounds other than White having increased from 3 to 7 million between 1991 and 2011 – in proportional terms, an increase from 7 to 14 percent of the population as a whole (Jivraj, 2012). While this growth in diversity has resulted in new ‘contact zones’ of intercultural exchange, research reveals a complex picture in which discrimination continues to be a prevalent feature of encounters across ethnic boundaries (Valentine and Sadgrove 2014). In addition, there are dramatic signs of persistent inter-ethnic tensions. These include the fact that the largest proportion of reported hate crimes in England and Wales (84 percent in 2013-14 and 82 percent in 2014-15) are racially motivated (Home Office, 2014, 2015). Moreover, notwithstanding the counter-urban trajectory of housing choices among most ethnic groups (Simpson 2004; Catney 2015), ethnic minorities still experience disproportionately high levels of housing deprivation compared to their White British counterparts (Noronha, 2015). The suggestion that governance and broader public policy has not addressed these challenges adequately (eg Finney and Simpson 2009; Kundnani 2007; Phillips 2006; Neal et al 2013) underlines the magnitude of the task facing planning if it seeks to be more progressive. In drawing attention to hurdles that have not been overcome by the planning system, therefore, we do not wish to suggest there has been a lack of will or effort in many quarters. Rather, we argue that the framework for thinking about these matters has been analytically and politically misguided.

Research in many disciplines has revealed the manifold ways in which the growth of particular ethnic and religious presences across urban Britain has intensified the transactions between minority groups and planning authorities, notably through the effects of development control on groups setting up places of worship (Nye 2001; Gale and Naylor 2002; Eade 2011; Greed 2011; Dwyer et al. 2013). However, this research also shows that the planning response to these

emerging social needs has been highly uneven, reflecting a generalised institutional inertia that has yet to be fully acknowledged, let alone counteracted. An important part of this picture is the way in which prevailing forms of racialized stigma, including those surrounding religious minorities, insinuate themselves into the planning function.

This is not to deny that efforts have periodically been made, often at the instigation of the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI<sup>2</sup>), the professional body for planners in the UK, to raise the profile of ‘race equality’ as an agenda for the planning profession. And yet, while this agenda is widely known about in UK planning, the persistence of racialized planning outcomes suggests that it is having limited effect. Planning responses to issues of institutionalised discrimination began with the publication of *Planning for a Multi-racial Britain*, a symbolically significant report by the RTPI and former Commission for Racial Equality (RTPI/CRE, 1983), which set out to challenge cherished, but fallacious, professional beliefs and eradicate unquestioning commitment to ‘colour-blind’ planning. Subsequently however, discussion of the ‘race agenda’ in UK planning has been limited and sporadic, mostly taking the form of awareness-raising through reiteration of the RTPI/CRE recommendations.

The report was in many ways an audacious step for the RTPI, addressing head-on the groundswell of political feeling that coalesced around chronic and overlapping forms of racialized disadvantage in Britain, expressed above all in the concentration of minority ethnic groups in inner urban areas of intense socio-economic hardship. The recommendations of the report were potentially far-reaching, amounting to an open challenge to professional misconceptions about the social impact of planning, and debunking as a myth the belief that procedural equality in the way planners treat people of different ethnicities would ensure equality of outcomes (RTPI/CRE 1983).

In the years immediately following the RTPI/CRE report, attempts were made to inculcate understanding of the ways in which planning disadvantages minority ethnic groups, giving rise to a modest, if diffuse, corpus of literature on the issue. Professional journal articles, RTPI-commissioned surveys, feasibility studies into the recruitment of ethnic minority planners, as well as ad hoc local planning authority policy guidance on ethnic minority planning needs, all told a tale of well-meaning attempts to respond to the clarion call sounded by the RTPI/CRE report. Moreover, internal professional responses were bolstered by central government through legislative change, with the *Race Relations Act* 1976 being amended by the *Housing and Planning Act* 1986, Section 19A of which now stated that '[i]t is unlawful for a planning authority to discriminate against a person in carrying out their planning functions' (Thomas, 1999: 15). Following an apparent lull in the late 1980s, two major studies were commissioned in the 1990s to assess how far the RTPI/CRE recommendations had been incorporated into planning policy and practice, one by the Local Government Association (LGA), the other by the RTPI (Thomas and Krishnarayan, 1993; Loftman and Beazley, 1998). While differing in methodology and approach, both studies reached similarly gloomy conclusions: despite more than a decade having passed since the RTPI/CRE report, take-up of its recommendations had been limited, pointing to a generalised reluctance among local planning authorities to view race equality as a core feature of their professional function.

A survey of the 'regeneration sector' by the CRE (2007) shortly before its absorption into the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), produced findings that were disturbingly reminiscent of discussions in planning more than two decades before: the survey revealed that, even in instances where regeneration projects had led to 'significant community tensions' (CRE 2007: 31), only a handful of authorities made consistent use of Race Equality Impact

Assessments (REIAs) when implementing regeneration schemes, and there was a lingering perception among several respondents that ‘physical regeneration’ is ‘a colour-blind process’ (CRE 2007: 70). Moreover, research into the effects of planning on religious minorities has revealed a pattern of disadvantage that suggests an emerging ‘faith and planning’ agenda is a further manifestation of the inability of planning to operate constructively in a racialized context (Thomas, 2008; Gale 2008). Against this background of stuttering progress, this paper draws on CRT to consider why the race and planning agenda has continued to stall over a 30-year period. Above all, it attempts to explain why there has been such a lack of conformity between the stance of the RTPI and racialized experiences on the ground. CRT, it is argued, provides a powerful analytical foundation from which to understand why race equality initiatives in planning have made such negligible progress.

The paper is divided into three sections. In the first, we consider existing explanations of the unresponsiveness of planning to race equality measures. As we show, these range from the view that there is a generalised, if benign, lack of awareness on the part of planning professionals, through to more trenchant critiques of planning and bureaucracies of the modern nation-state as irremediably oppressive of minority interests (Yiftachel 2006). In the second section, we introduce CRT as a body of theory and socio-legal praxis that seeks to reveal and transform the racialized social relations inherent to the functioning of public institutions. Here we consider CRT’s substantive claims with regards to institutional discrimination, and also engage with some of its critiques, notably those from a Marxist perspective (Cole, 2009a). In the third section, we illustrate the analytical and prescriptive dimensions of CRT through research vignettes from existing literature. We conclude with an assessment of why CRT provides a compelling account of the failure of planning to bring the issue of racial equality into its core areas of concern, and what needs to be achieved if such failure is to be overturned.

## **Existing explanations of the stasis of race and planning**

Most writing on race equality and planning in Britain has proceeded by analysing specific aspects of current planning practice, on the assumption that any shortcomings identified with regards to the unequal treatment of different ethnic groups can be rectified. Consequently, such analyses have tended not to address the prospect of persistent, wide-ranging ignorance of and/or indifference to race equality within the planning system. Nevertheless, this body of work assists in understanding why there has been so little change with regards to race and ethnicity in planning over many decades. These approaches, we suggest, can be grouped in four overlapping ways, as discussed in this section.

Firstly, there is a sense conveyed in some studies, such as the RTPI/CRE (1983) report, that the root problem lies with a *lack of understanding and/or professionalism on the part of planners and others operative in the planning field*. Thus, early discussions of planning in a ‘multi-racial’ (and subsequently, ‘multi-ethnic’) society focused on how lacking understanding on the part of planners and others with influence in the planning system resulted in blindness and insensitivity to ‘racial’ issues, and how this could result unwittingly in racially discriminatory outcomes. *Planning for Multi-Racial Britain* (RTPI/CRE 1983) devoted considerable space to addressing common misunderstandings on the part of planning professionals with regards to promoting race equality. The idea that resonated throughout the report and its recommendations was that if the relevant people, both within and beyond planning, were more informed they would act better. Importantly, this ethic was echoed in later reports, which as noted above, were commissioned to evaluate the impact of the earlier report (Krishnarayan and Thomas, 1993; Loftman and Beazley, 1998), and has also be reiterated in the work of some academics. For example, Reeves (2005, 1-2) spoke of ‘the importance of working on professional attitudes to difference and diversity in order to effect long-term



change'. Discussions of this kind usually stressed that the promotion of race equality aligned with established principles of good professional practice (Thomas and Krishnarayan, 1993). More sophisticated variants of this argument have noted limitations in the conceptualisation of key terms – particularly ethnicity, race and nation – that are central to practice in multi-ethnic areas (Thomas, 1997; Beebeejaun, 2004, 2012). In particular, the persistence of essentialist notions of ethnicity and culture have been identified as integral to the way the planning system engages with and consults minority groups, with minimal disruptive effects for existing power-infused social relations (Beebeejaun, 2007, 2012).

The emphasis on overcoming misunderstanding and ignorance in early instantiations of planning's 'race equality' agenda was apparently predicated on advocates' practical experiences of what promoting race equality involved. As such, it is understandable that such contributions tended to focus on factors that would produce positive results in individual cases. And yet, after more than thirty years of disseminating information with only modest impacts on planning practice, it is reasonable to suggest that unwitting ignorance at the individual scale has little validity in accounting for the continuing failure of planning to transform its practices and ensure equality. In contrast, commentators such as Yiftachel (1998) point out that focusing on individual ignorance and enhancing professionalism ignores the existence of structural factors that render the principle of race equality irrelevant to day to day planning practice.

A second and related form of argument has drawn attention to a *lack of political motivation or pressure (local and national), including a lack of national planning guidance*. Thus, explanations of poor performance offered by many analysts of race equality and planning have stressed that professional planners needed clearer direction and guidance (a 'steer') from politicians, both at local and national levels, such as through national policy documents or

similar statements (Thomas, 2000). A technocratic version of this argument speculated that local authority planners might respond if appropriate performance indicators were included in the increasingly prevalent management systems introduced into the UK public sector from the 1990s onwards (Thomas and Lo Piccolo, 2000). Under the New Labour government between 1997 and 2010, this general line of argument was influential in many areas of public policy. Within planning, research was commissioned by government on sensitising the English planning system to social diversity (the term which, for good or ill, came to replace promoting equality), and a Good Practice Guide was produced on 'Diversity and Planning' (ODPM, 2005). Moreover, in all parts of the UK, governments produced far more positive policies in relation to the accommodation of Gypsies and Travellers, an issue over which local councillors and representatives of the planning system had appeared to bow to common prejudices (Bancroft 2000; Ellis and McWhirter 2008; DCLG 2012).

There is some evidence that creating a supportive local political environment can be helpful in encouraging planning at a local level to take race equality more seriously. As Ellis (2001, 353) puts it, 'professional commitment to equal opportunities is only operationalized in areas where it finds more political resonance.' While this supportive context does not rely on the presence of ethnic minority councillors, there is substantial evidence that strong representation helps change the focus of local politics (Garbaye, 2005). Moreover, as with gender equality, a fair representation among elected councillors is likely to indicate a local political culture that is sensitive to equality issues. The continuing under-representation of ethnic minorities among local councillors in all parts of the UK suggests that equality issues in general are still struggling for recognition (Wood and Cracknell, 2015), while the severe lack of ethnic minority women councillors is indicative of the existence of compounded racialized disadvantage.

In contrast, changes in national policy, when operating in isolation, appear to have little discernible effect. Evidence of this is provided by the Macpherson Report (1999), which ensued from a lengthy public inquiry into the failures of the Metropolitan Police force in their investigation of the murder of the Black British teenager Stephen Lawrence in 1993. The report is a socially and politically significant document in its own right, both in its uncompromising critique of the racialized culture within British police forces and in the importance it accorded to the concepts of ‘institutional’ and ‘unwitting racism’ (Macpherson 1999: 20-35). Following the publication of the report, all government activity, and ipso facto planning, was supposed to put the promotion of race equality at its very heart. And yet despite the power and scope of the report’s findings, there is very little positive evidence to show that its findings and reflections made appreciable inroads nationally (Harris and Thomas, 2005) or locally (Thomas, 2004). This is in spite of the fact that this would have coalesced with the kind of ‘mainstreaming’ of equalities initiatives advocated by Reeves (2005) and other academic planners. Thomas (2004) addresses another example more directly focused towards local authority practices, in which a national legal requirement, introduced in 2000, stipulated that local authorities should adopt schemes setting out in detail how all services will achieve specified goals with regards to ethnic equality, and how progress will be monitored. Here again, the stark conclusion was that such measures were not taken seriously (Thomas, 2004). This is not to say that extra-local politics has no impact on planning’s response to race equality, but it seems to go mainly in one, largely negative, direction. These examples confirm the general point that the simple fact of having a policy is at best only a starting point in changing the way the planning system operates.

A third perspective develops the line of argument that *planning is rarely a major concern for ethnic minorities compared to other forms of institutional contact, such as the criminal justice system*. It is certainly the case that racialization in some institutional settings has been more

directly politicised than in the planning field. For example, persistent ethnic differentials in the application of police stop-and-search powers and educational disadvantages experienced Black British young men have generated longstanding and often high profile community mobilisations (O'Toole and Gale, 2013). Nevertheless, noting these variations does not obviate the less overt forms of racial disadvantage that play out in administrative contexts such as planning, while the suggestion that planning's insensitivity to issues of race equality may be traceable to a lack of interest among black and ethnic minorities has disquieting undertones of 'victim blaming'. Thomas (2000: 93) discussed survey evidence which appeared to show that planning-related issues were low priorities for black and ethnic minorities in Britain, but there are circumstances in which this generalisation requires qualification. The first, which we address in the final section of the paper, relates to religious space and the overwhelming evidence that faiths with a significant minority ethnic following are unhappy about the perceived lack of responsiveness of the planning system to their needs for additional places of worship (e.g. Greed and Johnson, 2016;). The second relates to Gypsies and Travellers, who show a great interest in the planning system as part of a wider concern about the difficulties they have in finding sites for accommodation (Thomas, 2000). These are both long-standing concerns suggesting that the interest of racialized minorities in planning is not a decisive factor in improving the outcomes of the planning system.

A fourth line of argument emphasises *the embeddedness of planning within wider power relations*. Some analysts have pointed out that the planning system is both influenced by and helps to reproduce the power-infused social relations (often contradictory and contested) that extend beyond it. Thus Beebeejaun (2007) argued that conceptions of 'minority-ethnic' groups constructed within the planning system unwittingly adopt and valorise a contrast between an ahistorical, timeless 'British way of life' and those (i.e. ethnic minorities) who lie outside of

this vision. Far from being timeless, this contrast is deeply implicated in contemporary social life and struggles over change:

The British nation has never been a collection of ethnically-similar people. This myth exists in tension with the continuing social and ethnic hierarchies in place, not least as part of the colonial and post-colonial immigration legacy.

(Beebeejaun, 2004, 448)

Leaving the myth unquestioned means that the planning system fails to engage with the social struggles within which racial discrimination is constructed and challenged, with the result that its policies and practices tend to reinforce rather than transform existing social inequalities (Beebeejaun, 2012). The idea of a homogeneous (and implicitly White) British identity confronting and having to live with a non-White Other has been central even to discourses advocating multi-culturalism and tolerance (Nash, 2003 : 642), within which a lack of class-sensitivity has allowed for a branding of white-working class people as racist.

In the light of these concerns, Beebeejaun, like Thomas (2000), is right to suggest that planners and others involved in the planning system have to view planning as part of a wider terrain of political struggle. However, what both leave relatively unexamined is the nature of the struggle itself. Yiftachel (1998; 2006) suggests that instruments of the modern nation-state – its legal framework and bureaucracies – can be used to systematically oppress a minority. In such cases, the struggle for racial equality must involve challenges from outside as well as within the state; simply ‘playing the planning game’, even if that game is interpreted as a politicised game, will not be sufficient, because racialized inequality is written into the rules of the polity. He had in mind ‘deeply divided’ societies like Palestine/Israel or Sri Lanka. But there are those that

suggest that the modern state more generally, in both its history and functioning, is a deeply racialized entity with racial thinking and inequality encoded in its DNA (Goldberg 2000). Others (eg Wynter, 2003) suggest that from the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century the category of ‘race’ has been developed by powerful social groups in the West to legitimise colonial expropriation, exploitation and annihilation as well as gross inequalities and injustices at ‘home’. On this account, too, there can be no stepping outside, or ridding oneself, of power-infused racial thinking. Thus even in less overtly racially divided societies, racial thinking and acting in institutional settings are unlikely to yield to the incrementalism of race equality policies, no matter how well-meaning in their content and promulgation. This line of thought leads us to consider the perspective of CRT.

### **Critical Race Theory and its Critics**

Critical Race Theory can be defined as a movement of ‘scholarly activism’ that combines the work of anti-racist academics with the political activities of campaigners, lobby groups and legal practitioners, all of whom share a concern to overcome the mutually compounding relationships between racist social attitudes, discriminatory institutional practices, and the racially imbalanced relations of power that operate at the heart of US civil society (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012: 3). CRT originated in the 1970s, when it was increasingly recognised by anti-racist campaigners that the symbolic successes of the civil rights movement of a decade earlier, while momentous in themselves, had largely failed to deliver lasting transformation of the institutional structures disadvantaging African Americans and other minorities in the US context (Delgado and Stefancic 2012: 4). From the perspective of some of the movement’s founders, the persistence of racism in the face of such celebrated, and formally conceded, calls for institutional change inevitably brought into question the whole ‘vexed bond between law and racial power’, on account of the manifest dissonance between the *de jure* constitutional

principles of equality, meritocracy and justice for all on the one hand and the *de facto* persistence of legal and social disenfranchisement of minorities on the other (Crenshaw et al. 1995).

Considered thematically, many of the core ideas that define CRT are not unique to the approach. Indeed, CRT could be construed as the culmination of a long line of radical anti-racist thought in the US, beginning with the pioneering work of W.E.B. Du Bois (2000[1903]) at the turn of the twentieth century through to the civil rights campaigns of the 1950s and '60s. As Delgado and Stefancic (2012: 5) remark, 'from conventional civil rights thought, the movement took a concern for redressing historical wrongs, as well as the insistence that legal and social theory lead to practical consequences.' Similarly, while making an ethic of actively articulating 'race consciousness' as a key part of its political programme – something which has given rise to occasional misunderstanding and claims of reverse racialism (Crenshaw et al. 1995: xv) – CRT commits to a social constructionist perspective that eschews any notion of race as a biological or genetic construct (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012: 8-9). Moreover, ideas and approaches that have taken hold in CRT are cross-cut by intellectual currents prevailing in cognate areas of the humanities and social sciences: in particular, recent developments in feminism that emphasise the 'inter-sectional' nature of racialized social identities (Collins, 2000) have been influential in shaping CRT's relationship to anti-essentialism, adding important sociological nuance to its calls for racial justice (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012). CRT theorists' discussions of race can therefore be viewed as part of a broader agenda concerning the ways western states privilege certain kinds of embodied citizen, which perforce has ramifications for planning (Hastings and Thomas, 2005).

Nevertheless, other central features of CRT are quite distinctive. In contrast to understandings of racial injustice shared by both liberal and civil rights perspectives, CRT holds that racism should not be narrowly equated with its overt, intentioned manifestations, since this both misconceives and trivialises it, placing self-defeating limitations on any efforts to eradicate it (Gillborn, 2005). Rather, for CRT racialized attitudes and practices are not ‘aberrational’ but ordinary and quotidian, with intentional racist acts forming only the surface of a deep-veined racial ideology that runs through the very foundations of US society and its economic and institutional life (Bell, 1980), including scholarship (Vitalis, 2015). Thus McKittrick (2011) points out the dangers inherent in analytical exposure of so-called ‘urbicide’ – the metaphorical killing of the city by various means, including gentrification and the clearing of poor, often racialized, neighbourhoods. Important as it is to explain and expose these oppressive and unjust practices, the analysis will often simply accept and work with terminology and categorisations of people (as racialized, gendered and classed, for example) that are permeated by centuries of oppressive social practices and that simply cannot be expunged even by the academic sanitisation of careful theoretical definitions. What that may mean for research and practice in planning is discussed in the next section.

Above all, what CRT emphasises is that racism (and hence race) is a potent and durable social reality, often banal and apparently unobtrusive, yet in reality, deeply entwined in how people in western societies make sense of themselves and the wider world. In this regard, one of its most radical claims is that race is historically foundational to the edifice of the modern European and North American nation-state. Goldberg (2002: 39), for example, argues that post-Enlightenment European political theory, so important in legitimising (and questioning) the development of the modern state, already included a key racialized distinction. Goldberg’s (2002) argument is that the development of Western states over the last three hundred years,



as part of a capitalist economic system which has always been global in influence, has involved the construction and maintenance of an elaborate and dynamic system of racial categorisation. This has been central to the way states have developed, operated and sought justification; and correspondingly, has influenced the way the relations of production and exchange, and civil society more generally, have themselves been racialized. His claim is that:

‘[T]he racial state is racial not merely or reductively because of the racial composition of its personnel or the racial implications of its policies...States are racial more deeply because of the structural position they occupy in producing and reproducing, constituting and effecting racially shaped space and places, groups and events, life worlds and possibilities, accesses and restrictions, inclusions and exclusions, conceptions and modes of representation...And they are racist to the extent such definition, determination and structuration operate to exclude or privilege in or on racial terms.

(Goldberg, 2002: 104)

The conclusions of Sylvia Wynter’s (2003) historical analysis are consistent with Goldberg, but more explicitly sensitive to the claims of intersectionality. She identifies hierarchical racial categorisations as one dimension of a complex of conceptual distinctions – others involve, among other things, gender, class and sexuality – central to the oppression by the West of ‘the Rest’ (Hall et al, 1992) since the fifteenth century. Unifying these dimensions is their constructed opposition to a conception of being human that is limited to privileged groups within Western societies. Class struggle, no less than countering racism, thus become dimensions of a broader ‘politics of being’ (Wynter, 2003: 319).

Yet, the way that racial thinking is insinuated in Western mentalities and practices conceals dangers. While Goldberg holds out the possibility of ‘taking up race as an organizing theme to anti-racist ends’, he warns that historically ‘[r]ace has been invoked normatively in institutional terms and state contexts almost always to hierarchical purposes’ (2002: 113). It is the seriousness accorded to the history of racism which underlies the force of CRT. As such, critical race scholars tend to eschew the scare quotes around ‘race’ made fashionable by some anti-essentialist scholars; not because they disagree with anti-essentialism, but because they wish to avoid the implication that race as a real presence shaping people’s lives can be dissolved simply by careful use of terminology.

While their full treatment lies beyond the scope of this paper, there are significant criticisms of CRT that need to be considered in adapting its insights for societal and institutional contexts other than those in which it emerged. Three of the most salient are addressed in detail by Cole (2009a, 2009b) and can be taken in turn. The first is that CRT places undue emphasis on colour racism, which is signified by some CRT authors’ use of the term ‘white supremacy’ as a key tenet of analysis (e.g. Mills 1997). This is seen to constrain CRT’s field of vision, inhibiting its capacity to engage with the protean forms in which racism – including culture and religion-based – can manifest in contemporary societies. In part, this criticism relates to CRT’s very specific history of emergence in African American struggles for civil rights. However, while a focus on colour racism may have been pronounced up to a certain point in its development, it is clear both from CRT’s inception and recent evolution that it is above all concerned with the ways in which racial privileges are created and maintained, and hence with the racializing effects of social and institutional processes, rather than with specific, reified racial characteristics. Degado and Stefancic (2012: 78-79) directly challenge this kind of reductionism in a discussion of what they term ‘binary thinking’, contending that:

‘The black-white – or any other – binary paradigm of race not only simplifies analysis dangerously, presenting racial progress as a linear progression; it can end up injuring the very group, for example, blacks, that one places at the center of the discussion. It weakens solidarity, deprives a group of the benefits of the others’ experiences, makes it excessively dependent on the approval of the white establishment, and sets it up for ultimate disappointment.’

Thus, while there certainly is a tendency for racial power to coincide with the privileges of White groups in Western societies, CRT analysts are at pains to avoid replicating this colour-coded reductionism in their work. The use of CRT to explore the experiences of other racialized groups, including Latino/as (Delgado Bernal 2002), Chicano/as (Solorzano 1998) and Asian Americans (Chang 1993), is indicative of this broadening of academic and activist visions, and underlies our discussion of the racialization of religious minorities in the UK in the final section of this paper.

A second criticism is that CRT accords undue primacy to racism vis-à-vis other form of societal oppression – and from a Marxist perspective, that racialization appears to trump class exploitation as the primary contradiction of capitalism (Cole 2009b). Wynter’s promotion of a politics of being (discussed above) avoids this criticism, though her post-structuralism puts her at odds with Marxism on other grounds (Paget, 2000). We concur with the argument that race continues to need articulation in relation to the capitalist relations of production, distribution and accumulation and that it should not be raised *a priori* above other categories of social and political analysis. Nevertheless, as critical race theorists (Bell 1976; Delgado and Stefancic 2012) and other critical race scholars (e.g. Gilroy 1987) often point out, the historical

foundations and on-going transformations of capitalism are so deeply enmeshed with organised racial power that no analytical separation can hope to prize them apart. Processes of class formation and racialization have long been mutually constitutive, and both are coterminous with the historical rise of modern capitalism (Goldberg 2002). The challenge of CRT, then, is not to unseat the economic dimensions of oppression that are woven into the functioning of capitalism, but to insist that race cannot be reduced to an epiphenomenon of class and should be treated as deeply embedded in the ways in which capitalism has organised and restructured itself over time.

A third, more general criticism of CRT, is that some of its founding ideas and political modus operandi reflect the emergence of the approach in the US post-Civil Rights context, setting limits on its applicability in other national settings (Gillborn 2005). Thus, while its radicalism inheres in its wide-sweeping agenda to reveal the depths to which racialization in US society reaches, its practical focus on the apparatus of the legal system reflects the privileged position of constitutional law within US society, and its perceived capacity to effect social change (Bell, 1978). Against this, it should be borne in mind that a key axiom of CRT is that racism is endemic and mundane, and insinuates itself into all public institutions to some extent, regardless of their field of operation. Furthermore, quotidian racial thinking and injustice produces and is inscribed in everyday geographies (McKittrick, 2002, 2011). As such, while the tools of enquiry are socially and historically situated, with sufficient care it is possible to look beyond these contextual features of CRT and identify a general body of ideas that warrant application in other national settings experiencing long-standing issues of institutional discrimination. Indeed, efforts to apply CRT as a radical critique of the ties between societal and institutional racism have already been made in the UK, notably in the field of education

(Gillbourn 2005; 2006). In light of the foregoing discussion of CRT and its critiques, we turn to discuss how the approach might be applied in the context of UK planning.

### **Towards a CRT interpretation of UK Planning**

#### *Exposing racialization*

We suggest that employing insights from CRT to analyse UK planning serves two related functions; exposing racialisation and reconceptualising non-racist futures. In terms of the first, CRT exposes the racialization that underpins areas of life, including public policy such as planning, which ostensibly do not use the vocabulary of race (or obvious surrogates such as ethnicity). CRT takes cues from the known patterns of stigmatic representation and racialized disadvantage experienced by marginalised groups across different areas of social life, and assesses how these are articulated within specific institutional domains. In some areas of public policy, these lines of enquiry have been relatively clear to pursue on account of the overtness with which racial categories have been mobilized within their fields of administration. It is no coincidence, for example, that CRT should have emerged within critical legal studies, given the high profile role of the criminal justice system that professes to deal with individuals abstracted from the ‘accidents’ of their birth and background in operationalising and amplifying racialized distinctions and outcomes of various kinds (Crenshaw et al, 1995; Hylton, 2005). In planning, too, the policy field appears to make no reference to race or racial categorization, so analyses need to be subtle and resourceful. Indeed, as noted above, one of the reasons why the relevance of race to planning has been consistently neglected is the fact that planning has continued to operate on the basis of enduring professional presuppositions, including that its remit is primarily physical rather than social, and that maintaining institutional blindness to social and cultural difference serves as a guarantor of equal treatment. Examining the role of race within planning thus involves not only exposing these professional

presuppositions, as attempted in the RTPI/CRE (1983) report, but moving beyond them to consider how they are implicated in reproducing societal forms of racism. While there are multiple ways in which these issues might be explored, the position of religious minorities in British society provides an illuminating focus of enquiry for a number of reasons: firstly, because of the observable tendency for religious minorities to become stigmatised and ‘racialized’; and secondly because of the ways in which the racialization of religion across society manifests within and helps shape planning decisions.

The term ‘racialization of religion’ denotes the ways in which religious group practices and behaviours – including dress-codes, theological beliefs and ritual commitments – have become the focus of negative representations, often building on and reinforcing longstanding myths and stereotypes (Kabbani 2008). In recent decades, such racialization has been particularly marked in the experiences of British Muslims, whose stigmatisation, denoted by ‘Islamophobia’, has been strongly affected by mediatised, government-fuelled anxieties over radicalisation and putative self-segregation (Hopkins 2004; Modood 2005; Phillips 2006; Gale 2013). Yet such representations are by no means of recent origin, tapping into and extending Orientalist constructions of Islam that were forged in the context of British and wider European imperial encounters with the Middle East, which portrayed Muslim peoples and territories as religiously and culturally fanatical, patriarchal and decadent (Said, 1995, 1997; Kabbani, 2008; Massad, 2015). Moreover, Muslims are not unique among minority religions in being construed according to Orientalist tropes, with representations of British Hindus and Sikhs being infused with similar traits of exoticism and ‘otherness’ (Ballantyne 2006). Meanwhile, the history of Black Pentecostalism in Britain reveals how colour racism and theological discrimination underlay the emergence of distinctive congregations – the so-called Black Majority Churches (MBCs) – whose membership and institutions are largely separate from the denominations

prevailing among the White Christian majority (Kalilombe, 1997; Burgess, 2009). In each case, religious affiliation can be seen to be implicated in a process of ‘differential racialization’ (Delgado and Stefancic 2012: 77-78) in which forms of religiously encoded racial power and privilege – linked in many cases to the legacy of empire – serve to define and cement the subordinate status of minorities.

Occasionally, such racialized logic is clearly revealed in planning documentation. The remarks of the Planning Inspector in an appeal decision at the end of lengthy planning case that saw a Hindu group being refused planning permission to establish facilities in affluent Harrow are revealing in this regard:

‘That the Temple would be an unusual architectural feature in Britain would not necessarily be a reason for refusing permission. A multi-cultural society must accept the aspirations of different ethnic groups to pursue their religious and cultural activities in appropriate forms of development. However, the planning system was designed to safeguard the general public interest. The needs of particular groups must be subject to planning policies otherwise any semblance of control of land use would be continually sacrificed to minority interests.’

Superficially at least, the fact that these remarks explicitly refer to Britain’s status as a ‘multi-cultural society’ and the need to recognise minority group aspirations could be taken as a movement towards the kind of culturally nuanced, socially articulate application of planning principles that had been called for in the RTPI/CRE *Planning for a Multi-Racial Britain* report. In this case, however, the final lines of the quotation reveal quite the reverse, namely that cultural differences are acknowledged only as a prelude to their being disavowed when set

against the greater good of maintaining ‘control of land use’. More generally, the underlying premise on which the decision in this case rests is informed by a racial logic that constructs an opposition between ‘minority interests’ and ‘the general public interest’, with the latter being ‘safeguarded’ from (rather than sacrificed to) the former. This is clear from the facts of the case themselves, which do not suggest that the application transgressed planning policies, but rather, would have necessitated their flexible interpretation to accommodate the religious group. The crux of the issue was the culturally-mediated view that ‘[t]he size and nature of the proposed building would materially alter the character of the application site and its surroundings’, which representatives of the planning system at various levels were at pains to preserve.

In these kinds of cases, CRT may not issue in radically different policy prescriptions for the planning system – generally, all that can be expected of planning in the short term is that it acknowledge the cultural specificity of many of its key notions and ideals, and recognise that applying them universally systematically disadvantages (and de facto racializes) specific groups. Yet as Charles Taylor (2012) points out, similar policies can sometimes be supported by different explanatory and normative narratives. In the case of religious minorities and the planning system, a CRT-influenced explanatory narrative would highlight the historical, Orientalist resonance of the racialization of religion as part of an explanation of why particular religious groups might be racialized in certain ways. Further, the strategy of racialization might be explained by situating it in relation to the continued salience of – generally discreetly signalled – racial thinking in shaping and justifying British economic and political relations with the rest of the world. Importantly, this salience is buttressed by a significant ideological apparatus comprising, for example, the editorial stances and decisions within news media, and the nature and perspectives fostered by ‘aid’ agencies. Planners are more likely to understand the significance of racialization within planning itself if the embeddedness of planning within



wider racialized structures is grasped. Securing such an understanding can only be a long-term political project, yet it highlights an important aspect of a CRT-inflected analysis: it places planning within a wider political struggle for radical social change.

### *Reconceptualising being*

The second way in which CRT might inform analysis of planning is by focusing attention on the need for a change of conceptual framework if radically different, non-racist, futures are to be envisaged and brought into being. It is difficult, if not impossible, for any intellectual position advocating radical social change to provide a road map for achieving the desired future. In part, this reflects the inherent unpredictability of social life; but there is also the difficulty that radically different ways of being are difficult to conceptualise using frameworks embedded in the social conditions of the present. This is one reason why imagined utopias can disappoint – they too obviously depend upon the present, if only to reject it and promote its direct opposite.

Recognising this, Davina Cooper (2014) has suggested that ‘everyday utopias’, understood as attempts to radically reconfigure some social relations while leaving the rest of the world as it is, might offer fragmentary, but useful conceptual resources for analyses and programmes for change. She argues that we should not think of conceptualisation as a purely intellectual activity set aside from everyday life, but as part of what it is to live from day to day; that is, we conceptualise as part of our practice of living, and refine conceptualisations through all our actions, not simply writing or formal argumentation. We illustrate what this might mean in relation to planning by considering two ways of thinking about a planning episode involving regeneration of a multi-ethnic dockland area.

Butetown in Cardiff's docklands developed as a port-related multi-ethnic area in the late nineteenth century. For most of the twentieth century it was stigmatised as a poor, down at heel and dangerous place (Jordan, 1988). In the 1950s and 1960s it was subject to slum clearance policies typical of those decades, with many families being moved out of the area as housing densities were reduced in line with current planning conventions. In Butetown's case the link between race, morals and physical conditions in the area was clearly drawn in the survey report Cardiff City Council's Development Plan of 1953 (Roberts, 1953, pp29 -30).

Decades of further physical decline and disinvestment ended in the early 1980s, when a period of top-down, property-led regeneration was ushered in. This state-sponsored gentrification has transformed the area physically, economically and socially, and it continues apace (Hooper and Punter, 2006). The dominant register within the research literature on later rounds of regeneration is one of 'urbicide' (McKittrick, 2011). Butetown and the dockland community within it are presented as stigmatised, often neglected, periodically victimised, and when attended to by public bodies, are typically under existential threat from redevelopment or gentrification (Hooper and Punter, 2006). Yet as McKittrick points out, this highlighting of real injustices - in this case suffered by Butetown's inhabitants - runs the risk of confirming and consolidating the racialized classification and its (sometimes not so implicit) hierarchy. What else might be gleaned from coming to understand Butetown's past and present?

Following Cooper's lead, we might try to understand 'from the inside' the nature of social relations – including how people conceived of themselves, each other, and their life-projects – in Butetown over a century or more from the late nineteenth century and the conceptualisations embedded in these. For example, is it possible, as Thomas (2004b:276) claims, that 'the resilience and vitality of local people sometimes ... points the way forward for a more just and

humane response to economic restructuring’? For over thirty years, a genuinely community-based and community-managed project in the area – the Butetown History and Arts Centre (BHAC) - has provided opportunities for the poor and stigmatised residents of Butetown to record and bear witness to the lived reality of both injustice and their collective responses to it. It has also fostered contemporary arts, some of which are an explicit commentary on the present and possible futures for the area. And while residents of Butetown have long suffered discrimination (see, eg, CRI, 1991), the area was, and largely still is, also renowned for peaceful co-existence among the scores of nationalities, ethnicities and religions who lived there (Jordan, 2005). Reflecting on decades of pioneering, often unheralded, work, two of the animateurs of the BHAC suggested that residents, in thinking of their lives, tended to reproduce the same binary categories (broadly, ‘us’ and ‘them’) as those implicated in the structures and processes which oppressed them; except that the residents valorised ‘us’ rather than ‘them’ (Jordan and Weedon, 2000; see also Carless, 2013). Yet, through their daily practices they also questioned some of these kinds of mutually exclusive categories – for example, in relation to the racialisation of Welsh national identity (Jordan, 2005). The community’s practices of remembering and memorialising, too, constituted a ‘counter-memory’ to the scurrilous portrayal of life within Butetown propagated in mainstream accounts of the area produced by outsiders (Weedon and Jordan, 2012). The community developed an account that was sensitive to the shared humanity of those who lived in the area, and in so doing eschewed racial thinking while being alive to different religious and ethnic traditions (Jordan, 20005). In photographs of the area as it was several decades ago there are sometimes hints which suggest small ways in which the appreciation of a shared humanity might have been fostered, such as the way that religious festivals would be open for celebration/enjoyment by residents regardless of their background or religious heritage.

These are speculations, of course, but ones built upon the realities of there being ‘everyday utopias’ – in this case de facto de-racialised spaces (except in the eyes and practices of outsiders) which necessarily still have their limitations. In the context of this paper they serve to show how a CRT-influenced planning analysis might proceed – namely, by painstaking work to explore possibilities for more progressive conceptualisations of futures that are built in part from conceptual materials embedded in contemporary life. Such materials may not always be very evident; but we would hold that there is usually some aspect of life, however fleeting, that resists the brutalisation associated with racial thinking. We do not have the scope in this paper to discuss the skills needed for this kind of work, but an important starting point for discussion is provided by Sandercock’s (1999) notion of ‘multi-cultural literacy’ which, as a key attributes of progressive planning, shares with humanistic observation a stance that is empathetic, reflective, dialogic and critically engaged (Jordan, 2008).

## **Conclusion**

As discussed above, Goldberg (2002) and other CRT theorists provide a forceful account of the centrality of race to Western political theory, urging a critical rethinking of the development of the modern nation-state and other institutions that underpin life in the West. To this extent, it is clear that institutional analyses premised on CRT differ from existing accounts of race due to their more radical approach to unearthing the deep structures underlying racial inequality, and how these structures are formed and reproduced through the concatenation of racial categorization, legal normalization and social and institutional relations (Delgado and Stefancic 2012). Above all, CRT encourages analysts to take seriously the proposition that the recurrent failure of public institutions to response to the needs of racialized minorities is a result of the deep fissures of entrenched racial power within society. The implications of this for distinctive fields of public policy are that researchers and activists in the respective field must

uncover how broader systems and networks of racialized power relate to, and ipso facto operate within, their policy field – how, for example, these help to frame, reproduce, or indeed resist, racial oppression and exploitation. Beyond this, they may have opportunities to explore the possibilities for more progressive futures inherent in aspects of everyday lives.

The article has argued that CRT presents a challenge to current understandings of racism in British society generally, and the role of institutional racism in planning in particular. Above all, it suggests that the long-term lethargy and exhaustion that characterise the engagement of UK planning with issues of racialized inequality can no longer be explained away as the result of well-intentioned failure or benign neglect. Rather, the sources of this failed engagement must be sought through a reappraisal of the deep-rooted legacies of race that continue to structure British social attitudes and relationships, and an evaluation of the ways in which these necessarily become woven into the fabric of planning as an institution. ‘Racial thinking’, to use Thomas’s (2000) phrase, remains part of the way in which people in Britain come to understand themselves (i.e. how they are constituted as subjects) and in turn, how they understand others and the wider world. For historic reasons, racism in Britain often aligns with, and is reinforced by, other structural inequalities such as those of class. But as we have also shown, it has an independent reality that is demonstrated, for example, by reactions of the planning system to minority places of worship. Such examples also show that struggle within the planning system can serve improve the system’s response to the needs and demands of racialized minorities. Indeed, as the developing literature on religious minority experiences of planning clearly shows (see e.g. Gale and Naylor 2002; Shah et al 2012), some of the most significant advances made in particular local governmental settings have resulted from the agency of minority groups themselves, as they have become procedurally insightful and politically astute with regards to the operations of the planning system. Nevertheless, these changes are against the grain of a

system in which socially-loaded assumptions (about ‘appropriate’ uses/ways of life; about aesthetics/amenity, and so on) are passed off as matters of professional judgement within a legal-bureaucratic framework. Taking racism seriously in relation to planning means taking seriously the implications of the (racialized, gendered, and other identity attributes) embodiment of all those caught up in the machinery of planning.

CRT contends that the abstract and/or nameless individuals of bureaucracies, and of legal and quasi-legal processes, do not exist in some kind of non-racialized parallel world. Their judgements – including those of ‘the public interest’ that is so central to justifications in planning – are made by racialized beings within a power-laden, racialized world. We cannot divest ourselves of habits, emotions, preferences, reactions we might regard as instinctive or natural, simply by accepting an intellectual thesis; far less can this be done when we operate within local and global social contexts which are indelibly structured by race. We can at best work slowly, with others, towards a more just and egalitarian future; and that begins with questioning some of the core, unexamined assumptions of British legal and bureaucratic systems.

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### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup>References are to the reported case, ‘Religious Building: Brent London Borough Council and Swaminarayan Hindu Mission [1987] 2 *Planning Appeal Decisions*, 327-31.

<sup>2</sup>The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) was founded in 1914 and is the representative body of planning professionals in the UK context, with major input into policies and practices relevant to built and natural environments.

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