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***Political Blackness in Multiracial Britain.* By Mohan Ambikaipaker.** University of Pennsylvania Press, Pennsylvania, 2018. Xiv + 254 pp. ISBN 978-0-8122-5030-5, £52.

The nature, scope, and worth of ideas of ‘political blackness’ in Britain have long been contested, with recent contributions from writers such as Claire Alexander and Kehinde Andrews furthering debates around the solidarity and erasures produced by such groupings. In this significant and engaging book, Mohan Ambikaipaker explores questions of identity and unity through the anti-racist activities of an important community-based organisation in Britain which led campaigns against racial and state violence inspired by a unifying ‘blackness’ deliberately ‘*coordinated to involve multiple communities in solidarity with each other*’ (p.5).

The organisation at the centre of this work is the Newham Monitoring Project (NMP), an anti-racist grassroots organisation based in an East London borough where, in 2011, ‘*the white British population was still the largest ethnoracial group [but] accounted for only 17 percent of the overall population*’ (p.7). Despite white Britons comprising a clear minority within the demographic composition of Newham, NMP was formed in 1980 in an attempt to combat the countless ways in which whiteness is inherently rendered superior within British liberal judicial and societal structures – what the author refers to as ‘everyday political whiteness’.

This book convincingly details how the state’s proclaimed liberal anti-racist approaches (falling under such terms as ‘colour-blind’ or ‘community cohesion’) fail to counter white British nativism because ‘*racial violence and racialized state violence [exist] not as aberrations in British everyday life*’, but rather are continuous and ‘*constitutive features of British state and society*’ (pp.25-26). Consistent with trends in the literature in more recent decades, the author thus aligns with George Lipsitz’s influential characterisations of a ‘possessive investment in whiteness’. This argument is clearly demonstrated through Chapter

Two's consideration of a case where the NMP attempted to intervene in the racist harassment of a woman of British Indian descent, but that white racial solidarity resulted in state, societal, and judicial actors instinctively aligning and supporting each other rather than the victim.

Recent work, such as Rob Waters' exploration of the impact of 'Thinking Black', has demonstrated how wide-ranging concepts of blackness have been criticised for neglecting important nuances between groups. Ambikaipaker similarly notes the debate prompted by considerations and criticisms of political blackness – such as that it is '*inauthentic*' and '*imperfectly imagined*' (p.165) – as well as issues of raciological thinking. However, through this detailed study of NMP's grassroots and practical activities in uniting local communities, he concludes that '*The academic and theoretical quest to denaturalize the categories of race would almost seem to contradict the continued, felt, need for varied forms of race-based social movements*' (p.166). This also impacts his terminology, wherein all 'non-white communities' are referred to under the moniker of black. This book rejects the idea that a period of unifying under the blanket term black was a sign of a basic or (in quoting Stuart Hall) '*innocent notion of an essential black subject*'. Instead, it argues that NMP activists constantly considered the meaning and inclusivity of blackness through lived experiences and connections with local communities suffering from racial violence and institutional racism: '*There was no innocent black essentialism among African Caribbean, South Asian, and other marginalized non-white British communities in Newham, but, rather, a conscious history of solidarity making and joint struggles that arose from a political sensibility that appreciated their locally lived experience of white racial violence, state violence, and everyday political whiteness.*' (p.175). The book's structure somewhat reflects this line of argument: thematically covering issues such as intersectional racial violence and the impact of 'counter-terrorism' ideologies and policies on the Muslim community in Britain, the accounts included act to demonstrate differing racial, religious, and ethnic experiences, as well as to highlight unifying connections.

The chosen methodology adds to the distinctive contribution that this work makes to the existing literature. The book is built around personal and often affecting narratives recounted by Ambikaipaker, who attempts to give voice to those with *'lived experiences of racial violence and racialized state violence as well as the lived experience of engaging in antiracist activism'* (p.xiii). Challenging views that activism inhibits research about race, the author consciously adopted an *'activist anthropology'* approach by conducting *'observant participation'* during two years spent personally participating as a caseworker in NMP's anti-racist activism. Ambikaipaker places the people and experiences he encountered into wider theoretical and historical frameworks with a level of care and self-awareness. Indeed, the author acknowledges how his own life has been shaped by colonial racial policies and the struggles he has faced, noting characterisations of ethnography as *'a colonial form of knowledge production'* (p.xiii) and concluding that he is not a *'traditional white male anthropologist ... carry[ing] out participant observation among "native" inhabitants'* (p.33). Considerations of the place of the researcher have of course been long discussed, particularly regarding areas and topics covered by this work, but Ambikaipaker clearly and effectively forwards a position for why he *'did not find the project of researching racism in Britain to be viable as an abstract or a politically neutral enterprise'* (p.37).

NMP was forced to close the doors of its Newham office in 2015, due to ongoing issues of a lack of funding. An anecdote in Chapter One, in which 'black' Newham residents seemingly utilise the state's repressive language to complain about recent refugees in the area, raises interesting questions about whether another factor hastening NMP's decline was an apparent weakening of a sense of a unifying blackness – or if this was simply a demonstration of its continually contested history. As the conclusion of this important book affirms, the future of political blackness depends on whether subsequent generations *'renew or discourage this particular tradition of resistance'*. Regardless of what conclusion they reach, Ambikaipaker

records that *'their issues and interests were always imagined as included in the resistance and advocacy agendas of a group like NMP'* (pp.193-195).

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