The British Journal of Criminology, 2025, **XX**, 1–19
https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azaf023
Original Manuscript

OXFORD

Racial Profiling, Anti-Black Racism, Black Resistance and the Policing of Young Londoners

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In this article, drawing on findings from an ethnographic study (2018–21) and a Participatory Action Research project in a London Borough, we explore the nature, impact, and forms of resistance to, police racial profiling. Centring accounts of 'policed' Black young Londoners we develop a reconceptualization of racial profiling in sociological terms as a dynamic process, understood as both didactic *and* dialogic*; 'didactic' given the ways that policed individuals are compelled, uncomfortably, to 'learn' about their place in the social formation through profiling interactions; and 'dialogic' given the way that profiling instigates a series of claims and counterclaims whereby racist tropes and categorizations can be consolidated, contested and/or resisted as part of an ongoing process of cultural production.*

KEY WORDS: racial profiling, anti-Black racism, racialization, Metropolitan Police Service

> Race in Britain is beaten into formation between police batons and policed borders
> (Shafi and Nagdee 2022: 15)

> But we about to flip the script
> Coz pain changed us
> Built us into leaders not bullies
> Built on love not policies
> Our morals are different,
> It's time to protect our community
> (Extract from untitled poem by 'Daniela', co-researcher at the *YouthVox* project)

INTRODUCTION

Across the multitude of scandals that have rocked London's Metropolitan Police Service in recent years, few themes have recurred as frequently as the so-called 'racial profiling' of Black Londoners (Ashby 2020; Grierson 2020). Throughout a series of well-publicized incidents, campaigners, politicians and media commentators have all at one point accused police officers of singling out Black people in London for arbitrary, unjustified, forceful and/or excessive treatment (Dodd 2020b; Observer editorial 2020; Taylor 2021). Drawing an explicit connection between 'Black' racialized identities and police actions, these critics have often sought to frame these incidents as forms of 'racial profiling', that is, as the targeting of specific racialized groups by law enforcement; both at the individual and corporate level (Fagan 2002; Delsol 2015). High-profile incidents drawing the most media attention in London include the vehicle stop of Black Member of Parliament for Brent Central, Dawn Butler (BBC News 2020), and the police stop of two Black Olympic athletes, Bianca Williams and Ricardo Dos Santos (BBC Sport 2020). Whilst these cases drew unusually high levels of public attention, these incidents ought not to be understood as exceptional. In fact, when observing wider statistics regarding the policing of Londoners, it can be noted that Black people are consistently met with higher levels of policing interventions when compared to their white counterparts; with Black people usually found to be between three and four times more likely to be searched by the Metropolitan police in London (BBC News 2022). When adjusted to measure *young* Black *men*, a group even more overrepresented in policing interventions, the numbers become especially striking. During the 2020 lockdown for example across just three months, the Metropolitan police carried out over 20,000 searches of Black young men (aged 15–24), the equivalent of over 25 per cent of the entire young Black male population of London at the time (Grierson 2020).

Despite the huge overrepresentation of Black young people in these forms of police interventions, there remains a relative dearth of qualitative data, especially within empirical academic research, that centres the accounts, worldviews and experiences of the policed Black Londoners who experience these encounters (with a few notable exceptions, see e.g. Williams 2018).

Our research attempts to plug this gap in the literature by drawing on findings from a three-year (2018–21) ethnographic study and a two-year (2019–20) Participatory Action Research (PAR) project to explore the nature, impact and consequences of racial profiling, focusing primarily on the ways it is understood, made sense of, and resisted by a cross-section of young policed Londoners (aged 18–29) living in 'Aldergrove', a large inner-city London Borough.[1] In addition to this research with policed individuals, we also carried out a small amount of observational fieldwork relating to local police officers during the same period, focusing in particular on the ways officers responded to, and made sense of, accusations of anti-Black racism.

Focusing on first-hand accounts of police encounters we argue for the reframing of racial profiling in sociological and historically specific terms as a *dynamic social process*, where, through 'talk and action' (Loader 2023: 314), the meaning of 'Blackness' and Black resistance is constructed, rationalized, contested and struggled over.

Two specific theoretical claims are articulated within this framework.

Firstly, drawing on theorists of racialization and policing (Fassin 2013; Lerman and Weaver 2014; Fanon 2021), we argue that racial profiling can be understood as following a distinctly *didactic* logic, with policed individuals being 'taught' through these encounters, often uncomfortably and painfully, about the meanings of Blackness through the eyes or 'gaze' of what Omi and Winant term the 'racial state' (Omi and Winant 2014: 138; see also Fanon 2021: Chapter 5). Drawing on anti-colonial philosopher Frantz Fanon, we emphasise the ways in which these

1 All names, place names and identifying features have been anonymized.

didactic processes play out not solely at the level of 'ideas', but also as embodied affects of restriction and containment, relating to both the body and the body in space (Fanon 2021).

Secondly, drawing on cultural studies scholars of racialization (Hall *et al.* 1978; Gilroy 1987; Keith 1993) and theorists of policing encounters (Bottoms and Tankebe 2012), we argue that racial profiling exists as more than a unilateral fixing of meaning but rather speaks to an ongoing open *dialogic* process where policed, police and other actors external to these encounters struggle over the meaning of racialized categories; a process defined not just by actors and institutions with greater symbolic power but also by those attempting to challenge, resist and defy racist categorization through a variety of strategic and creative cultural practices.

The remainder of the article will be structured into three parts. Firstly, we aim to explore academic literature that has sought to investigate and conceptualize the phenomena of racial profiling in the Anglo-American context. Looking beyond *psychological, cultural and statistical* frameworks for understanding racial profiling, we outline the need for research that theorizes historically specific 'racisms' as part of one or more dynamic social processes that create and consolidate divisions and hierarchies within a given social formation.

Secondly, we outline in more detail the empirical part of our study; offering reflections on the nature, methodology, and limitations of our project.

Lastly, we will outline our findings, exploring the ways in which accounts of young, policed people have led us to our new conceptual framework, with racial profiling understood as a *didactic* and *dialogic* social process.

Researching racial profiling

Ever since the term entered common usage in the 1990s (Fagan 2002: 105), the issue of 'racial profiling' in policing has inspired a wealth of empirical research (see e.g. Russell 2001; Rose 2002; Reitzel and Piquero 2006; Glover 2009). A great deal of this research, drawing on experimental psychology, proposes that racial profiling can be understood, first and foremost, by exploring the range of cognitive processes that take place within the mind of a given police officer during encounters with the public. These studies explore the way in which certain unconscious mental shortcuts, or 'heuristics'—most prominently *stereotypes about racialized groups*—colour and shape the forms of recognition, interaction and 'normal' cognitive processing that take place during police encounters (Glaser 2015: 67; Lee *et al.* 2007).[2]

A second approach to understanding racial profiling of note here, perhaps most associated with the work of Janet Chan, relates to the study of police *culture* and 'cultural knowledges' (Chan 1996; see also Loftus 2010). Moving the focal point away from a given individual officer, this approach seeks to understand the distribution of policing power with regards to forms of 'cultural knowledge' that act as 'ready-made schemas and scripts … assist[ing] individual officers' to orient their actions through forms of 'sensibility' and furthermore to 'organize information in terms of established categories', including, for example, racialized categories (Chan 1997: 114; see also Shearing and Ericson 1991). These shared forms of knowledge about how police work ought to be done—for advocates of the 'cultural' framework—are powerful in practice, often 'trumping' obligations to follow legal codes, such as the right to due process, and other forms of formal bureaucratic imperatives (Chan 1997: Chapters 2 and 3; Reiner 1992: 232). So-called 'deviant' police practices such as the targeting, harassment or abuse of racialized people are here seen to flow from ready-made informal 'working rules' (in contrast to formal legal rules) that speak to the inherent utility of engaging groups and 'problem' populations deemed as especially

2 This framework, perhaps more so than any other, has had a significant impact on police reform, with an explosion of 'unconscious' or 'implicit bias' trainings rolled out across police forces in the United Kingdom and the United States from the early 2000s (see e.g. Worden *et al.* 2020).

'suspicious', including groups who are often economically and socially marginalized and/or racialized (see e.g. Choongh 1998; McAra and McVie 2005).

Further research seeks to understand racial profiling and police racism through competing analyses of the *statistical distribution* of police power across different racialized groups and areas. This research has become increasingly possible as governments, local authorities and police forces across the United Kingdom and the United States have moved to publish more data on the reported demographic backgrounds of the members of the public police interact with. Under these police-produced statistics Black people in England and Wales are generally found to be between five and nine times more likely to be searched than their white counterparts, relative to population (Dodd 2017; 2020a).

Whilst many scholars and campaigners have pointed to this statistical evidence about 'disproportionate' rates (relative to population) of Stop and Search as clear evidence of racial profiling (Bowling and Phillips 2007; Phillips 2011; Parmar 2013), a small number of studies, claim, conversely that police searches are generally 'in proportion' with what they term 'available populations', i.e. street-dwelling populations whom police are able, in practice, to intervene with (Miller *et al.* 2000; Waddington *et al.* 2004; Quinton 2016: 60).

Whilst this research challenges simple readings of 'disproportionality' statistics, several scholars have argued that the findings of the 'available population' literature do not disprove or contradict the notion that racial profiling might be taking place within policing operations. Firstly, scholars point to the fact that 'available population' studies do not use 'neutral' population samples but refer to the places where police powers are already 'most extensively used' (Bowling and Phillips 2007: 947). Bowling and Phillips argue that this selection bias makes available population studies 'self-referential and self-reinforcing', given that available populations are likely to (at least partially) *reflect* police decisions about which populations to interact with in the first instance (Bowling and Phillips 2007: 947). This lack of neutrality becomes especially relevant given the extensive literature arguing that police often deem certain racialized areas of inner cities as symbolically dangerous, or 'troublesome' (often inaccurately, see Ratcliffe and McCullagh 2001), an observation that suggests racial profiling might be understood as occurring at the neighbourhood as well as the individual level (Keith *et al.* 1991; Quinton 2016: 62).

Racialization, the state and the policing of the inner city

Other scholars have explored the intersection of race and policing in more socio-historical terms. These scholars, rejecting an analysis of police racism as a psychological, cultural, or statistical aberration, focus instead on the ways in which the policing of Black communities in Britain, in particular, relates to the 'normal' functioning of the imperial and post-imperial British state in the context of late capitalism, neoliberalism and successive moves towards the politics of 'Law and Order' (see e.g. Hall *et al.* 1978; Gilroy 1982; Bhattacharyya *et al.* 2021; Elliott-Cooper 2023). These frameworks differ from psychological, cultural and statistical/distributional models outlined above by framing both race and racism not as fixed essential or exceptional categories to which policing may or may not respond, but rather as historically specific, relational and dynamic social processes that are constituted in different ways across different social formations (Gilroy 1987; Keith 1993). Influential works by Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Michael Keith and others, for example, explored the ways in which Black young people in Britian's inner-city 'domestic colonies' (Howe 2020) were often subject to higher levels of policing not merely following individual attitudes of the police, but following the attempts of the state more broadly to resolve various social and economic crises and challenges to its authority in the 1970s and 1980s (Hall *et al.* 1978; Gilroy 1982; 1987; 2008; Keith *et al.* 1991; Keith 1993). Hall and others tracked the ways in which the state (including the judiciary, police leaders, politicians) in response to these crises played its part in generating 'moral panics' relating to specific forms of crime, in particular

to incidents of street robbery or 'mugging'; a crime construed as having a stable relationship to 'Blackness', and to young male working-class 'Blackness' in particular (Hall *et al.* 1978: Chapter 3). This rearticulation of the meaning of race in this context, Hall and others argue, played an ideological function, obscuring a general economic and political crisis of the capitalist state, and condensing a multitude of public anxieties onto a new racialized 'enemy within'; a 'criminal folk-devil' against which a new popular and political 'bloc' could be mobilized and consolidated (1978: 305).

In recent years scholars such as Patrick Williams, Becky Clarke, Lambros Fatsis and Anthony Gunter have returned to some of these works by Hall and others to understand the ways in which the activities and rhetoric of the police and the state continue to shape how race is articulated, drawing connections between racialized policing practices and the functioning of the state and the capitalist economy more broadly (Williams 2015; Gunter 2017; Williams and Clarke 2018; Fatsis 2019; 2021). Drawing on a similar theoretical framework, these scholars suggest that policing in England and Wales in the 21st century is increasingly mobilized around new Black criminal 'folk devils', with the trope of the 'mugger' now superseded by images of a young, Black street-gang member (Fatsis 2019; 2021; Gunter 2017: 118). This 'folk devil', scholars argue, much like racialized images of the 'mugger' in the 1970s and 1980s, plays a *political* function, with the image of racialized gangs utilized by 'vote-seeking politicians' to 'legitimise the expanding penal control apparatus' (Williams and Clarke 2018: 1).

These studies that draw on historically specific racialization frameworks have been followed by a multitude of theoretical and historical works that explore the role of policing in consolidating racialized hierarchies in capitalist economies (Bhattacharyya *et al.* 2021; Elliott-Cooper 2021, 2023; Shafi and Nagdee 2022). Within this literature however, there is still a relative dearth of studies that explore these processes of racialization from the direct perspectives of those most impacted by these encounters, with most studies (for justifiable reasons) drawing on data from the interplay of public and political rhetoric at the 'meso' or interorganizational level of interaction (with some exceptions, e.g. Gunter 2017; Williams 2018; Elliott-Cooper 2021).

Background and methodology

In this paper, we aim to address this gap within the literature by following a largely *ethnographic* approach to studying racialization as a fluid, open process, observed from the 'bottom-up' in contexts of policing encounters, primarily at the micro-sociological level of interaction. Following in the tradition of Hall, Gilroy and other scholars of racialization, we are not seeking to locate the presence of racism in the pathological views of either individual officers or the police 'cultures' they sit within, nor are we seeking to isolate proof of police racism in the quantitative measure of 'disproportionality'. Rather we explore the ways in which policing, race and current forms of anti-Black racism(s) can be understood and made sense of in relation to the making and remaking of forms of belonging, identity and shared experiences at this particular historical conjuncture in inner-city London.

The ethnographic research presented in this paper draws on qualitative data collected between 2018 and 2021 as part of the first author's PhD and as part of a PAR project carried out by all authors in 'Aldergrove', a large inner-city London Borough. This PAR project, in short, involved training a group of young adults impacted by policing to conduct their own original research into policing within Aldergrove. Both the participatory research project and the PhD research involved working collaboratively with a large cohort of young people and young adults aged between 18 and 29 on the project 'YouthVox', a project aimed at scrutinizing and challenging police injustice in the local area. Working as part of this project, we carried out extended interviews and extensive participant observation, with subsequent fieldnotes and transcript data making up the majority of the data source for this article.

During the three years we spent working and researching with YouthVox we worked with 28 young people and young adults, 10 of whom the first author worked with continuously throughout the full three years. Of the 28 young people, 19 identified as male, eight as female and one as non-binary, with all aged between 18 and 29 during the three years we spent working on the project.[3] With the exception of two young people all young people we worked with (and all young people quoted in this article) spoke about being racialized as either Black or Black and mixed race, with young people in the group predominantly identifying with African (including Congolese, Ghanian and Nigerian), African-Caribbean and Caribbean (Jamaican and St Lucian) heritages.[4]

Of the 28 young people we worked with 21 had direct first-hand experiences with police officers in the Borough at some point in their lives, ranging from Stop and Searches, to house raids, to time in police custody.

Collectively, we spent over 500 hours with young people from this group during our time at YouthVox. As well as these more informal interactions, we would also spend over 150 hours with young people in meetings and training sessions, and over 100 hours in external meetings and events with the local council, the local Police Basic Command Unit (BCU) and the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC).

In addition to these public-facing meetings we also attended roughly 50 hours of closed meetings with local police officers. This would include regular meetings with roughly 30 different police officers, ranging in rank from Police Constable, to Sergeant, Inspector, Chief Inspector, Superintendent, and BCU Commander. It is worth noting that most officers we interacted with were from white backgrounds, reflecting broader trends across the BCU with 86 per cent of serving officers recorded as white (taken as an average between 2011 and 2017). This high proportion of white officers becomes especially relevant when noting the fact that only 52 per cent of the Borough's residents were recorded as white (according to the 2011 census).

Within the context of this paper all names and directly identifying features, such as street names, estates or neighbourhoods in Aldergrove, relating to young people, police officers, youth workers, council officers, community representatives and the YouthVox project itself have been anonymized.

Limitations

The study, based as it is on a localized ethnographic work with a small purposive 'convenience sample' of young people, is of course subject to many significant limitations (Etikan *et al.* 2016). It is first worth noting that our research participants were purposively recruited from a pool of young adults living in the Borough with at least some experience of being policed, with most joining after feeling motivated to create some form of change in the local area. Once recruited onto the project, participants were not dispassionately 'observed' in untarnished neutral settings but rather encouraged to learn about and become actively engaged with relevant issues in social movements related to police injustice.

The boundaries between 'activist', 'researcher', and 'research participant' during this process of shared learning were often deliberately loose, with, for example, all participants trained in

3 It is worth noting that all but *one* of the experiences we recall in this article relate to young *men*. The lack of alternatively gendered forms of experience within our research amounts to a significant limit that future scholarship may be able to address.

4 It is also worth noting that, during our time spent working and researching in Aldergrove (2018–22) police 'on-the-ground' operations increased substantially, including a significant increase in Stop and Search; that is, the power police use to detain and search individuals to 'allay or confirm suspicions' about members of the public possessing stolen, dangerous or prohibited items, without 'exercising their power of arrest' (Bowling and Phillips 2002: 937). Whilst Stop and Search rates, along with national trends, had been falling in the Borough since 2011, this trend reversed from 2018. Where Stop and Search in the Borough totalled at 4,499 searches in 2017 (a number typical for the previous four years), this total increased year on year, doubling by 2020 to 10,497 searches.

some level of research methodology. This stemmed from a conscious decision on our part to develop our research in line with forms of participatory ethics (Freire 1970; Cahill *et al.* 2007; Torre *et al.* 2012). This felt especially appropriate given that the majority of the research team had themselves gone through direct experiences of police injustice; personal experiences that were often drawn on when gathering data including during interviews. It would thus be fair to say, following in the tradition of critical-participatory work, that our research, whilst striving towards objectivity, was at the same time not committed to 'neutrality' or 'impartiality' with the accounts of policed young people we worked with deliberately amplified and centred (see Martín-Baró 1996: 48; Torre *et al.* 2012).

For this reason it is worth emphasizing that the findings we present here, as with most qualitative research, cannot be taken as generalizable, nor can they be presented to evaluate any testable social scientific hypotheses about the racialization process or the nature of policing encounters for any aggregated population (such as 'Black young people living in London'). The analysis and case studies in this paper should instead be taken as an 'exploratory' examples (see e.g. Clayman and Skinns 2012) with the goal of developing conceptual tools, and exploring data 'generalisable to theoretical propositions' as opposed to data generalizable to entire 'populations or universes' (Yin 1989; cited in Easton 2010: 126).

Racial profiling in Aldergrove—becoming a target

Fieldnote by First Author 13th Feb 2020 – Ripple Street, Aldergrove

After walking for another minute, Niles and I [First Author] turn back as another police car drives into view. This time the police car is a response unit (known as an Incident Response Vehicle [IRV]). The car slows slightly as it drives past us in the opposite direction, on the side of the road closest to us, at a medium pace… As the car comes closer to us it slows down more. Looking inside I see three officers in body armour vests, two male, one female, all white, and looking in their late 20s and 30s. The male officer in the driving seat and the male officer in the back glance over to Niles, with the male officer in the back turning his head, to look at Niles with a focused, yet serious look… Niles looks back at the car, although from where I stand (to the right of Niles, furthest from the road) I can't see with what expression Niles looks back. Whilst the male officer in the front of the car briefly looks at me, I am struck by how much more attention is paid to Niles.

As we continue down the road Niles shakes his head before continuing in silence.

'Did you see how they looked at us?' I ask.

'Yeah man' Niles responds. 'These jakes [police] man… ridiculous'.

'They [police] looked at you a lot more than they looked at me' I note.

'Boy…' Niles replies then laughs, responding with a phrase often used in sessions; 'we're a target in this world…'

Niles interpretation of the events depicted in the fieldnote above represents a typical way in which interactions with police were made sense of by young people we worked with throughout three years of fieldwork. Many young people on the YouthVox programme reported similar sets of experiences regarding being 'targeted' by police surveillance. Passing police cars, vans and the sound of sirens and the watchful eyes of (predominantly) white officers were often described as an intrinsic part of everyday life in Aldergrove. For one young woman we worked with, Daniela, the sound of police sirens circling around her estate, she would always joke, acted as her 'alarm clock'. From spending countless hours on the phone with Daniela (especially during the COVID-19 lockdown), we would become accustomed to a routine where we would have

to pause for the sound of sirens to pass before we could start speaking again. This background of police presence was also accompanied by more invasive interactions, especially for younger members (18–21) of the group. On many evenings throughout our time on the YouthVox project we would pick up our phones to see footage and voice notes, or to receive calls directly from young people to notify us that they had been 'stopped again'.

In most cases, young people would relate these interactions to their racialized identities with race acting as, to stretch Stuart Hall's phrase, a 'modality' by which police oppression as a form of 'structured subordination' was 'lived' (Hall *et al.* 1978: 340). Iosef, for example, would express to us his belief that his 'Blackness' could explain why police officers had chosen to search him and furthermore to use handcuffs during a Stop and Search.

> **Iosef:** When he [the police officer] got the handcuffs, he said the other police officers name, 'handcuff him'. Then I'm just thinking, what am I getting handcuffed for? … It was kind of degrading … everyone's got biases, and police officers biases are majority of the time it's going to be a Black issue, like, you get what I mean, they're gonna have a bias towards Black people.

The majority of the encounters recorded over three years of fieldwork, as with Iosef above, were framed as being driven by police officer motivations to 'target' young Black individuals. Whilst the qualities deemed to make one a police 'target' related to 'Black' skin colours and hairstyles, it was also perceived to relate to 'street' designer branded clothing (such as Nike and Adidas), mannerisms and even walking styles assumed to be 'racially symbolic' (Joseph-Salisbury 2018: 180 ebook edition) of Black and working-class youth.

In general, whilst our data sample was smaller in this area, we found that the accounts of police officers we spoke to resonated with these reports of young people, with most officers also believing that local policing was applied in a way that impacted Black or so-called 'African-Caribbean' young men (the term often used by officers) much more than other groups. Most senior officers were aware of local disproportionality statistics in Aldergrove that tended to show Black people as between three and five times more likely to be Stopped and Searched than their white counterparts in the Borough, relative to the resident population (see e.g. Figure 1). Faced with the controversy that this uneven application of police power generated, police officers would rarely attempt to deny that Black young people were policed more frequently than other demographic groups. Rather, attempts were made to justify and legitimize the high levels of searches and interactions young Black men were subject to.

Most frequently these claims drew on erroneous claims that crimes and criminal victimization in the local area, in particular violent crimes, had a stable, reliable relation to the 'young, Black' 'profile'. The following interaction between Jacob, a young Black man we worked with on our project and two white officers from the Territorial Support Group (Metropolitan Police 2019) during a police stop (May 2021) exemplifies one of these justifications:

> **Police Officer:** There's a lot of problems on this canal with robberies, and knife related crime, people carrying weapons on them and robbing them, so that's why we're here doing a little operation in plain clothes…
> **Jacob:** I'm a youth worker.
> **Police Officer:** Well, that's good, we're sort of doing the same job aren't we, tryna stop the stabbings, tryna stop young Black people dying? … you do seem quite resistant, if you're a youth worker, shouldn't we be on the same sort of page, working together?
> **Jacob:** Not necessarily, I'm a bit against people stopping people out of their everyday.
> **Police Officer:** So how are we gunna reduce young Black kids from dying then, mate?

Racial profiling as didactic

Racial profiling, understood at face value here, from the perspective of both police and policed, implies that a series of visual racialized markers, and 'street cultural tropes' (see Ilan 2012; 2020) related to dress style, demeanour and physical appearance are used as part of a broader criminal 'profile' relating to Black criminality and/or criminal victimization that police officers use to justify interventions.

The nature of, and motivations behind, these forms of police officer action are sociologically relevant in and of themselves, especially given debates regarding the role of 'police culture' in shaping discriminatory actions against certain 'suspect communities' or 'problem' populations (Chan 1997).

At the micro-sociological level however, where interactions can shape and re-shape an individual's sense of self, belonging and identity (Bradford *et al.* 2014; Bradford 2016), we can also observe interactional processes of meaning-making that exist *between* police and policed. Observations regarding these processes move the focus away from what any given police officer's 'true' motivations are and towards the ways in which these interactions, in and of themselves, are experienced, felt and made sense of. With 'targeting' reported by both police and the policed (albeit explained in different terms) what might the impact of these practices be on subjectivity, at the micro-sociological level of interaction?

Most strikingly perhaps, when exploring the impact of targeting was the *constitutive* function that the practice seemed to have for some young people we worked with; playing a role in what scholars term the 'racialization' process, that is, the process whereby racial categories are themselves made and remade. More specifically, policing interactions involving racial profiling seemed to make up a fundamental part of how 'Black' identities were understood, with a moment that an officer notices, observes, profiles and approaches, amounting to a defining experience when attempting to describe the meaning of 'Blackness' in everyday experience. Kwame, for example, a young adult we worked with would describe how he made sense of his

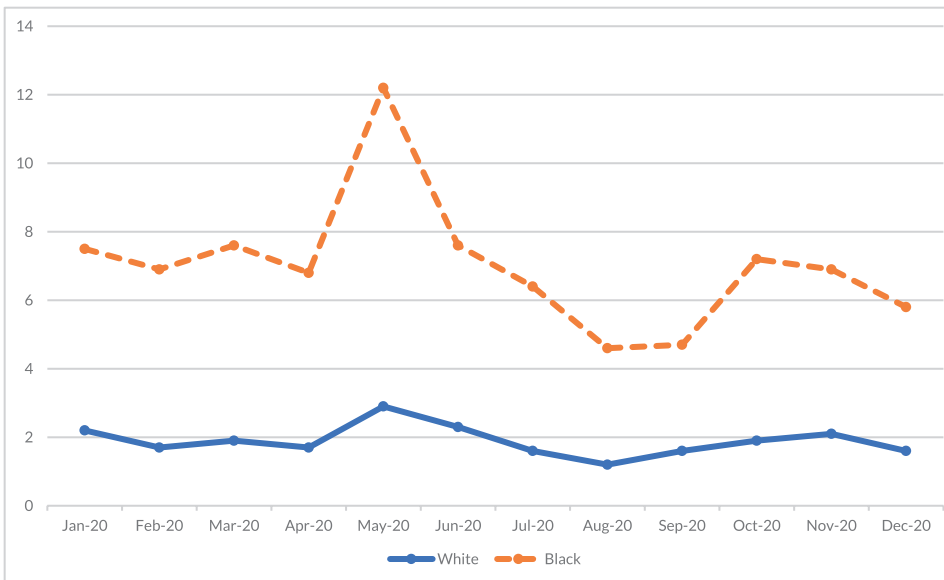

Fig. 1 Police stop proportionality by ethnic background in Aldergrove (per '000 population) in 2020.

'Black British' identity in relation to the ways in which police would approach, 'see' him and 'target' him, based on the clothes and Black 'styles' he chose to wear.

> **Kwame:** My identity has evolved. Even before joining [*YouthVox]* like this. There's four parts actually,… the first part is obviously… is the British Black identity… [being] Black British… the relationship with the police, is if they approach us, they will, because we have a certain look, you know, like, like if you if you go on the street, like we have the gear, we have the puffer jackets and the trousers and, you know… Yeah, we've talked about this in our sessions. Like, that's, that's exactly the profile that police will see us as, and then they'll see, 'oh that's a Black British man', you know, and then that will give them the confidence to approach us and ask us all these questions… so with that that's how, that's how we are a target for them.

This relationship between policing and identity formation, as described by Kwame above, arguably speaks to what Lerman and Weaver have referred to as the 'hidden curriculum' of policing, whereby law enforcement 'beyond merely reflecting social understandings, actively cultivate and structure racial membership, identity, and perceptions' (2014: 16) with individuals in this case 'learning' about what it means to be Black in relation to society, in part through the eyes or 'gaze' of an authority figure (Fassin 2013: 8, see also Fanon 2021: 89). The fact that Kwame's *first* response when discussing his identity was to refer to the ways in which he is seen by police officers was particularly noteworthy. Such a reaction resonates with the famous description of racialisation articulated by anti-colonial philosopher Frantz Fanon, and his claim that individuals racialized as Black must not only be Black, 'but be black in relation to the white man' (Fanon 2021: 90), existing in a state of what Black Sociologist W. E. Dubois would term 'double consciousness', that is, the 'sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others' (Du Bois 2007: 8). For Fanon, this moment of 'interpolation', where an individual is 'hailed' into a world of racialized meanings, was famously described after a white child on a train, seeing Fanon, expressed 'look a negro!'(Fanon 2021: 89; Omi and Winant 2014: 137). In Kwame's case, this moment of interpolation follows on from the police assertion that 'oh, that's a Black British man' (see also Omi and Winant 2014: 137).

Given the apparent significance of these formative interactions we would join other scholars in terming practices of racial profiling as *didactic*, moments of 'physical education' as policing scholar Didier Fassin has argued, that 'teach' subjects about the meanings of race through these encounters (Fassin 2013: 92; as cited in Schclarek Mulinari and Keskinen 2022: 384).

As noted above, these didactic moments would often involve hypothetical or literal interactions with officers. It is worth mentioning however that these lessons would also be passed around following vicarious experiences and even from the advice and lessons of peers and family members in anticipation of one of these moments taking place (see also Lingras 2021). As Amare recalled to us in an interview, early experiences of family members warning about police targeting of 'Black' streetwear played a formative role in coming to know the meaning of 'Blackness' within the urban environment:

> **Amare:** We talk about ourselves amongst ourselves [as young Black people], since a young age,… all my sisters tell me, I can't dress a certain way… if I dress a certain way the police will stop me… And then in that state, it happens to everybody that's majority Black…
> **First Author:** So, what sort of age were you when your sisters are having that conversation with you?
> **Amare:** I was like 13… So, I was in like Adidas, so all the normal tracksuits… predominantly black, because I loved black when I was younger. So, I liked wearing black tracksuits… police, they see that as a target. If you're amongst a certain crowd, or you're wearing a certain dress code, a dress sense, you get stopped straightaway.

With these accounts of Niles, Kwame and Amare, as many scholars of policing have long argued, racial categories can here be understood as not just *cause* but also one of the *consequences of* policing interactions, with this dynamic of police gaze and self-realization amounting to one of the productive socialization processes whereby the boundaries and meanings of racial categories are mediated, made and remade (see e.g. Fassin 2013; Schclarek Mulinari and Keskinen 2022; Plümecke *et al.* 2023).

Racial profiling as didactic: restrictions on self and movement

For many young people we worked with, it is worth noting that these didactic moments of race-making were experienced not just in the mind but also within the *body*, with lessons about one's identity experienced alongside embodied affects of restriction and containment, both in one's sense of self *and* in terms of the body in physical space. Again reflecting the work of Fanon, our observations here took note of the ways in which being constituted as a racialized object by the police, in a moment of 'suffocating reification'(Fanon 2021: 89), involved both spatial and affective dimensions, with an injury suffered not solely at the level of an imagined identity but also across the body and the sense of the body in space (Fanon 2021: 89). Reflecting on his experiences of racialized targeting, Carnell, for example, would draw on the metaphor of a police 'hard stop'; the controversial trapping and ambushing tactic used by police to forcibly 'stun' suspects into compliance (see Dutta 2014). Referencing this tactic, Carnell would suggest that the police's repeated decisions to racially profile him amounted to an unwanted imposition of policing power that would generate real restrictions on his sense of self *and* on his freedom to move in space; a form of containment that would precipitate many forms of psychological and physiological distress:

> **Carnell:** I'm telling you it [being constantly racially profiled] it's like a *hard stop*. [Carnell slices his left hand down on to his right palm]. It made, it put me in a hard stop to say, rah, am I allowed to go out anymore? Am I allowed to do certain things anymore without being stopped and searched or without being segregated by police or things like that, or singled out? … Those situations [with police] really broke and tore me inside. It made me think like, how am I supposed to conduct myself in life without being profiled by these fucking people? … It can lead to committing suicide. It can result you into ultimate depression, it can result you into having breakdowns.

Niles, drawing on a similar affective and emotionally laden spatial metaphor regarding the body, would describe how racialized targeting would leave him feeling that there was 'no way out'. More specifically, Niles here described the felt sense that following repeated interactions he was unable to get out of a 'box', unable to escape the categorizations police impose on young Black men, and unable to escape the impact these categorizations have on an individual's ability to move around the urban environment.

> **Niles:** [Police] targeting certain people cos of the way they look and whatever, it's getting more disgusting nowadays, like I know it's always been a thing but now, oh Gad, it's so ridiculous man … Like, its defo something to do with your appearance, and skin colour or appearance and skin colour… I wouldn't say like your *trapped* but, but like, the way they [police] make man feel, it's like there's no way *out*. Like even if you've never done nothing, there's still *no way out,* you know what I'm saying? … like I can't get out of this box cos I'm seeing police or I'm feeling a certain way.

For both Carnell and Niles here, repeated racialized targeting by police officers left them feeling restricted and contained, both in terms of the boundaries of who they could 'be', and also in

terms of their ability to exist and navigate within their immediate environment. Such descriptions, it is worth noting, speak to what Tolia-Kelly and Crang have called the 'profoundly emotive register' that 'racial categorisation is felt and enacted through' (2010: 2309), with these didactic processes experienced not merely as a transfer of knowledge but as an interpersonal affective process taking place at what sociologist of emotions Jack Katz has termed as the 'hidden, sensual and aesthetic foundations of the self' (1999).

Racial profiling as dialogic

In addition to these observations about the *didactic* nature of racial profiling, we also noted the ways in which these articulations of the meaning of 'Blackness' were not fixed irrevocably, but rather were contested; challenged, resisted, reformulated and re-justified, as part of an ongoing process of cultural production involving a whole series of actors with different relationships to the original interactions. It is on this basis that we would argue that racial profiling, when conceptualized as a social process, as well as being understood as didactic must also be understood as *dialogic,* that is, as a series of claims and counterclaims contesting the meanings of 'race' (in this case 'Blackness') and the right and proper place of racialized subjects within a given social formation.

At times, forms of contestation from policed young people to these didactic moments were ambivalent and/or cynical, taking the form of 'begrudging acceptance', often termed in the criminological literature as 'dull compulsion' (Bottoms and Tankebe 2012: 149; Carrabine 2005). In these scenarios, young people might accept the inevitability of the police's exertions of power, and powers of definition, whilst simultaneously resisting and disrupting the police's activity in small yet significant ways, for example, by refusing to cooperate, by 'dragging heels', or by laughing at or mocking officers even whilst ultimately complying during interactions.

For others, notably *after* the experience of profiling encounters with officers had taken place, a set of responses from policed young people involved actively engaging in discursive acts that 'flipped the narrative', building up alternative positive evocations and celebrations of Black and working-class identities in relation to fashion, art, music, food and/or beauty. Two young adults we worked with, Daniela and Carnell, for example, would directly reference and *contest* the police category 'IC3', used to identify and codify criminalized suspects who are racialized by police (or public) as 'Black' (Metropolitan Police 2021). Using song lyrics and poetry produced as part of their work with YouthVox, Carnell and Daniela would both reframe the meaning of Black people as IC3 suspects and 'gang members' instead using the term to articulate a celebration of Black style and wealth ('I be an ICY G') and educational excellence ('black brudda, talented, straight As, Academic G').

Carnell:
Positivity, Run thru Me,
Why am I labelled as an IC3,
Maybe because I be an ICY G,
[Carnell] Garn Unite Communities!
Daniela (written from the perspective of a younger man):
Ahh here we go again,
this is my 3rd stop and search this week
I've been stopped so much
It's like a monthly routine
They claim that they see me
but do they really see me
To them I'm just a black brudda

Negro
an ic3
Troublemaker
Gangbanger
Problem teen
But if they really saw me,
They would see a black brudda
Talented, straight As
Academic G

These creative and productive responses to racial profiling, challenging the way that police 'see' Black people highlights the ways in which race here is operating, as Paul Gilroy has put it, as an 'open political category' (1987: 36); with these creative articulations challenging and disrupting the fixity of earlier articulations of Blackness (Gilroy 1987: Chapter 5).

Backlash counterclaims and Black resistance

As with similar dialogic processes observed during police encounters (see e.g. Bottoms and Tankebe 2012 in the case of police legitimacy) these forms of counterclaim were often met with further counterclaims, sometimes in direct conversation, other times made more diffusely across a range of different social settings. At many points when interacting with local officers (of ranks from Constable to Commander) young people would raise the issue of racial profiling, often discussing incidents involving friends, family and members of the group. In one meeting a local sergeant attempted to contest a young person's analysis of a particular incident as 'racial profiling' with what scholars would call a 'colour-blind' framework (Hughes *et al.* 2016): 'you call it racial profiling, I would say we call it suspect profiling'. The sergeants claim here specifically was that the deliberate targeting of young Black men could be justified following an assertion that this 'profile' was more likely to be involved in violent crime in the Borough.

Whilst these counterclaims were often articulated by officers in the ranks, in our experience these counterclaims were also endorsed and echoed among many in senior leadership, albeit couched in the pseudo-scientific language of official police 'statistics'. This set of justifications was perhaps the most common response given by senior police officers in the Borough when attempting to contest claims about the true meaning of 'Blackness' and its essential and/or stable relationship to deviance and criminality in the local area. Note, for example, the BCU Commander's claims made at a meeting with the local council in June 2020 that

> **Aldergrove BCU Commander:** When we talk about violence and when we talk about drugs in [Aldergrove] there are a large number of African-Caribbean young men between the ages of 15 and 24 that are predominantly and tragically involved in violent crimes like robberies and involved in gangs…
> There is no getting away from the fact that a significant proportion of the people that we are working with and to reduce certain elements of criminality in [Aldergrove] is African-Caribbean men involved in violence and gangs. Part of that *profile* is involved in drug trafficking, using drugs, and county lines. (emphasis added)

As many scholars have noted before, these legally dubious and generalizing claims about Black criminal 'profiles' by officers, made at both street and corporate level, can be seen as playing an active role in this ongoing dialogue to contest, justify and/or reaffirm the *meaning* of 'Blackness' as it relates to the policing of the inner city (Gilroy and Simm 1985; Keith 1993; Gilroy 2008; Williams and Clarke 2018). These articulations, or attempts to re-fix the meaning of Blackness,

also of course, have significant material impact for the distribution of police power and (as reflected in the previous section) young Black individuals' ability to move across the urban environment.

Much like similar dialogic processes theorized in the context of policing, we can see here how, whilst practices of profiling take place as part of an 'ongoing conversation', it is nevertheless not an 'equal' conversation (as put by Harkin in the context of police legitimacy 2015: 599). Those 'speaking' on one side of the dialogue—the police—are armed with huge amounts of symbolic and institutional power, not least relating to superior financial resources, legal tools, state-sanctioned weapons (and other uses and threats of force) along with access to media and public institutions that so often grant police tacit power of definition (see e.g. Erfani-Ghettani 2018).

Despite this imbalance, in our experience, counterclaims and contestations regarding the meaning of Blackness would nevertheless continue from the 'policed' in a seemingly unstoppable cycle of response and resistance. Most striking to note here from our observations during fieldwork was the way in which these forms of racialized categorization by police were used as the basis to build community, collective strength, power and even joy and celebration based on shared experience, shared opposition and shared projects for organizing resistance. Whilst this was most often observed in actions (e.g. during large intergenerational events, following incidents) its traces are perhaps best observed through some further poetry and lyrics produced throughout these moments of collective community organizing. Note, for example, extracts from two spoken word pieces created by Daniela, following community initiatives to unite following the profiling and violent search of a young Black girl in Aldergrove in 2020; a series of articulations that connect Daniela and others to a long history of Black defiance and resistance in the face of anti-Black violence and racism in Britain (see e.g. Sivanandan 1982; Elliott-Cooper 2021):

Daniela:
And history shows that a lot of our pain in the past
Is caused by those who claim to bleed blue,
They have constantly left my people with a broken heart
Year after year, time after time
This physiological warfare, got us living in bondage
With no shackles or chains
Were still feeling like we trapped
They say dreams don't live in the hood
Only pain does
But we about to flip the script
Coz pain changed us
Built us into leaders not bullies
Built on love not policies
Our morals are different,
It's time to protect our community…
They know the rage is due,
That's why they over-police our ends now,
But we can't give them what they expect
We got to come different with our next steps
Intergenerational, community flex
And like I said loves got to be at the core of it
Not for money, or fame, trends or gains

Coz this our children, our elders, our people
It's about time that they see that are all equal
One voice when we stand up, we are the people

CONCLUSION

In this article, we have attempted to contribute to the growing literature theorizing policing, anti-Black racism and Black resistance in Britain, by offering an analysis of the ways that racial categorization is constructed, contested, legitimized, enforced and resisted within and following practices often termed as police 'racial profiling'.

Moving away from frameworks that try to empirically verify the existence of racial profiling through measurements of officer motivation or statistical distributions of police power, we have centred the experiences and recollections of policed individuals to explore some of the complex, embodied, affective and at times unstable ways that police racial profiling impacts and (re) produces 'race' and anti-Black racism(s) at the current historical conjuncture.

Our first contribution here, drawing on scholars of race and policing is to emphasize what we have termed the *didactic* nature of these interactions, with policed subjects being 'taught', often painfully and uncomfortably, about the meanings of Blackness and the restrictions placed on Black racialized subjects and bodies, *through* the talk, action and anticipated actions of these encounters (Fassin 2013; Lerman and Weaver 2014; Fanon 2021).

Our second contribution, drawing on theorists of racialization (Gilroy 1987) and police interactions (Bottoms and Tankebe 2012) is to highlight the *dialogic* ways in which the racialized policing of Black youth plays out, with a whole series of actors playing a role in contesting and struggling over the meaning of both Blackness and Black resistance during and following these encounters.

We have highlighted both the didactic and dialogic nature of these processes not because we believe such an account describes the ultimate, fundamental or universal nature of 'race' or 'racism' as it relates to policing. This is because, following Hall and others, we do not see either race or racism as reducible to an eternal ideal form, but rather see these phenomena as processes that emerge differently within different historical contexts, playing novel functional roles in each setting (Hall 2018: Chapter 6). How are we to define the historical contexts at which the forms of anti-Black racism(s) described in this article emerge? An adequate answer to such a question has been beyond the grasp of our intervention here, yet it is worth noting in concluding, that in our context, researching and working with young people living at the sharp end of what scholars term 'racial capitalism' (Robinson 2000; Bhattacharyya 2018), these histories relate to the dispossession, exploitation and displacement of those people racialized as Black, who live across territories defined by both the flow of global capital and the British state's imperial and post-imperial conquests (Bhattacharyya 2018; Howe 2020; Elliott-Cooper 2021).

With these historical contexts in mind, we would therefore caution against future academic work that treats the racialized policing of Black young people in Britain as a mere recent novel phenomenon, aberrational or antithetical to other forms of British policing. This is because, rather, we see these forms of policing as following on logically and normally from the fundamental role police have played in this particular historical context, across the British empire, at 'home' and 'abroad', in classifying, sorting, and confining people racialized as Black through practices of what policing scholar Ben Bradford has called 'classificatory action' (Bradford 2017: Chapter 8; see also Anderson and Killingray 1991; Elliott-Cooper 2021).

Given how deeply these practices continue to shape and define policing, we would also argue that, when attempting to remedy some of these maladies in practice, and strengthen forms of

liberatory Black resistance, what is at stake here is not the 'stamping out' of a few pathological officers or deviant practices but, rather, the dismantling of the entire modern system of order maintenance we term 'policing' as such, and the dismantling of the current racialized mode of economic production that many have argued makes such a system inevitable (Seigel 2017; Elliott-Cooper 2021; Sarah Day and McBean 2022). Growing calls in movement spaces for anti-capitalist, anti-racist police abolition and the radical reimagination and reproduction of safety, we believe, reflect a growing wisdom that anti-Black racism in Britain is not something epiphenomenal that could ever be 'reformed' or 'trained out' of police departments. Many organizers operating within these movement spaces draw on this wisdom to demand, rather, the radical overhaul of a social and economic system that sustains itself on the back of what abolitionist scholar-activist Ruth Wilson-Gilmore has called 'the state- sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group- differentiated vulnerability to premature death' (Gilmore 2007: 28; see also Sarah Day and McBean 2022).

Further work, much more than we have managed here, will hopefully rise to meet the challenge of these radical demands; turning not just to questions of theory and empirical analysis, but, also, to questions of praxis, tactics and strategies for resistance and liberation.

FUNDING

This work was supported by a grant from the Economic and Social Science Research Council (award reference 1808961).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank Patrick Williams, Remi Joseph-Salisbury, Alexandra Cox, Ben Bradford, Jackie Head and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on drafts of this paper. The authors would also like to thank Yolanda Lear for her support during the later stages of the research project.

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