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Introduction

This article addresses critical aspects of what I take to be the *problem* of the theory of the New Racism¹ (Barker 1981): the account of discursive change it proposes and the central role and significance it accords Powellism in this process. I define the theoretical problem of new or modern racism as the problem of the decipherment and designation of public-political languages of group separation and exclusion as racist, when such language forms are encoded by a cultural logic of difference and accompanied by elite disclaimers of racism, in a debate context which is understood by critical-linguistic, sociological and other approaches as informed by discriminatory motives, and which results in the production of legislation that confirms such fears (cf. Reeves 1983; van Dijk 1993b). It is clear from this summary definition that the *new racism thesis* does not address all aspects of the problem it has come to define but it does provide the most consistent theoretical account of key aspects of the phenomenon.²

With the notable exception of Miles (1987; 1989:) the *new racism thesis* has met with little critical scrutiny (but see Brown 1997; 1998: ch.2). This article attempts to redress that imbalance. My approach is, of necessity, selective in that it addresses the account of discursive change the thesis proposes, and the role and significance it accords Powellism in this process. In particular, I highlight the claim that Powellism invents or articulates a new commonsense racism that becomes hegemonic within the political field thereafter.³ The reasons for this approach are because I want to offer a modification to the New Racism argument and its treatment of Powellism. Drawing on my own research findings I argue that public-political racism in Britain, since at least the mid 1950s (and most certainly before),⁴ has taken a predominantly anecdotal form. If we can define an anecdote as a ‘detached narrative’ of an event, it is the particular ideological quality of such narratives of the local politics of ‘race’, detached from any specific referent, that has allowed the development of a powerful populist-political *commonsense*⁵(Gramsci 1971; Hall et al 1978). I propose that we define this form of commonsense discourse as *Commons’ sense* in order to distinguish its location and significance: Parliamentary Debates. I argue that it has been the anecdotal form of expression of such racism that is the key to understanding its success and the source of its tremendous political and ideological power. My modification of the New Racism thesis therefore depends upon the analytical primacy afforded the relationship between commonsense *on the ground* and commonsense in Parliament and political discourse. This significance is crucial to a deeper understanding of the role and success of Powellism.

The New Racism thesis

While racial political discourse, particularly in the form of Parliamentary Debates, has been little studied (cf. Reeves 1983; van Dijk 1993b, p.66), major claims about the significance of public political racism in Britain have been advanced on the basis of surprisingly little empirical evidence (cf. Barker 1981; CCCS: Race and Politics Group 1982; Gilroy 1987; Brown 1997;1998).⁶ Central to such accounts has been a claim about the strategic role of Powellism, in the form of public political speeches and interventions, in promoting or securing the ascendancy of a *New Racism*.

The novelty of the New Racism thesis, as it was developed in Britain, was that it appeared to offer a comprehensive theoretical account, in the form of a “bite-size” concept, of the emergence and rise to political hegemony of a new form of public political discourse. The theory claimed that it was the self conscious development of this discourse that secured the ascendancy of the populist politics of the New Right on the British political scene for over two decades (cf. Barker 1981; CCCS Race and Politics Group 1982; Gilroy 1987; Mercer 1994; Smith 1994). The central element in this emergent discourse was a transformation in the discourse of ‘race’ into a new form of political commonsense that had become normalised across the political field by the mid to late 1970s (cf. Barker 1981: ch.2 CCCS Race and Politics Group 1982: ch.1, 2). The prime mover and the point of emergence or rupture in the political field was that associated with the dramatic appearance of Powell and Powellism in April and November 1968, with his Birmingham and Eastbourne speeches.

This idea of a point of rupture, and the figure and impact of Powell, are central to the claims of the New Racism thesis and, in particular, the distinction integral to an idea of a discursive shift in the imagery and signifying properties of racist language, that between the “old” and the “new” racism. As for example, Gilroy has argued:

It is only by looking in detail at the language and imagery of th(e) discourse on 'race' that the extent of changes which followed Enoch Powell's 'river of blood' speech of April 1968 [...] can be appreciated. That speech provides something of a bridge between the older forms and linguistic devices of racism represented in the work of writers like Elton, Griffiths and Pannell, and the recognisably modern forms which identify and address a different range of problems [...the speech] can be read as a break in the epistemology of contemporary racism (Gilroy 1987, p.85).

Here, quite clearly, Gilroy argues that Powellism marks a transition point between the old and modern discursive form of racist reasoning. He also claims that the outcome of this moment, or period of discursive transition represented by Powellism, is what amounts to an epistemological break.. Presumably he means by this claim that racist discourse, post Powell, refers to a different range of social objects (that there has been a change in the entire field of reference of the discourse).⁷ It could be argued that the New Racism thesis rests on the validity of this claim for an epistemological break between the old and the new racism. However, I would argue that the New Racism authors are complicit in accepting this distinction from the New Racists themselves. Clearly much depends upon how this claim is made and what sort of evidence is employed to support it.⁸ Whatever is the case, it is in the work of Barker (1979; 1981; 1983) that the argument for a *point of transition* is most clearly stated:

[In my book...] I argued that a new kind of racism had emerged in British politics, first articulately shaped by right wing conservative Enoch Powell, whose speeches on the question of immigration in 1968 lurched politics to the right very sharply. This 'new racism' stressed cultural differences as the primary reason for resisting immigration, and argued that each culture differently arises through national traditions from a common human nature. Thus, we aren't superior to black people, just inevitably different [...] That reference to human nature is a symptom of a semi-biological justification of racial separation emerging. Increasingly since 1968, it has been the main organiser of official state racism in Britain (Barker 1983, p.2).

Here Barker argues that it is only after a *point of transition*, represented by Powellism, that a new semi-biological or pseudo-biological discourse advocating racial separation is able to arise and become the official orthodoxy.⁹ While Barker is talking about the political field, he clearly views such a field as formed and driven by ideologies, to the extent that Powellism is able to have such an impact in creating the conditions for the rise of a “new” racism.

More recent contributions to this debate, such as the arguments of Mercer (1994, pp.305-7) and those of Smith (1994, pp. 54-7) uncritically adopt the New Racism distinction, and the centrality of Powellism it proposes, although they do go on to develop an account of Powellism as a *nodal point* or point of re-articulation of the concept of ‘race’.¹⁰ These approaches unquestionably owe a considerable debt to the work of Hall (1978, p. 154; Hall et al 1978). For Hall, Powellism is a precursor of the discourse of *authoritarian populism* that is central to the success of Thatcherism and the New Right (1979; 1988).

I have claimed elsewhere that the theory of the New Racism and the account of Authoritarian Populism are not consistent with each other (Brown 1997: ch.2; Brown 1998). The significance of this distinction concerns the development of a neo-Gramscian theory of commonsense and the role it plays in accounts of the New Racism (cf. Barker 1981, pp.22-5; Lawrence 1982, pp. 48-9). It could be argued that Barker’s account of commonsense racism is not one consistent with Gramscism since it does not provide an account of how racism is to be understood as part of existing commonsense (cf. Brown 1997: ch.2; 1998).

The significance of these distinctions to my argument centre on the broad claim the New Racism thesis advances: that a profound discursive shift accompanies the rise of popular Powellism, sustaining or making possible the development of a populist-political relationship, secured through a novel re-articulation of the conceptual language of racism. For Barker, the mechanism that secures this relationship is a new theory of 'race' that is concealed within, and which informs the formulation of political arguments, statements and policy itself. This new political commonsense provides the political audience with a new language that racializes the experience, or rather *perceived* experience, of immigration and 'black' settlement (1981, pp.22-5). For the CCCS writers, popular racism is achieved because such political racism connects with existing commonsense (Lawrence 1981, p.4; 1982, p.89).¹¹ This important distinction is never made clear in the dialogue between, for example, Barker and Lawrence (see Brown 1997; 1998: ch.2). What is clear is that while the CCCS are arguing that the working class are already racist, the impact of Powellism is to re-articulate such racism. Whereas Barker is arguing that it is only after the intervention of Powell that a new commonsense racism can be successful since, before such an intervention, racist arguments would have been rejected as extremist.¹²

My position, in relation to these arguments, is that all advocates of the New Racism argument privilege the moment of Powellism and 1968, whether they see this moment of transition as a break or point of re-articulation. However, I concur with the CCCS writers, particularly Lawrence, in arguing that the New Racism reorganizes existing commonsense racism, but at *both* the political and non-political levels. It is clear that commonsense racism exists in the post-war period in elite and popular locations, however Barker is correct to argue that racism, as a political phenomenon, has to be reconstructed because there is a political prohibition on its expression. This prohibition is consciously experienced in both the public and political spheres.¹³ For Barker, Powell is the first politician to break through this barrier.

My argument is that this new language is longer in the making and that Powellism is the beneficiary of it rather than the inventor. Central to such a modification is the argument that the New Racism is, first and foremost, a political racism and it is how this political racism is able to articulate an ideological account of the local politics of 'race' in a public language of Englishness that allows it to be normalised across the political field. However this process is a protracted not a dramatic one. It is a process of discursive formation or re-articulation and central to it is the significance of the racialized anecdote.

A modified version of the thesis

In the light of these remarks I propose the following modification to the New Racism thesis: that (i) Powellism cannot be explained entirely in terms of the novelty of its discursive content since, (ii) the content of Powellism has a great deal of continuity with other accounts that are historically prior to it and, upon which, it is both parasitic and transformative. Therefore, (iii) if we are to sustain an argument for a discursive shift or transition in post-war racial discourse then we must establish it through a greater attention to the content and dynamics of Parliamentary and Public Debates, taking place from at least the 1950s onwards. These sources indicate that if we are to claim any sort of validity to the distinction of a New Racism emerging in post-war political discourse then we must abandon any strong sense of the conceptual transformation achieved *through* Powellism. Here we are confusing different sorts of claims about the 'success' of Powellism. Namely, that the political impact of Powellism is uniquely due to the impact of the conceptual transformation inherent Powell's novel discourse of 'race'. But this distinction, of the old and the new racism, is also a distinction about the relative lack of success of the old racists. This is misleading on two counts. Firstly, both the (so called) old racists and Powell share a similar kind of political exclusion. The distinction between Powell and Powellism is one that allows, in the New Racism thesis, the idea that Powell's ideas pass into the political mainstream while Powell does not. In this sense, Powell's political career has been a spectacular failure (Schoen 1977).

Secondly, it could be argued that the political benefactors of the New Racism are its real authors: the backbench old racists¹⁴ who remain within the Parliamentary process, *post* Powellism. Thus it is my argument that the *external* success of Powellism is an indicator of the *internal* achievement in the political discursive realm the Powellism exemplifies. Central to this

distinction is the claim for 1968, and Powell's Birmingham and Eastbourne speeches. If we examine the evidence of public political discourse constituting Parliamentary Debates and speeches prior to and post 1968, the paucity of evidence supporting the distinction is clearly revealed, as I will show.

A detailed examination of the discursive record of post-war political debates clearly supports the argument that the significance of Powellism is in highlighting, in admittedly dramatic fashion, discursive shifts and changes that had already taken place and were well established within, what I would term, Parliamentary *Commons' sense* (cf. Brown 1997; 1998) by 1968. If this is not the case then we have, for example, precious little explanation for the passing of the 1962, 1965 and 1968 Immigration and Race Relations' Bills. Very obvious sources of public political racism which the New Racism writers are entirely silent about.¹⁵

This modified argument will be substantiated in two ways. Firstly, through a discussion of discursive materials that form the 'archive' of enunciative statements of Parliamentary Commons' sense and public discourse on Immigration and Race Relations over the period 1957 to 1988;¹⁶ although our method will be a selection from this extensive body of material (cf. Foucault 1972). Such a slicing across a period of discursive history allows both a synchronic and diachronic analysis of a political discourse formation. This procedure will illuminate the emergent patterns of continuity in the form and content of post-war racist discourse in British public-political life, the purpose of which will be to modify arguments for a 'break' or 'interruption' in their trajectory by 1968. Central to this continuity will be the form and figure of the anecdote and its mediation of the discursive ideology of 'race'. Secondly, via a re-interpretation of the theory and methodology informing an exemplary and path-breaking piece of media research: Seymour-Ure's classic *Enoch Powell's Earthquake* (1974).

The significance of this work is that it seeks to account for the tremendous public-political impact of Powell's 1968 speeches; the Birmingham 'rivers of blood' one in particular, and it does so through the development of an empirically based argument about Powell's securement of a media constructed national constituency (Seymour-Ure 1974, p.129). We will argue that the element that secures this is the development and use by Powell of 'anecdotal' or 'hearsay' accounts of 'ordinary English people' and their views i.e., Powell's media impact is secured through the development of an anecdotally based, detached racial narrative which Powell delivers to the press and media.

The persuasiveness of the public-political racism of Powellism lies in the interior development of these anecdotal themes within Powell's elite speeches and the selectivity of media exposure of them. This argument is important because it is the close analysis and discussion of the Birmingham and Eastbourne speeches, by Gilroy and Barker respectively, that forms the core of the argument for the New Racism. Not only are these accounts textualist, by imputing the impact of Powellism from the detailed content of such speeches, and thereby missing the significance of their selective media amplification, but they also fundamentally attribute their popular impact to a new theory of 'race' which is concealed and communicated through the precisely developed syntax of Powellism.

My modified argument for a more theoretically and historically consistent account of Powellism rests on the (controversial) view that the idea of 'race', imbricated within the black country vignettes that form the centre of *those* speeches, is a discourse of the *old* racism not the new (cf. Brown 1997; 1998). This assertion involves a theoretical claim that racism, as a text, is co-produced by its writers and readers, since the meanings of its language depend upon, or rest upon, an appeal to a shared knowledge of the world to which that discourse assigns meanings or achieves 'truth' effects (cf. Kress and Hodge 1981; Fowler 1991). Thus the meanings of New Racism are negotiated through the framework of old racism's old meanings. Old racism, in this sense refers to the deep structure of the modalities of the ideology of 'race'. Anecdotal discourse allows a conduit into this reservoir, the flow of which is operated by the audience who are able to complete the meanings referred in the play of the discourse of politicians.

Powellism is thus illustrative of the central feature of the success of racialized common sense in public life in post-war Britain, in offering an account of social and political reality through the development of a discourse of anecdotal racism, that appeals to an idiom of hearsay

and is qualified in terms of personal experience. This central reference to personal experience, that produces personal knowledge, allows a conceptual division to inhere in such discursive accounts between those who accept racialized discourse as authentic and those that are deemed to be excluded from the experience and are, therefore, not qualified to pass judgement or condemn those that do. The discourse of the local and familiar allows racist ideas to be appealed to and invoked within a detached narrative that deploys dis-embedded empirical features as constitutive of the racialized urban location of black settlement. Here the power of racist discourse depends upon acknowledging the power of the idea of 'race' as a profoundly conceptual power of metaphor, allegory, etc. It is incumbent on me to provide a theoretical account of racism consistent with this assertion. I will do this through a brief discussion of racism as a social and political fiction and as a type of discourse.

Racist fictions

I define the concept of racism as a 'biological fiction' (Fuss 1989, p.91). Although in asserting this I am well aware that scholars have expended a considerable effort in attempting to clearly trace and periodize the varieties of types of racial classification over historical time, and the concomitant differences in social meaning that the term 'race' has signified (cf. Banton 1983: ch.3; Guillaumin 1995: *passim*). Like Miles (1989) I do not believe that such evidence should be interpreted to mean that the term racism can never achieve analytical clarity. On the contrary, the term racism should quite clearly refer to types of discourse which employ, refer or otherwise metonymically invoke, the historical fiction of 'race' by seeking to ground social and political forms of domination and inequality within 'a concept which signifies and symbolises socio-political conflicts and interests in reference to different types of human bodies' (Winant 1994, p.270).

This discourse, as Seidel (1988a) (drawing on Guillaumin) has argued, since the nineteenth century, has been a biological one; one grounded in a conception of 'man's nature'. It is this 'biological discourse (the discourse of nature) which perpetuates both racism and sexism, the class system and male supremacy' (1988a, p.12) in defining the social order as underpinned by the natural and thereby justifying (through forms of argumentative reduction) socio-cultural inequalities. Thus '(t)he biological rationalises the political' (Seidel 1988a, p.11). To this formulation we must add the caveat that '(a)lthough the concept of 'race' appeals to biologically based human characteristics (so-called phenotypes), selection of these particular human features for purposes of racial signification is always and necessarily a social and historical process' (Winant 1994: 270).

Racism is an ideology and therefore an untruth (Miles 1982; 1989; 1993). However its historical existence depends upon its articulation within specific discourses. All discourses are claims to truth or rather carry truth claims within them (Foucault 1980). A discourse of truth must persuade us through the mobilisation of evidence, concepts, etc. Racism is the most enduring of historical discourses because it appeals for truth-effects to the most fundamental, non-rational, non-cognitive site of human truth: the body/nature, the bio- physical sub-structure of existence. Various claims for profound difference at this level are signified by recourse to a range of physical, cultural and political symbols or markers of social difference. Racist discourse works through a conceptual articulation of social symbolism ultimately reducible to a discourse of the non-social.

Crucially, the political persuasiveness of racism lies in its social referentiality, i.e. connecting profoundly determined difference to social effects or consequences. This is the articulatory power of racist discourse. In this important sense racism empowers its articulators by providing a powerfully simple explanation of social complexity. But the pattern of this explanation is reductionist: it explains the constitution of the social through the prior constitution of the non-social. Therefore, it is the articulation of types of social problem discourse, directed at empirical referents in the immediate environment, and their successful articulation to the determinism of racialized discourse, that explains the public purchase of such narratives in Powellism and other political discourses. My discussion of textual examples of Parliamentary racism and public speech will seek to illuminate this argument.

The 'erasure' of race

In this section, through a brief dialogue with post-structuralist positions which claim a de-centring of the concept of 'race', post-Powellism, I claim that any adequate account of forms of post-'race' signification practice, particularly ones constitutive of political discourse, must be able to negotiate the distinction between old and new racisms as relating to distinguishable periods that are consistent with empirical evidence of Parliamentary Debates and political speeches in post-war Britain. My argument is that if we are to meaningfully employ a conception of the old racism then we must situate this type of racist expression as hegemonic up to the period of the Second World War in Western Europe. I claim empirical support for such a view in the accounts of historical scholars of racist discourse (cf. Rex 1970; 1973; Banton 1977; 1983; 1987; Guillaumin 1985; Miles 1989; Goldberg 1993) and as the necessary basis for any adequate account of the emergence of a New Racism as a post-war political phenomenon.

My argument, simply stated, is as follows. The growth and development of public racism in Great Britain in the post-war period has been made possible by, and inexplicably has been guaranteed its political impact upon the electorate, because of a profound and deliberate official political erasure of the signifier of 'race' from public political discourse, i.e. a political racism has been achieved without explicit use of its dominant signifier. Since the liberation of the Nazi death camps and the UNESCO statements of the 1950s and 60s (cf. Montagu (ed) 1972), the 'race' signifier has been, in the sense advanced by Derrida, erased in public space (cf. Derrida (Spivak (ed) 1976: xv-xviii).¹⁷ The effect of this erasure has had a de-centring effect on explicit biologizing racisms, (i.e. discourses that refer to 'race' and 'races'), but the most notable development has been the proliferation of discourses that erase 'race', while in their place has arisen discourses of post-'race' signification, which form a flux around the signifying space, and which work through the articulation of its absent presence.

We cannot argue the finer points and evident complexities involved in the neo-Foucaultian and post-structuralist debate about racist discourse and 'race' signification here. But a few points of inevitable engagement arise: thus Omi and Winant have argued 'race' is 'an unstable and de-centred complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle' (1986, p. 68). Such a process of flux seems to deny that there was/is any certitude to what 'race' means, prior to re-articulation, but crucially they argue that the meanings of 'race' are reinterpreted by articulating 'similar elements differently' (p.64). Thus it is the principle of articulation not what is articulated that has changed: 'race' is still the signifier but what it means, *post rearticulation*, is open to political contestation. The parallels with neo-Gramscian accounts are striking but the authors do not offer a theory of commonsense. Rather, political struggles over the signifier of 'race', take place in the context of the activities of post-war new social movements, and through policy politics aimed at the state. This appears to be a bottom-up, rather than top-down theory of political struggle, as advocated by the British Gramscians, but it depends upon a claim for 'racial formation' as identity *giving*. It is not clear how such identities can be both determined and re-negotiated.

These accounts are more consistent than those that claim that the concept of 'race' is 'virtually vacuous, reflective of dominant social discourses' and thus 'inherently political[...] assuming significance as it orders membership and exclusions from the body politic'(Goldberg 1992, p. 543). This position seems to confuse a methodological principle (we should seek to discover what 'race' means in a given context) with a theoretical claim: that it has no distinctive content of its own. This ought to be an argument about the stability of the relationship between the 'race' signifier and its signifieds. In this sense the New Racism thesis claims a radical or permanent interruption in such a relationship. Thus Mercer argues that, post Powellism, 'race' is a 'signifier without a signified' (Mercer 1994), meaning that what 'race' might mean after the break is open to contestation. It is probably more accurate to argue that what has occurred in the post-war period is a breakdown in the relationship between signifier and signified and the way that relationship works at the level of communication. Laclau's (1994) notion of an 'empty signifier' is suggestive here.

The question Laclau poses is how is signification possible without a stable signifier, or more pertinently, when the signifier appears to be absent? His answer, although he does not apply it to the question of racism, is that racist signifieds are able to act themselves as signifiers

of that which they are not. Smith (1994), while supporting Laclau's approach, claims that 'race' has been re-coded as crime, immigration, civil disorder, etc. But I would argue that this function needs to be located historically in terms of the 'erasure' of 'race' as a public-political signifier that took place in the context of the preservation of its socially located 'conceptual primitives'¹⁸ which are not eradicated, neither are they replaced, by the *moment* of decolonization or the post-holocaust pronouncements that accompanied the public-political critique of scientific racism (Benedict 1983, orig. 1942; Barzun 1965, orig. 1937; Montagu (ed) 1964; cf. Miles 1989: 42-50).¹⁹ Consequently, the space of 'race' is available to be reconstituted, since racism is a social ideology not a voluntarist politics derived from 'bad science'.

The essential 'articulatory' elements of this resurrection of racism in the post-war world is the persistence of the signifieds of old racism in private elite, official and public/popular spaces. Thus, paradoxically, the effect of political erasure has been a subterranean proliferation of racisms' many social signifieds in these very sites. It follows that the story of the development of post-war 'race' politics (or the racialization of British politics) is the story of the infiltration or permeation of these ideologies to the centre of public political debates about 'black' immigration. The often claimed metonymy of immigrant=black is symptomatic of the success of such a semiotic reconfiguration. What follows is a tentative account of the rise of the New Racism as an account of the rise of a politically loaded anecdotalism whose chief virtue was its ability to get around the public prohibition on the explicit discourse of the 'old' racism.

Post-war British Racism as an Ideology of Englishness

The unique problem facing ideological racists in post-war British politics was the political prohibition on the explicit reference or employment of the signifier of 'race' in respectable debate. The political achievement of exclusion legislation is the result of the successful construction of a Parliamentary discourse that was able to communicate the ideology of racism without the give away signifier of 'race' itself. This process of discursive re-formation was gradual and fraught with difficulties; restricted for the most part to Question Time and Supply Days, where frequently their centre-liberal and left colleagues would deride and ridicule their dedication to this topic (cf. Layton-Henry 1984: ch.3). The elite response was often high minded and disdainful. However, through perseverance, which is the preserve of the ideological driven, and encouraged by their local successes and support, this group fashioned a particularly distinctive political narrative that allowed the translation of the local politics of 'race' into a narrative of neighbourhood nationalism and white identity politics. This is not to suggest that this group of driven Backbenchers knew what they were about. They practically understood that it was necessary to submerge or redefine 'race' within other social topics or concerns that would act as conduits for it; that would operate as public symbols of the dangers it posed for British society.

Early versions of this emergent formation included the discourse of disease and contamination: health scares, TB outbreaks, tropical diseases, etc. (Barker 1979: 1). Secondly, there was the discourse of vice (linked to the incidence of sexually transmitted disease), moral turpitude and degradation; the delineation of 'red-light' areas and thinly disguised miscegenation discourse, directed at the imputed sexual liaisons between black men and white women (*Hansard vol. 634* 17 February 1961, cc. 1963-70; Pannell and Brockway 1965). Thirdly, there was the discourse of crime. This often involved combining prostitution, pimping, etc., with the idea of violence and drug trafficking, and the creation of 'no-go areas' (cf. Gilroy 1987, pp. 79-85).

These emergent local evils, attendant upon the development of black immigration, were often imbricated within a discourse of protection of the working class neighbourhood and local area from moral and social decline As Foot (1965, pp.36-7) records the early Immigration Control Associations were welcomed by the locals because, *at last here were people who were going to clean up the town*. As Miles and Phizacklea (1979, p.94) have convincingly argued, this perception of decline was closely associated with the arrival and settlement of black migrants. Contained within the development of this discourse was a local nationalism that involved an idea of the decline of Britain as a dominant world power and the arrival and mixing of inferiors, viewed as a direct result of this fact. The acceptance of the idea of decline often

involved a perception of a threat to the character and Englishness of the areas. Here nation was fused into class; the working and lower middle-class, white locals become the nation and the repository of the virtues and values by which the Empire, and world leadership, had been achieved; a white-order that was realised as it was at the same moment threatened by decolonization (cf. Schwarz 1996).

At the emergent centre of this discursive formation was the figure of Coates and Silburn's *Forgotten Englishman*²⁰ (cf. Joshi and Carter 1984, pp.67-8). A figure discovered to exist in poverty when poverty had been officially eradicated. He lived in the inner city, unable to move away, while the blacks moved in next door. It is no surprise that the key site of struggle over racism at the local level has been that of housing (cf. Rex and Moore 1967; Smith 1989). It is the forgotten Englishman, living in the 'areas most affected', who is spoken up for and on behalf of by the Backbenchers involved in supporting Cyril Osborne's campaign for exclusionary legislation of 'coloured immigration' (*Hansard* 5 December 1958, cc.1552-1597; *Hansard* 17 November, 1959, cc.1121-1130; *Hansard vol. 634* 17 February, 1961, cc.1929-2024; *Hansard, vol.645* 1 August, 1961, cc.1319-1331; *Hansard* 16 November, 1961, cc. 687-823).

As this discursive formation develops, the Forgotten Englishman becomes the Ordinary English person. A person who is tolerant, well disposed to be civic in his community but finds himself unable to tolerate the extent of changes that have recently occurred and, in particular, the introduction of foreign elements into his neighbourhood. It is widely believed that Powell exposed or invented this figure in his Birmingham 'rivers of blood' speech. But the quite ordinary Englishman is the central figure in the campaign for controls. It is on behalf of this tolerant and exasperated person that legislation must be achieved. It is this mythical community Cyril Osborne articulates: 'Speaking as an Englishman for the English people about conditions in England, I feel deeply that the problem of immigration must be tackled, and tackled soon' (*Hansard vol. 634* 17 February 1961, c.1930)²¹

The political success of racism in post-war British politics and society is the achievement of dedicated campaign by a group of inter-party Backbenchers and the work of Immigration Control Associations and the assistance, declared and undeclared, of organised fascist and racist groups and individuals (cf. Foot 1965; Walker 1977; Layton-Henry 1984: ch.3; 1992). This dedicated campaign does not achieve success until 1961 when the Conservative government agrees to support a modified version of Cyril Osborne's Private Member's Bill, presented in February of the same year (*Hansard vol. 634* 17 February, cc.1929-2024; *Hansard vol. 649* 16 November, cc.687-823). This earlier debate was itself the culmination of a series of Private members Bills and attempted interventions by Osborne and his supporters from 1955 onwards (Layton-Henry 1984, pp.31-2).

As we have observed such Supply Day Debates and Question Time comments were met with indifference and with elite support for the principles of the Open Door and Commonwealth ideal. Scholarly work now reveals that the State had a *Janus* face during this period, since publicly it expressed the unity of the Commonwealth; in private and official memos and minutes, it deplored and feared the arrival and settlement of 'inferior' blacks. There can be little doubt that the state elite's response to black migration is a profoundly racialized one, despite the fact that this process is uneven and does not produce restriction legislation until 1961 (cf. Harris 1987, p.72; Miles 1988). We must conclude that the success of public-political racism in post-war Britain is the result of the conjunctural alliance of the State elite and racist Backbenchers, which takes place within a more generalised shift in the whole ideological field of racism in this period (cf. Guillaumin 1995, pp.37-40).²²

If the claim for the New Racism is to be at all consistent with such accounts then it must address this discursive processes as part of wider transformation of the ideological field of racism in the period 1945 to the early 1960s. Powellism is a privileged confidant of this elite and backbench racism and Powell fashions his own elite/populist version of it in 1968. Prior to this political intervention he is unmoved by the theme (Foot 1969: ch.2).

The Discourse of the New Racism.

In the past 30 years, large areas of our towns and cities have been transformed by immigration. Schools which were once securely based upon British cultural values

have often had to cope with a predominance of immigrant children. In their schools, in their pubs and in their shops, the British have felt like strangers in their own land (Nicholas Budgen *Daily Mail* Thursday March 13, 1997).

Perhaps the first issue raised by this sort of quotation is how a British politician, in the course of a General Election campaign, can be allowed to get away with this sort of mischief?²³ But this is precisely our point. What appears to be recognisably New Racism, and therefore a carrier of hidden racism, is able to assert such 'empty' fictions because these metaphors have, through dint of repetition, sedimented into a popular consciousness of racial reason or racialized commonsense. The continuity and familiarity of these metaphors allow their absurdity to pass into folklore: a folklore that exists in the appeal to the local and to a collective working class experience of immigration. Of course Budgen's phrase 'predominance of immigrant children' is both Powell's 'lonely little white girl' (of which more in a moment) as well as the problem of the threat of numbers that flow from immigrant increase. This takes us to the heart of the racist logic at work in the words: immigrant mothers produce more immigrants. This is the language of the numbers game, so eloquently denounced by Robert Moore over two decades ago (Moore 1975, p.27). But also here is the language of the New Racism, in particular the threat to British cultural values. This Mr. Budgen borrows from his erstwhile colleague, another white man, who feels he must speak out on behalf of the English indigenous:

There is little hope of our coming to terms with the monumental significance for our future of New Commonwealth and Pakistani immigration until we invent a language by means of which doubts, fears and aspirations can be expressed openly and honestly[...]In the absence of the coinage of honest discourse, one can perhaps make a start by reporting and commentating on one's everyday experiences (Honeyford 1984, p.31).

This is Ray Honeyford²⁴ bemoaning the absence of a public language in which to discuss 'Immigration'. But this is *too* disingenuous for that language has already been invented. The old right and the new have got together and crafted it under our very noses. It could be that this has escaped Mr. Honeyford, but what is certain is that the language of the meantime, the recourse to the anecdotal, local experience *is* that language. As far as the New Racism writers are concerned the precedent for this stance and the blueprint for this style is Powell's April 1968 Birmingham speech. In that speech we find Powell moved to speak up for the 'ordinary, decent, sensible people, writing a rational and often well-educated letter' who are most concerned and most affected. Because they have 'found themselves made strangers in their own country. Found their wives unable to obtain hospital beds in childbirth, their children unable to obtain school places, their homes and neighbourhoods changed beyond recognition, their plans and prospects for the future defeated' (Powell, *Birmingham Speech*, in: Smithies and Fiddick 1969, p.38).

The transformation of the neighbourhood into alien territory is definitive of Powellism and the New Racism but, in point of fact, the need to speak up for the oppressed whites, the English indigenous, is evidenced in much earlier public Debates. As, for example, the 1965 Race Relations Bill, where an even more familiar argument is advanced by Selwyn Lloyd MP:

That is the kind of situation that hurts people - the fact that there are schools at which from 25. per cent. to 40 per cent. of the pupils are coloured children; that there are places where priority in day nurseries is being given to coloured children; that in the maternity hospitals the beds seem to go to coloured mothers; that there are places where there is residential down grading of house property, and where there are dormitory conditions in which single coloured men are crowded together in circumstances that shock those living near (Selwyn Lloyd MP (1965) *Race Relations Bill - Second Reading* (Hansard : 3 May, cc.1033-4).

Powell was present during the Second Reading of the Bill and voted against it.²⁵ But this narrative of persecution and minority oppression arises out of a succession of articulations on behalf of beleaguered constituents in Parliamentary Debates in 1958, 1959, 1961, 1964, 1965, 1968, etc. (cf. Brown 1997; 1998). It is this sense of continuity in the development of this narrative strategy that Powellism embodies. And significantly it turns on the distinction central to the appeal to local experience: 'The sense of being a persecuted minority which is growing among ordinary English people in the areas of the country which are affected is something that those without direct experience can hardly imagine' (Powell in: Smithies and Fiddick 1969, p. 40). Thus, in the House of Commons Debate on *Control of Immigration* (17 February 1961 (Hansard) vol. 634), a debate to which, like so many in the years of silence, Powell was a non-contributing attendee, we find a striking resemblance of narrative style, language and delivery to Powell's own later, much more deliberately constructed efforts:

The point can best be summed up by what was said to me by a constituent of mine. He was the occupant of a house of which he had the statutory tenancy, and the house had been bought over his head by a Jamaican who wished to get him out. The man was a fairly humble railway worker, and he told me "Believe me, it is said that we hate the Jamaicans, but it is nothing to what they feel about us." That is the kind of thing that is occurring[...]The man of whom I spoke was a decent, honest sort of man who really had no such hatred at all, but who felt the result of what is happening in this way (Sir Hugh Lucas-Tooth, (Hendon, South) *Control of Immigration* (Hansard): 17th February 1961, c.1981).

Compare this anecdote with one of Powell's most (in)famous:

A week or two ago I fell into conversation with a constituent, a middle-aged, quite ordinary man employed in one of our nationalised industries. After a sentence or two about the weather, he suddenly said: 'If I had the money to go, I wouldn't stay in this country.' I made some deprecatory reply, to the effect that even this government wouldn't last for ever; but he took no notice and continued: 'I have three children, all of them through grammar school and two of them married now, with family. I shan't be satisfied 'till I have see them all settled overseas. In this country in fifteen or twenty years time the black man will have the whip hand over the white man (*Birmingham Speech*, 20th April, 1968; in Smithies and Fiddick 1969, pp.35-6).

The conceptual structure and content of these anecdotes are remarkably similar. Obviously Powell's is more literary and self-conscious; the accented quotation is a caricature of proletarian authenticity. This device allows Powell to 'quote' racial analogies that turn the received view of slavery and Empire, 'on its head'. These are the elements Powell has added. The attention to detail and 'authenticity' are required for the delivery of this speech to the national media. The supporting paragraph fixes Powell's preferred interpretation: 'Here is a decent, ordinary fellow-Englishman, who in broad daylight in my own town says to me, his Member of Parliament, that this country will not be worth living in for his children. I simply do not have the right to shrug my shoulders and think about something else' (Powell in Smithies and Fiddick 1969, p.36).

The language of the honest, decent, respectable, 'quite ordinary' Englishman invokes and constructs the validity of these 'tales'; confirming upon their teller the membership of that community that can share this 'feeling for the soul of the nation'. As Behrens and Edmonds (1981) have pointed out, the characteristic markers of the 'race populists' are: (i) a duty to articulate the view of the ordinary English and (ii) to act as guardians of the national heritage and English institutions, that these relations are apparently expressive of. This sense of Englishness, as symbolic birthright and identity, conferred by an invoked collective identity and tradition, goes back to the mid and late 1950s. It is hardly surprising that this language usage travels in the other direction, post 1968 Powell:

Some years ago I met a constituent who found himself and his family the last English person in a road otherwise totally occupied by immigrants. He said to me "What have I done to deserve it?"[...]I make no apology for the fact that this problem mainly concerns England and the big English cities. There are certain areas there where an Englishman may feel that he is a stranger in his own land. Nobody has told him who, or how, this happened, or what is the point, what is the aim, what sort of England this will be in 10, 20 or 30 years time (Mr. John Stokes, Halesowen and Stourbridge, *Race Relations Bill*, (Hansard): 4 March 1976, c.1643).

Here we have, well absorbed and perfectly recreated, an identifiable language of Powellism: the ordinary English, the street by street occupation, the invasion and cultural alienness which must lead to conflict; a situation moved beyond tolerance and the threat to the future, birthright and identity of the nation, written into the private tragedies of the common people who populate the streets of England. The selection of specific terms: 'occupied'; the use of ordinary speech; the claim for 'authenticity'. As Ann Dummett has pointed out, and others since, Powell's story was standard mythology to be heard in any pub in 1968 (cf. Foot 1969, p.114). Foot goes further in providing evidence, culled from the Neo-Fascist press, very formally resembling the structure and content of Powell's 'little old white lady' letter: 'Some elderly women were nearly in tears as they revealed how Indians were blocking drains with stagnant refuse, threatening them when they protested, urinating and excreting in the streets' (*Southall Resident's Association* report in the BNP's *Combat*, Jan/March, 1964). And in the *National Socialist* we find the following 'survey' findings: 'Among the mass of evidence that has been put before us by white victims of these methods, we have for instance photographs showing human excreta deposited by blacks outside the door of a white woman's flat in London as part of a campaign to get rid of her' (cited in Foot 1969, pp.114-5). While Seabrook, Orwellian chronicler of the life of the English working classes, recorded the new 'folk devil' of the declining Midland and industrial North: 'Packie Stan' (Seabrook, 1970):

There is a kind of folk ogre[...]a compound of all the least acceptable characteristics of the immigrants in the town, and whose name sounds like 'Packie Stan'. He kills goats and chickens in the back yard, his children pee on the flagstones, has a large family, and he depresses the price of property wherever he goes. He contrives to filch people's jobs and yet batten on Social Security at the same time. The police are on his side and he had been granted immunity from the laws of the land by the Race Relations Act (Seabrook 1971, p.39).

Such a folk devil arises from the many anecdotal stories passed from mouth to mouth by people, identical in detail, and yet common to many different towns:

Each time I was told [the] story, it was said to have originated in a different [and named] street in the town. Nobody could identify the protagonists. It was invariably told to the story-teller by a friend who personally knew the individuals concerned, but who remained always at one remove from the actual informant (1971, p.39).

Seeking verification of the story by identification of the individual was likely to arouse resentment among tellers, 'because it looks as if you're doubting their word. It's simply a well known fact, that's all' (1971, p.40). Powell's refusal to give up names and addresses, and the inability of certain major papers to find the people and situations depicted in his stories, is in a greater sense irrelevant. What is important is the idea of 'typicality':

He said that in any event he was not quoting the letter as evidence of the truth of what it stated. He was not quoting it as evidence because he did not need evidence; and he did not need evidence because what the letter said had happened was to his knowledge so typical as to be an established fact. He had used the letter as an illustration of what he knew to be true (Terry Coleman interview, *The Guardian*, 20th May 1970).

The point surely is made that Powell was quite able to construct a 'typical story', and was almost certainly, in the early years of immigrant settlement, to have been offered countless stories concerning the 'blacks', that would have been 'typical' in this way; in reflecting working class sense of 'loss of community', economic insecurity and racialized social antagonism ?²⁶

Having established these connections it is surely proven that the 'race populism' and the Parliamentary racism which we have recorded exhibits a ubiquitously anecdotal form ? At the centre of each piece of appeal, on behalf of the beleaguered English working class in 'our' major cities, is an anecdote or story or reference to a conversation or letter. On top of this often a reference is made to a newspaper as verification of the validity or generality of the incident or sentiment. Such a reference is employed to indicate the source of the reality denied those not directly involved in the 'race experience'. Take, for example, the following:

Hon. Members should see some of the things which go in Birmingham. They would then think that it was getting out of hand. Certainly the police have more than they can deal with[...] I am not saying that it is all crime, but I know of cases where the police have been so busy at certain times of night that there has been as much as an hour's delay after the making of a 999 call before they have been able to get out and settle these little brawls which take place, not only among coloured immigrants but certainly among immigrants[...] Most of the newspapers have been fairly honest about this issue. They have been more reliable and the Birmingham newspapers, the Birmingham Post, the Birmingham Mail and the Birmingham Despatch, have tried to be fair[...] We have had criticism from The Times and this is understandable. The Times is not sold in the areas of difficulty. The places where immigrants are now living are not the places where the Times is sold to any great extent. The Times is sold in areas where people never see immigrants and do not understand the problem (Mr. Harold Gurden, Birmingham, Selly Oak, *Commonwealth Immigrants Bill - Second Reading*, (Hansard): 16 November 1961, cc.737-8).

Compare this with one of Powell's 1976 Speeches:

There are cities and areas in this country, some not many miles from this House, where assaults upon the police are matters of daily occurrence and where in daylight, let alone after dark, ordinary citizens are unwilling and afraid to go abroad. Day by day and at a mounting rate this transformation in actual outward behaviour is taking place in these cities[...] Occasionally there emerges something above the surface. I do not expect that Hon. Members saw the headline "50 police constables injured in Birmingham" as it appeared in the Birmingham Sunday Mercury of 16th May[...] For the most part, these cases go unreported except locally; but they are continuing and mounting and are very well known to those who live in the areas concerned and who see such areas being transformed beyond all recognition, from their own homes and their own country to places where it is a terror to be obliged to live (*Immigration and Emigration* (Hansard): May 24th 1976, c. 47: in Powell 1978, p.161).

In its self-consciously defensive and incoherent way the earlier speech contains a striking number of the elements central to the Powellism of the second extract. Elements which Powell has appropriated, cleaned-up and re-fashioned, for his 'race-war' speeches; particularly those delivered in 1968, 1969, 1970 and 1976 (Powell 1969; 1972; 1978). Central to such speeches is the stress on the 'reality' that can only be judged by those who actually experience contact with 'the immigrants', by virtue of their residence within the 'areas most affected'. From this source Powell and the 'race populists' are able to fashion the discourse of the 'fears' and aspirations of the 'ordinary' Englishman, waking up to a multi-racial nightmare. The phrase the 'areas most affected' is absolutely central to the formation of the discourse of anecdotal racism and its rise to public hegemony. It allows the justification of the strategy of the appeal and reference to local experience. It is the winning of the political battle over commonsense that

establishes the ordinary discourse of racial experience and racial fears, and their legitimate basis in the life of the working class community. Thus Powell opens his Walsall speech:

There is a sense of hopelessness and helplessness which comes over persons who are trapped or imprisoned, when all their efforts to attract attention and assistance bring no response. This is the kind of feeling which you in Walsall and we in Wolverhampton are experiencing in the face of the continued flow of immigration into our towns. We are of course in a minority - make no mistake about that. Out of over 600 Parliamentary constituencies perhaps less than 60 are affected in any way like ourselves. The rest know little or nothing and, we might sometimes be tempted to feel, care little or nothing. (Speech by Rt Hon J Enoch Powell at the *Annual Dinner of the Walsall South Conservative Association*, February 9th 1968; in Smithies and Fiddick 1969, p.19).

Once Powell has claimed the idea of the community, become its defender, he can go on the initiative and begin to talk of the community as a site of war; a war of invasion and slow, street by street occupation. This logic can take him right to the heart of what Barker calls the New Racism: the idea of alien encampments in the heartland's of Britain. But now it is no longer the recognisable metaphors of the working class community but the mythic land of Blake: England's green and pleasant become unpleasant and overrun. The decaying working class community is the central metaphor of the anecdotal story, strategically placed within the 'Rivers of Blood' speech, as Gilroy has noted (Gilroy 1987, p.86).

The ability to articulate the idea of 'race and immigration' to the idea of urban change and decay is a central success of 'race' politics. Its beginnings lie in the debates taking place in the latter half of the 1950s and the early 1960s, as we have indicated; 10 years or more before Powellism explodes. It is inescapable that Powellism has more continuity with these treatments than others have allowed. Let us turn to a re-examination of the public impact of the Birmingham and Eastbourne speeches in the light of these arguments.

Enoch Powell's Earthquake *reconsidered*.

Seymour-Ure's essay (1974) examines the same discursive sources as those advocates of the theory of the New Racism, but it does so in terms of an empirically based examination of the significance of the media impact of Powellism, made possible by the occasion of *those* speeches. Seymour-Ure's method of exposition is exemplary. The first part of the essay looks at the dramatic media coverage the speech receives in terms of the 'race politics' background, the position of Powell within the Conservative party and Cabinet, and the content of the speech itself. The second part of the essay examines the possible range of explanations that could account for the saturation coverage the speech received. Finally, Seymour-Ure looks at the political impact of the speech.

While advancing historical and political scholarship may invalidate Seymour-Ure's contextualizing evidence of 'race' politics (cf. Layton-Henry 1984; 1992; Solomos 1989), the central question posed by the essay, concerning the volume and intensity of coverage of the Birmingham speech, is of lasting significance. In particular, Seymour-Ure seeks to explain why the Birmingham speech was such an Earthquake when the Walsall speech was not? The first point is simply that the political moment was more explosive at the time of the April speech. Labour's Race Relations Bill was about to be debated and there was the serious possibility of Conservative Backbench revolt against their leadership. In addition there was the impact of the Kenyan Asians scare upon the press in a period in which, as Paul Foot reminds us, the press crawled with 'race' stories in a climate of 'moral panic'.²⁷

Then there was Mr. Powell's aims and techniques. First there was the content of the speech itself. The Birmingham speech was about three times as long as the previous one.²⁸ In addition much of its content seemed designed to provoke public reactions (even anticipating such reaction).²⁹ In addition, Powell had circulated the whole text of the speech directly to the Press Association so that all Sunday editors would have sight of it before it was read. Given the political moment, the wording of the speech, Powell's position as a Shadow Cabinet Minister, and the underlying current of concern over Immigration and Race Relations, those editors knew

the piece was controversial, and they also knew that every other editor knew the same. Powell had them over a barrel before he had uttered a word of it. These strategies and tactics, aligned with the media's news values, meant that the speech would get disproportionate coverage. It still seems incredible to recount that the actual speech was read before an invited audience of a mere 85, and yet within a few days it had reached up to 96 per cent of the national population (Seymour-Ure 1974, pp.99,105).³⁰ There is no doubt that it is one of the best remembered post-war political speeches in Britain. The prime reason for this immediacy of memory is certainly the skilful construction of the speech, in particular, the choice of language; although, of course, this feature is dependent upon the 'saturation coverage' of the speech in the Sunday press.³¹ The other significant aspect was the extended use of personalised anecdotes within the speech:

In Walsall, a brief passing reference to a school with 'one white child in her class' had attracted disproportionate attention. Mr. Powell[...]was well aware of the publicity-winning benefits of couching an argument in intimate human terms. At Birmingham he exploited the method more fully. In fact the story of the harassed old white lady and the white man fearing the whip hand of the black man took over a quarter of the speech (Seymour-Ure 1974, p.121).

Of most significance, for the argument developed here, is how the coverage of the anecdotal aspects of the speech were 'disproportionate' in relation to the amount of words reporting the speech content in total (Seymour-Ure 1974, p.121).³² Seymour-Ure concludes that all the papers, with one exception, gave the anecdotes 'disproportionate space' in their reports. Seymour-Ure accounts for this exceptional treatment in terms of 'news values', in particular the appeal of the 'human interest' form of the 'little old white lady' story (1974, pp.120-1).

Seymour-Ure's analysis and judgement of the Powell effect is very persuasive, yet the study is un-acknowledged by those writers who claim a significance to the content of Powellism. Their fundamental error has been to theorise the ideological impact of Powellism directly from the content of the speech as read. What they miss is the mediated nature of that impact. The effect of this mediation is to dramatically highlight the salience of the anecdotes to the speech and its impact. Their special significance, in the communication of racism, or rather its public construction in the telling and receiving of these tales, is what is centrally missing from accounts of the New Racism. As we have illustrated, in terms of content, there is nothing particularly new in these anecdotes. What is significantly different is the degree of their public exposure. If this is correct then both the basis and the content of the relationship at the heart of claims for a New Racism, must be questioned. The implications of this revision are that the form of racism and its successful communication do not depend upon the widespread acceptance of a new theory of human nature, or a new language of cultural difference, but rather the re-articulation of 'race' to an *ideological narrative of the social*.³³ In the light of these points let us re-examine that (in)famous anecdote in full:

Eight years ago in a respectable street in Wolverhampton a house was sold to a Negro. Now only one white (a woman old-age pensioner) lives there. This is her story. She lost her husband and both her sons in the war. So she turned her seven-roomed house, her only asset, into a boarding house. She worked hard and did well, paid of her mortgage and began to put something by for her old age. Then the immigrants moved in. With growing fear, she saw one house after another taken over. The quiet street became a place of noise and confusion. Regretfully, her white tenants moved out.

The day after the last one left, she was awakened at 7 am by two Negroes who wanted to use her phone to contact their employer. When she refused, as she would have refused any stranger, at such an hour, she was abused and feared she would have been attacked but for the chain on the door. Immigrant families have tried to rent rooms in her house, but she always refused. Her little store of money went, and after paying her rates, she has less than £2 per week. She went to apply for a rate reduction and was seen by a young girl, who on hearing she had a seven-roomed house, suggested she

could let part of it. When she said the only people she could get were Negroes, the girl said, "Racial Prejudice won't get you anywhere in this country." So she went home.

The telephone is her life line. Her family pay the bill, and help her out as best they can. Immigrants have offered her to buy her house - at a price which the prospective landlord would be able to recover from his tenants in weeks, or at most months. She is becoming afraid to go out. Windows are broken. She finds excreta pushed through her letter-box. When she goes to the shops, she is followed by children, charming, wide-grinning piccaninnies. They cannot speak English, but one word they know. "Racialist", they chant. When the new Race Relations Bill is passed, this woman is convinced she will go to prison. And is she so wrong? I begin to wonder' (Powell, *Birmingham Speech*, in Smithies and Fiddick 1969, pp.41-2)

The overwhelming difficulty we face with this 'story' is how the adjective of racist is to be assigned to it. Because it is a re-presentation of an experience, a quotation held in inverted commas, told by an anonymous but concerned well wisher. Its register is therefore as an honest, decent appeal on behalf of someone who needs our indulgence, and ultimately, protection. It is no accident that both the subject and the correspondent are female. Their vulnerability is both racialized and an appeal to the discourse of gender order. Through an appeal to our imagined membership of white community order, invoked through an ideology of Englishness (respectability, manners, dignity in the face of adversity) we must enter into and go through the travail of the little old white lady. Through this anecdotal experience our consciousness is racialized.

This discursive move requires sustenance through the recognition of empirical features and elements that connotate a racialized urban scene. Indeed the central travail of the little old white lady is that her economic situation has trapped her in this street, taken over by the 'Negroes'. It is no accident that the metaphor of the Negro in Britain, and the 'haunting tragedy' of the US referred to in Powell's speech, is that of economic deprivation and this key signifier is given further sustenance in the metaphors of an underclass: loudness, rudeness, aggressivity, disorder, etc. It is this mixture of the real and imagined that confers upon the teller the validity of the tale. Its penetration into popular consciousness is achieved through the emotional identification the story affords. This emotionalism is powerful but not irrational; it appeals to a sense of order, tradition and community and personifies these within an image we cannot easily interrogate. It is the violation of this quiet order and dignity with shit, obscenities and violence that we must face. The tale is recounted as *modern tragedy*. The route back from this emotional identification is however racialized; once we have entered into the circuit we must carry its supplement.

Gilroy has argued that the power of this vignette is the neat series of binary oppositions that lead us to the realisation of the threat of racial disorder:

The anarchy generated by black settlement is counterposed to an image of England in which Britannia is portrayed as an old white woman, trapped and alone in the inner city. She is surrounded by blacks whose very blackness expresses not only the immediate threat they pose but the bleak inhumanity of urban decay (cf. Gilroy 1987, p.86).

The sense of neighbourhood nationalism and white identity, as a possession of challenged and cherished values, is surely correct. But the argument for a textual binarism understates the role of same as *referents* of an economic reality common to this imagined experience that grounds 'race' within a discourse of racialized inequality. This discourse of social and moral inferiority is a central one in understanding English racism and its eugenicist core.³⁴ What Powellism is about here, and elsewhere, is in connecting racialized discourse to the signifiacatory motifs of the urban experience of deprivation and decay.

For Barker the central racist feature in Powellism is the reference to human nature occurring in the Eastbourne speech:

Looking back over the three speeches, it is clear to me that this third one is by far and away the most racist. True, it does not use the nastiest examples; its language is relatively restrained. But here, almost fatalistically, a theory is propounded. The consequences of human nature are such that whether he, John Enoch Powell, wants it or not, people are going to resist. It is not that blacks are bad; they are simply different. Therefore their sheer presence in numbers has the same effect as an invasion. Their cultural alienness will bring about the rivers of blood he had talked of those months earlier. It is as if, over the year 1968, Powell had gradually assembled the confidence and the ideas to assert a complete racist programme (Barker 1981, p.40).

This is a very persuasive and appealing claim. It theorizes racism as a hidden dimension of the development of this kind of argument, so that racism is communicated without consciousness of it; or it is located within an appeal to an ideology of the nature of human groups. But the Eastbourne speech has an even more bizarre extended sequence of anecdotes, supplied by Dr. W E Bamford of SW 18 (Powell, *Eastbourne Speech*, in: Smithies and Fiddick 1969, pp.66-8). Here another white lady is thumped in the back in the dark; a young couple have filth smeared around their toilet, etc. One thing is clear the forgotten Englishman is female ! But what is assaulted here is not Britannia but the personification of the struggle to deal with and remain respectable against the privation of economic adversity. This is the soul of the English nation and the source of the thread of racist identification which makes the tales believable. Post-war racist discourse, as Smith has argued, is about residence (cf. Smith 1993)

Conclusion

As Seymour-Ure (1974) argues, it is the over concentration upon the ‘ripe anecdote’ and selective exposure of it to a mass audience, that ensured its popular resonance. The precisely coined phrases that framed it, the river tiber, whip hand, etc., served as elite legitimations of proletarianized emotionalism and the supplementary racist imaginings such a public form was able to carry. These remain as symbolic markers of a route back to the powerful public idiom articulated through Powellism. However the success of Powellism resulted from his recognition and utilisation of the performative value of the racialized anecdote, a value that had been demonstrated through the development of this form within Parliamentary Debates going back to *at least* the mid 1950s. This anecdotal discourse of ‘race’ and residence served Powell’s purpose in providing the most effective public means of communication of a racist nationalism.

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Notes

¹ The debate about the New Racism emerges in British sociology in the early 1980s (Barker 1981; CCCS Race and Politics Group 1982) but the concept has subsequently been addressed in the context of debates about the resurgence of ideological racism in Europe, cf. Balibar (1991) and developments in France, in particular: Wieviorka (1994, pp.173-88; 1995, pp.42-5). Any theoretical assessment of the concept must acknowledge the important ideas of Taguieff, whose key books are still (sadly) not available in an English translation. The object of my analysis here is post-war British political discourse, and there are important differences in the meaning and deployment of terms in, say, the British and French context. But this should not lead to theoretical insularity or the abdication of responsibility of scholars to seek out and highlight common strategies and tactics among the ideological racists in both the European and British contexts.

² A critical history of the debate has yet to be written (but see Brown 1997; 1998). My description emphasises the continuities between earlier sociological definitions and approaches to the problem of political languages and the expression/ concealment of racism, as for example Reeves, and more recent approaches, such as van Dijk and the critical linguistic approaches associated with the journal *Discourse & Society*.

³ Such a claim is for the political project of Thatcherism. As Smith (1994, p.36) argues '(t)o the extent that a project achieves hegemonic status, it appears that virtually any problem can be resolved within its framework'. Such a view is part of a neo-Gramscian hegemony as naturalization (as opposed to domination) theory, where the organisation of consent within a new political bloc is achieved through the re-articulation of weakened traditional social elements and ideologies. I am not concerned to assess the relationship of Powellism to Thatcherism, critical to this account, but rather the evidence for the significance of the 'content' of Powellism to the moment of re-articulation.

⁴ The discursive history I trace in my research is from 1956-7 until 1988. But the discursive phenomenon I am concerned with is a post-war phenomenon whose 'conceptual primitives' are articulated from the late 1940s onwards.

⁵ The Gramscian term commonsense is central to the claims of the New Racism thesis. The assumption is that commonsense is the dominant ideology, sedimented into a common register, so that ideological meanings are bottom-up rather than top-down. Barker's account of the New Racism offers a particular claim about the making of a new commonsense and how this is achieved. The critical point in such accounts is the moment of 're-articulation', since this involves a reconstruction of the relationship between the dominant and the subordinate, initiated from the political realm as a discursive event. Hall's account of Thatcherism offers a sophisticated account of this process. See also Smith 1994.

⁶ The evidential basis of the New Racism is examined in my unpublished Ph.D. thesis, *Racism and Political Language: the impact of Smethwick and Powellism on the formation of a political racism in post-war Britain, 1957-1988*, Department of Politics and Sociology, Birkbeck College, University of London, 1997. But see Brown 1998.

⁷ In point of fact it is the discourse of criminality that Gilroy views as central to the representation of the black presence in Britain. Powellism initiates a shift to a discourse not of criminality but of legality, as the ultimate symbol of nationality.

⁸ A discursive shift proper must involve a discussion of how the referents of 'race' have changed. A more detailed examination than is possible here would point to the existence of at least three types of claims in the New Racism thesis: (1) a re-coding of race (still meaning race); (2) a re-working of a biologically grounded claim (i.e., socio-biology) and (3) a cultural discourse offered as an alternative to 'race' talk (see Brown 1997: ch.2; 1998).

⁹ Barker actually claims a new or re-worked biological discourse informs the New Racism (see Brown 1998: ch.2). The claim for state racism is not substantiated by engagement with state theory or with actual pieces of legislation (see Brown 1998: ch.4)

¹⁰Mercer, for example, while developing an argument from Hall's account of Powellism (Hall 1978; 1979), claims Powell's speeches on English nationalism and the Empire as 'myth' provide the *reversible-connecting* factor whereby 'race' can be re-coded as culture (1994, p.307). Mercer claims this as a 'textualist-strategy': 'Powellism encoded a racist vision of English cultural identity, not in the illegitimate language of biologizing racism, but through literary and rhetorical moves that enabled the dissemination of its discourse across the political spectrum, to the point where it became legitimised by being gradually instituted in commonsense and in state policies' (1994, p.307). A 'profound shift' or 'radical break from previous discourses on race' is also claimed by Smith (1994, p.4) but such an account of the New Racism is developed within a sophisticated defence of hegemony as 'naturalization' in which the success of Thatcherism's re-coding of 'race' inform the achievement of a hegemonic project (1994: ch.1). While Smith's discussion of the success of the New Racism is in terms of a post-structuralist (mis)identification claim (which privileges 'form' over 'content') the moment of re-articulation is carefully defined in terms of a moment of social 'un-fixity' where 'new articulations borrow from and re-work various traditional frameworks so that they already appear to be somewhat familiar' (1994, p. 6).

¹¹For Lawrence (see Brown 1998: Ch. 2) racist commonsense in Britain is the product of centuries of sedimentation of images and ideologies of 'blacks' which are re-worked. This is certainly not a claim for a new biological-reductionism, as in Barker, but the articulation of a cultural language of crisis with popular racist ideologies.

¹² Here Barker is conflating two elements (i) the unspoken prohibition on 'race talk' in public (itself symptomatic of the amnesia of empire (cf. Hall 1978, p.25; Smith 1994, pp.131-40) and (ii) post-war popular feeling against Nazism, which made it difficult for the Far Right to employ 'race' explicitly in attempted political projects. Barker's argument is that the achievement of a new 'race talk' in politics offers a popular politics that can articulate racist meanings. Importantly this argument is based on the view that people would not arrive at a racist (theorized) account of immigration without the discourse (theory) of the New Racism. Importantly the New Racism should be viewed 'not as an appeal to commonsense, but as a struggle to create a new commonsense' (1981, p.22). Whereas Lawrence argues the new commonsense racist ideologies are popular 'because they intersect with and re-organise the common-sense racism of the white working and other classes' (1981, p.4). The latter view is actually more consistent with the arguments that I would view as the precursors of the New racism thesis, for example, the Dummett's account of 'crypto-racism' (1969); although neither Barker or the CCCS writers acknowledge or appear aware of earlier sociological or political studies approaches.

¹³ Other writers prior to the new racism debate argue that it is the liberal prohibition on race in public space that allows Powellism the impact it does achieve by finding its way through the official silence. Powell is of course able to turn this silence into a conspiracy of the liberals against the best interests of the people (cf. Dummett and Dummett 1969; Seymour-Ure 1974; Braham 1982, pp.279-82).

¹⁴ Layton-Henry (1992, pp.72-3) identifies the anti-immigration Backbenchers, drawn from the ranks of both Labour and the Tories, as: Cyril Osborne (Louth), Norman Pannell (Kirkdale), Martin Lindsey (Solihull), Harold Gurden (Selly Oak), John Hynd (Attercliffe), Harry Hyne (Accrington), George Rogers (N. Kensington), Albert Evans (S.W. Islington) and James Harrison (Nottingham W.) I make the argument for their authorship of the New Racism in Brown (1997; 1998). Layton-Henry (1984: ch.3) provides an important account of the Campaign for Immigration Controls.

¹⁵ In fact the New Racism theorists completely ignore all Parliamentary Debates prior to 1968; as they ignore all Debates taking place between 1968 and 1976 (Barker) and between 1968 and 1981 (Lawrence and CCCS). It seems outrageous that such an influential theory as the NR is based on such a narrow and unrepresentative selection of Debates and statements. See Brown 1997: ch.4; Brown 1998.

¹⁶ This period covers the Parliamentary impact of the Backbench exclusion campaign, up to and including the intervention of Powell, and Powell's defeat as candidate for South Down.

¹⁷ There is no satisfactory treatment in studies of post-war political racism of this notion. Theoretically Derrida's conception suggests something of the sense in which 'race' is present in its absence (absent presence) but how such an absence is articulated is at the heart of the fierce theoretical controversies surrounding the political implications of the attempt to combine post-structuralism and neo-Gramscism, cf. Barrett (1991) Smith (1994).

¹⁸ The term ‘conceptual’ or ‘discursive primitives’ is an important element in the neo-Foucaultian approach to the signifying ‘epistemes’ or elements of articulation by which ‘similar elements are articulated differently’ at moments of discursive shift (see Foucault 1972, pp.37-8; Omi and Winant 1986, p.64; Said 1978, pp.1-4; West 1982, pp.47-68; Goldberg 1990, pp.295-318).

¹⁹ The definition of racism as doctrine of hierarchy and inferiority, sanctioned by bad science, is a political act of prohibition (Benedict 1983; Barzun 1965; Miles 1989). In some instances, for example the case of Benedict, it is a social-scientific critique of the illegitimate uses of biological science. More generally the definition of racism as a doctrine of inequality allows the detached significations, by which racism has been made and remade historically, a route back to the erased space occupied by the prohibited notion. Banton’s (1983) argument that racism should be defined as racial typology theory and assigned an epistemic moment in the development of biological thought allows in the *new racisms* of Griffiths and Powell (cf. the debate between Banton and Rex in: Zubaida (ed) (1970).

²⁰ Actually the title of Coates and Silburn’s study was *Poverty: The Forgotten Englishmen* (1972) (Harmondsworth: Penguin). I am indebted to the perceptive remarks of Joshi and Carter: ‘They were the poor and unorganised, trapped in the decaying ‘inner city’ areas of declining capital investment [...] invisible to politicians, the intelligentsia and large sections of the labour movement. It was to these invisible communities that the first post-war black immigrants were driven, to disappear from view in much the same way as their powerless, white working-class neighbours [...] For the white working class in the inner-city areas, a black presence brought a sharp awareness that things had changed, an awareness of the loss of community and their own sense of failure, of being left behind in the competitive struggle to live in the same streets as the people over whom ‘they’ had once ruled’ (1984, pp.67-8). Much of the material informing this view can be found in Seabrook’s pioneering explorations (1971; 1978).

²¹ This quotation could be supported by many more examples. See Brown 1997 and chapters 3, 4 and 6. and the references: 1958a; 1958b; 1961a; 1961b; 1961c; 1964; 1965.

²² Guillaumin’s argument is that a discursive field can shift and mutate under an apparently stable signifier, so that the referentiality and function of the signifier changes. The reply to the New Racist argument has to be that the period of drift or transformation takes place post-1945 and involves the engagement with and political development of the changing relations of representation informing post colonial societies and their former subjects. As Balibar argues, ‘The new racism is a racism of the era of decolonization, of the reversal of population movements between the old colonies and the old metropolises, and the division of humanity within a single political space’ (1991, p.21).

²³ An unexpected bonus on election night in Britain (April 1997) was that the Labour landslide also included the loss of Wolverhampton SW, (Powell’s former constituency), and its incumbent Budgen, despite a racialized campaign.

²⁴ Ray Honeyford was Headmaster of Drummond Middle School in Bradford UK, until he began publishing *Anti-Anti-racism* articles, first in the *Times Educational Supplement* and then in the *Salisbury Review*. A boycott of parents lead to the local authority offering Mr. Honeyford a ‘golden handshake’. It was widely thought the Honeyford was ‘doing a Powell’. Mr. Honeyford was subsequently invited by Mrs. Thatcher to Downing Street in the capacity of educational advisor. After the publication of his book (1988) he appears to have slipped into oblivion.

²⁵ The debate about Powell’s late entry into the race restriction lobby, cf. Foot (1969: ch.2) misses the continuity and consistency of Powell’s particularly chosen language forms. It is my argument that Powell sits silently through Debates in which a nascent version of, what I call, *post-race signification* is being discursively systematised and made consistent, cf. Brown (1997; 1998).

²⁶ In fact we know from Foot that Powell was offered many stories and accounts which he rejected on principle, prior to his interest in the ‘Immigration issue’, cf. Foot (1969, pp.54-7).

²⁷ It is of course, Stuart Hall, who develops the notion of ‘race’ as a moral panic in post-war British society (1978).

²⁸ Powell's first major speech on immigration control was given at Walsall (Powell did give a speech at Deal, the previous year, but this speech is very different in argument and style). The length of the Walsall speech was approximately 1,000 wds.; the Birmingham speech was 3,184; over three times the length, Seymour-Ure (1974, pp.103, 107).

²⁹ 'I can already hear the chorus of execration. How dare I say such a horrible thing? How dare I stir up trouble and inflame feelings by repeating such a conversation?' Powell, *Birmingham Speech* in: Smithies and Fiddick (1969, p.36).

³⁰ Seymour-Ure refers to a Gallop Poll survey conducted a few days after the speech, 'In answer to the question: 'Have you heard or read about Mr. Enoch Powell's speech on coloured immigration?' 96 per cent of the sample replied Yes and 4 per cent No.' (1974, p.105). In addition Powell received 110,000 letters on the subject of the speech, of which about 2,000 were disapproving. Given that many of the letters had more than one signature, the likely figure of correspondence was 180,000.

³¹ As Seymour-Ure observes, 'The speech, delivered on a Saturday, received saturation coverage in the Sunday press [...] three papers published virtually the full handout - a rare event for the weekend speech of a Prime Minister or Opposition leader, let alone a middle ranking politician like Mr. Powell. Other papers gave it exceptionally full treatment according to their resources.' (p.105). Some indication of this is given in Seymour-Ure's data (1974, pp.106-7). Of the seven papers surveyed all gave the story 1st or 2nd story status. Of particular significance is the ratio of 'Total words in Report' as compared to 'Total Words in direct or indirect quotation': *News of the World* 1,320: 1,150 (87%); *The People* 540: 400 (74%); *Sunday Mirror* 800: 440 (55%); *Sunday Express* 1,080: 1,080 (100%); *Sunday Times* 1,840: 1,737 (94%); *Observer* 1,950: 1,865 (96%); *Sunday Telegraph* 1,840: 1,816 (99%).

³² Table to be placed here.

³³ Post-war British racism is consistent in developing as a narrative of the social which has its particular purchase within the discourse of the local. It is a discourse of social inequality through which the metaphors and signifieds of 'race' are articulated. In one important sense this discourse is part of an 'English Ideology' by which a class discourse of moral authoritarianism is secured, cf. Hall et al (1978, pp.150-60). But this also points to the provenance of 'race' ideologies to the internal discourses of 19th century British society, in particular those of thrift, merit, hierarchy and social Darwinism, that underpin social and political ideologies, such as aspects of Fabianism. Such ideologies can be located at the contradictory centre of social interventionists projects, such as universal Secondary Education. For a reading of the history of racist ideology as a discourse of social-biology, see Chase, A. (1977).

³⁴ Eugenicist discourse can be found in prior parliamentary debates, such as the 1958 Immigration Policy Debate and the 1961a Immigration Debate (see References); eugenicism is a prominent theme of the neglected 1905 Aliens Restriction Bill, cf. Gainer, (1972). For a discussion of the significance of the Eugenicist Society project in Britain, see the excellent, Mazumdar (1992), esp. Intro. & Ch.1.