

## Extended View: Issues of Class, Ethnicity and Migration in a London Borough

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**Focus on:** *The New East End: Kinship, Race and Conflict*, Geoff Dench, Kate Gavron and Michael Young, Profile Books, 2006

### A Question of Class?

“However often today’s literary scholars repeat the mantra of race class and gender, they clearly have a problem with class”. This was the view of Jonathon Rose, writing in his text on *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*. In developing this view he pointed to:

A search by subject through the on line *MLA International Bibliography* for 1991 to 2000 (which) produces 13,820 hits for “women”, 4,539 for “gender”, 1,862 for “race”, 710 for “post-colonial” and only 136 for “working class”. (Rose 2000: 464)

In Rose’s view this uncoupling of the working class from issues of gender, ethnicity and global political change is severely damaging and is related to processes on new class formation within the professional and middle classes. His ire is directed at the “affluent and ambitious, profit motivated and style conscious” cultural professions who in:

The boutique economy that have constructed . . . (use) the accoutrements of the avant-garde . . . to distance and distinguish cultural workers from more traditional manual workers.

More recently this theme has been developed in other directions. Ferdinand Mount in *Mind the Gap: the New Class Divide in Britain* writes of the persistent cruelty with which the rich have treated the poor in Britain

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and its excesses in recent times. Drawing on an alternative left tradition (of G.D.H. Cole and George Orwell) he laments the soulless processes of slum clearance, the bleak utilitarian estates that have been created at the edge of our great conurbations and the bureaucratic powers of the housing officers that accompanied them. The implications of some of these developments were examined by Orwell prize winner Michael Collins (2006) in his quasi-family history *The Likes of Us: A Biography of the White Working Class*. Based on the London borough of Southwark he traces generations of costermongers (street traders) back into the 19th century and the writings of Dickens. It emphasizes the veracity and independence of a unique urban culture based on a deep attachment to a neighbourhood that stood in stark relief to the riches north of the river. In considering contemporary developments Collins had written earlier of the growing willingness of these working-class people to vote for the British National Party (BNP) seeing it as not necessarily because of an endemic opposition to multiculturalism:

but more an objection to the debate around it. It is a discussion that fails to consult them; it's a discussion in which they are daily cast in a dual role: as a dying breed and as a racist blot on the landscape preventing multiculturalism reaching its true Nivarna. (Collins, 2004)

The history of the Labour Party is a clear part of this story and the issues have accelerated in importance during the years of Blair's administrations. They are central to the recent study of *The New East End* which argues that: "Class is reasserting itself as the key to British society, albeit in a novel way (*TNEE*: 219). It's account however is rather different from Collins'. In its view the problem lies with the welfare state and the generosity it has directed toward incoming migrants:

The evolution of the welfare state has turned it from a mutual aid society writ large, as it seemed at first, into a complex, centralised and bureaucratic system run by middle class do gooders who gave generously to those who put nothing into the pot while making ordinary working people who *did* contribute feel like recipients of charity when drawing their own entitlements.

This book has been widely reviewed and cited and (given its pedigree) is likely to have an impact on future policy. It is a book which, in the view of Madeleine Bunting in the *Guardian*, "will infuriate and bewilder the progressive left". It obviously bears close examination.

## **The Book and the Method**

The story of *The New East End* began in 1992 when the authors at the Institute of Community Studies decided to replicate the classic sociological study conducted in Bethnal Green by Wilmott and Young in the 1950s.

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*Family and Kinship in East London* is the backdrop for the current text defined as “a fairly general study of how life has changed over the last half century in London’s East End” (p. ix). The research itself was supported by the Commission for Racial Equality which funded the employment of “two Bangladeshi researchers who did a lot of interviewing in English and Bengali” (p. x). Trevor Philips the Chair of the CRE is one of several notables who endorse the cover of the book:

In a debate too often loud with the clash of uninformed opinion and smug self-righteousness, *The New East End* offers a rather old fashioned contribution: evidence. The authors report what is actually happening in a community, both based on what people say and on hard measures

The authors themselves are more circumspect pointing out that it is neither an academic text or a government report, but written with the aim to be true to “the accessibility of the earlier Institute of Community Studies books” and to the work of Michael Young.

The Institute of Community Studies is based in Victoria Park Square in Bethnal Green. Since the death of Michael Young (Peter Willmott also died in the last few years) it has been renamed the Young Foundation and has at its head Geoff Mulgan who founded and ran the think tank DEMOS before he joined Blair’s advisory team at No. 10. Dench is professor of sociology at Middlesex University and Gavron vice chair of the Runnymede Trust. Both have strong expertise in issues relating to migration, Gavron’s PhD at the London School of Economics was based on a study of the British Bangladeshi community in Tower Hamlets and the book draws heavily upon her expertise. They are both fellows of the ICS.

The method of the Young Foundation is stated as involving the collation of a number of approaches, fuelled by the belief that “most people understand their own lives better than any expert can”. In this case it involved a survey based on a random sample of 799 adults (of which 171 were Bangladeshi) living in wards that corresponded to the old Bethnal Green. The interviews collected details of all household members providing data on 2565 individuals. Further details were collected of “a number of categories of relatives” living away from the household. In all, survey data was collected on “8,000 people”. However the data for these larger numbers is never formally analysed. One table is based on 2265 informants (p. 237) and although we have data on 171 Bangladeshis, complete data existed for only 530 of the 628 respondents in the white sample.

The survey was conducted in 1992 and replicated the 1953 survey with questions on family and neighbourhood. However “a few open questions were added regarding perceived change in the locality” (p. 2). It seems that the responses to these open ended questions alerted the team to the “importance of community relations” in a way that convinced them that

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“the problem of ethnic conflict could not be avoided” (p. 2) From this they concluded that the scope of the study needed to be broadened to include the whole of Tower Hamlets.

A smaller sub-sample of 51 informants with children (33 white and 18 Bangladeshi) were interviewed in more detail “to flesh out the survey findings and make better sense of them” (p. 236) This followed the pattern of the parents’ survey conducted in the earlier study. However this study obtained additional information from local teachers, youth workers, council officials and long-standing residents. The decision to extend the study beyond Bethnal Green led to additional interviews with an unspecified number of Bangladeshis “most of whom were young women” (p. 236) Most of the primary data presented in the text draws upon this set of interview data.

The team also made great use of newspapers: “as they are one of the main sources of information for our own interviewees and must be influential in forming—and reflecting—changing attitudes” (p. ix). The dilemma here and the issue it raises about the formation of attitudes and the mode of their expression is not considered further. This is important given that *The New East End* focuses upon the ways in which the two contemporary communities have come into conflict. They relate this to the ways in which state benefits, particularly housing are distributed.

Generally the account is even handed. The authors are quick to challenge viewpoints that are unreal or unsubstantiated—correcting the more exaggerated and negative account of the welfare benefits received by Bangladeshis. However there are lapses; sometimes in the language. Margaret Thatcher will be remembered for her use of the metaphor of the “flood”. These authors are much more guarded but in their account of the “flow” and the “spread” of Bengali settlement they seem to take on the world view of some of their white respondents (“a Mosque in Bethnal Green!”). There are also moments when their commitment to the viewpoint of local people is stretched. As in this account of the old Muslim men written in the field notes of one of the Bengali researchers:

There they go wearing the distinctive skull caps and with grey beards. Chewing *paan* and holding cigarettes in their hands they drag their bodies, weakened by decades of hard work, toward the mosque. One, ten, hundreds of them. After all, Allah is the creator. Allah is kind. May Allah ensure them a good life in Heaven. (p. 101)

What is most dramatic is the confidence with which the authors generalise from the detail of this case study which they clearly feel to be sufficiently robust to underpin proposals for major changes in the operation of the benefit system and the whole welfare state. The fact that these policy changes sit well with an agenda being developed by the Young Foundation also raises some concerns.

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## The Place

Tower Hamlets is one of the poorest places in Britain. The extent of its poverty is excruciating and too little of it is made in *The New East End*. Measures produced through the index of multiple deprivation (which income, employment, health and disability, education and training, housing and services, the living environment, and crime) make the borough the second most deprived local authority in England. Most significantly, high proportions of its population are concentrated in the most deprived wards. Not everyone is poor in Tower Hamlets, but most people are: 50 per cent of primary school and nearly 60 per cent of secondary school children qualifying for free school meals, compared to national averages of 16 and 14 per cent, respectively

The borough stretches from Bethnal Green and the Tower of London in the East through to the Blackwall Tunnel Northern approach road and the decay of the Lea Valley—now site of the hoopla associated with the Olympic Games. As part of the field work, the *TNEE* team visited the Teviot Estate in East Poplar. Located on these Eastern outskirts it is one of the most deprived parts of the borough and eight Bengali families were relocated there in 1984. Here in an estate of tower blocks corralled by railway lines, canals and motorways:

800 of the 1041 homes were council owned.

The flats facing the canal get the full force of the north wind and this resulted in a great deal of condensation on the inside walls; they are wet though for most of every winter. The estate at night has the air of a deserted town gradually falling down, which it was. Few people ventured out after dark. Most of the flats were built badly in the 1950s. One of the worst was Hillary House, opened by the conqueror of Everest and named after him . . . what a tribute! (NEE: 63)

In the ironic view of one of the long established white residents: "It's OK for Bengalis in a place like this, because the flats are so wretched we can all live together in our own wretchedness". Here in a place where nobody wants to live, people survive.

This account can be read alongside the findings of research funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF, 2005). Examining the achievement of British welfare the researchers found it "acutely disappointing to discover that so many opportunities and resources depend upon where people live" and point to the operation of an inverse care law: the greater the need the fewer the resources. As such, and at the beginning of the twentieth century, poor people in Britain continue to live in poor places and continue to have restricted access to the best of everything important: health care, housing, education, employment, transport. In Tower Hamlets it seems that this was the source of conflict. Poor housing stock in short supply clearly creates

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distress as do poor schools with academic achievements of all groups below the national average. However the authors of *TNEE* downplay the importance of scarcity, poverty and economic change. For them, issues of politics and “moral economy” supersede matters of personal circumstance.

### **Two Communities**

It is clear that *TNEE* is far more extensive in its reach than *Family and Kinship* while sharing many of its preoccupations. The approach developed in the 1950s was characterized by a model of society ordered though a relationship between “community” and “state”. It was written in defence of community and the approach was facilitated by a particular form of economy in which established industries (like coal, steel, textiles, and dock transportation) drew upon a labour force of families that lived locally. In these industries fathers, uncles and sons often worked together and recruitment was predominantly through kinship. To an important extent they were single class communities. While this can be exaggerated, places like the East End of London were *working class places* and understood as such. Here workers lived together to the exclusion of the boss and upper classes and could be studied through their family and kinship patterns which were tightly networked and spatially specific.

This was the model that worked with some effect in the earlier study by Willmott and Young. In *Family and Kinship in East London* women (mums and nans) were at the very heart of the kinship networks and (through the operation of the extended family) were seen to regulate community life. In that study “the economy” was a taken for granted part of the world of the East End: stabilized through nationalisation, US borrowing and the post-war reconstruction boom. These years (following depression and war) were remarkable for their stability and comparative affluence. Writing at that time, Edward Shils and Michael Young had commented that: “the central fact is that Britain comes into the Coronation period with a degree of moral consensus such as few societies have ever manifest”. They are remembered in *TNEE* as “the Golden Years” and similar accounts have been produced of other working class areas and mining communities.

However the stability and the moral consensus (such as it was) did not last. The forty years that separate the two studies were characterised by enormous changes. The expansion of car production in Dagenham combined with state driven policies of house building and slum clearance saw many moving out to Essex setting a trend that was to continue north and south of the river. Now, of course, the Dagenham plant has closed and London has been transformed into a world centre of global finance with its pinnacle located in Canary Wharf. All contemporary photographs of the

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East End (and the cover of this book is no exception) depict streets and houses overlooked by the glass towers of this new source of power. People commute to these new towers; some of them have bought houses in Tower Hamlets.

However, this is not the central theme of *TNEE* where discussion of work and economy is the weakest of the empirical sections. Consequently the middle class newcomers (although strongly represented in the survey) are largely disregarded, the main attention being saved for the Bangladeshi migrants whose numbers increased in the 1970s. Their presence forms the central motif of *TNEE* and support the idea of two communities rather than one. In an interview Kate Gavron put it like this:

I think there is a sense of community, or communities. I would say there is definitely a sense of community among the white working class families still living in Tower Hamlets, and a very strong sense of community among the Bangladeshis

Michael Young had been struck by the similarities between the family and kinship systems operating in Bangladeshi neighbourhoods and those of the old Bethnal Green of the fifties, and the similarities are striking. Some of the best pages in the book relate to the pattern of migration (beginning with the seafaring *lascars*) and the patterns of family life and belief amongst these new Londoners. This could have been amplified and developed.

The 1992 survey data is used to reveal significant but not unexpectedly different demographic patterns between the two groups. In common with all early migrant communities the Bangladeshi group is younger, the men arrived first and were followed by family members a decade or so later. They have larger families and household units often include extended family members. The family connectedness of this community was emphasised by the fact that only four of the 170 single individual households identified in the sample, were Bangladeshi.

The demography of the White sample is more complex. The team organize the data around “family life stages” to establish that:

Among parents and elders more than half of the respondents were born locally, and more than four out of five in London. Of the white elders, 41 per cent were born in Bethnal Green itself, which is approaching the level found in *Family and Kinship*. However, amongst the childless adults not living with parents, the majority are newcomers to the area. Barely a quarter come from Tower Hamlets, and less from Bethnal green, and more than half come from outside London. (p. 238)

These and other data from the survey confirm the exodus of relatively large numbers of younger people born in the area and the arrival of young newcomers. These data aren’t linked to occupation but the assumption is that the newcomers relate to the other new east End of Canary Wharf. One of the consequences is that the “white sector of the population is least

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engaged in family lifestyles” (p. 239) The contrasting images of family based cohesion and social disintegration critically underpin the structure of the book—the current circumstances of the White population being seen as the future for the Bangladeshi. Here the reflections upon *Family and Kinship* are the most poignant with the important centrality of mothers within the extended family system, and the centrality of the family to the community and the ordering of social life.

The authors of *TNEE* relate this change to the rise of individualism. However:

When the negative side of individualism is considered now it is conventionally seen as a product of the Thatcher years. But much is traceable further back . . . For what enabled individualistic behaviour and attitudes is the individualisation of citizenship and social support systems which started after the war. (p. 106)

In this context while the rise of the welfare state was welcomed it refashioned the relationship between the state and the citizen. Here, the authors resurrect the debate between Ruth Glass and Michael Young on the balance between the state and family and return to the discussion of the 1945 *Family Allowance Bill* endorsing Lady Apsley’s view of the “Greek concept of the father as head of the household” (p. 110). They argue that: “It is hard to say now that the lives of women as mothers have been greatly improved by the changes that have occurred” (p. 108).

However there is little evidence (certainly none presented in this text) to suggest that contemporary women would welcome a return to the Greek arrangements. However it seems that this is what is being suggested. The strong view expressed in *TNEE* is that the welfare state and its reshaping of individual as opposed to communal rights had the unintended consequence of weakening men’s commitment to marriage.

An implication of giving women fuller direct access to citizenship, not mediated by relationships with men, is that men may lose their positions as representatives of the family interests in the public realm (p. 110)

From here we see the collapse of family life and the increasing penetration of the state and state officials into the home:

Mum has lost ground steadily and comprehensively. An army of social workers now organises her children’s and grandchildren’s lives often around moral principles and child-rearing practices with which she disagrees. (p. 118)

This chapter on “The New Individualism” makes clear the conservative communitarian viewpoint that gives shape to *TNEE*. It is clear that many women would disagree with the account and certainly have mixed feelings about returning to the home and being “mum”. This consideration becomes acute when we consider how the model is applied to inter-community



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relations. In this view middle-class liberals have continued where Eleanor Rathborn left off. They have:

Promoted a swathe of political measures and institutions which consolidate the rights of minorities while multiplying the sanctions against indigenous whites who object to this. (p. 6)

They accept that: "this analysis would no doubt be disputed by black and Asian groups who see little evidence (of this) in their daily lives" but add euphemistically that "this only underlines the complexity of the situation".

It also reveals a problem with the ICS method: for in the realm of policy it seems that the experts do know best.

### The Issue of Racism

A central theme of the book, the one picked up by most reviewers and of most interest to readers of *SAGE Race Relations Abstracts*, relates to *racism*. In this they seek to take issue with something, which they describe as the "orthodox view in academic circles". This view is defined as seeing: "The expression of racial hostility is misguided and reveals personal inadequacy" (p. 183).

They refer to the work of Danny Burns and his colleagues as an example of this approach. In contrast they consider the question of stereotypes and refer to Jews, Maltese and Irish in this regard. They then summarise their data in this way: "The stereotype of the Bangladeshi migrant which emerges in our data is of someone with a large family out to plunder the welfare system" (p. 182).

They proceed to analyse the data in relation to the hostility felt by whites toward the Bangladeshi community and establish that:

- 41 per cent had hostile opinions;
- 18 per cent had a mixed response registering resentment but no blame;
- 11 per cent had positive opinions; and
- 30 per cent indifferent.

The newly arrived middle class were seen to be most likely to have positive opinions of the area as multi-cultural. These new owner occupiers have no memories or commitment to the "old" East End and are attracted to the "exotic atmosphere". In the words one of hospital doctor:

I felt I wanted a complete change of environment after Cambridge . . . The type of population here offered some very interesting medicine, with the ethnic mix offering me a very interesting lifestyle too. (p. 184)

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The most hostile responses came from older people, born and brought up in the area with a deep attachment to the neighbourhood. Those with their children and family still living locally were particularly hostile. Unlike the doctor they were caught up in a day to day conflict over public resources:

... older people are more likely to display racist attitudes. This comes out strongly in our own findings ... The expression of hostility to Bangladeshis is consistently associated with age ... But this does not require psychological interpretation. It makes adequate sense (and is rational) when linked not only to such respondents' own personal decline but also to changes that this generation has experienced. (p. 183)

We can see here an explanation of the hostility as a *rational* response to the struggle for resources, coupled with some deep unhappiness over the way the world has changed. Such hostilities have existed within working classes (for example between skilled and unskilled; between different localities, etc.) for centuries. In this situation, amongst the poorest of the poor in Britain there is also a strong sense that the problem lies not with individuals but with "the system". and with people who "live in big houses"; sentiments which could be interpreted in terms of class and of a class based understanding of how the world works. The rational development of these ideas might lead to class based organization and a struggle for more resources. That it does not, and why these hostilities have been termed "racist" by *TNEE* team, lie at the heart of the problem and indicates that rationality is embedded in other sets of understandings that extend beyond the particular issue. These can be seen to involve matters of culture, history and politics.

Racism, of course, is a particular kind of hostility linked in to clear and negative beliefs about the characteristics of the other "race". In *TNEE* these negative feelings are expressed by white people most commonly in relation to dirt, food and language. The Bagladeshi people are referred to in quotation as having unhygienic habits, eating strong smelling curries and speaking a language other than English. Issues of dress and religion might also be involved but these are not highlighted in the account. These, it seems, are regularly combined in ways that establish them as "the other". Nowhere are sentiments expressed that define the newcomers through the lexicon of biological racism with notions of genetic inferiority and sub-humanness. It is *cultural* racism that is at work here with its own underpinnings of moral worth. In itself it is not an insuperable barrier to class based understandings and actions. In fact the *TNEE* team document how some of "the most explicitly hostile to Bangladeshis admit that while they resented the immigrants and what they felt their presence was doing to the area, they somehow managed to get on with them or even to like them" (p. 172).

For the old White families who have remained in Bethnal Green there is a deep nostalgia for The Golden Years, of the time when neighbourhood

means friends and family and employment was on the river. This operates as a powerful and energising myth, reinforced by memories and stories of the Blitz. In those years the East End and East Enders seemed to be at the centre of British working class politics. George Lansbury was followed as leader of the Labour Party by Clement Atlee then Mayor of Stepney. During the War, Atlee, as Deputy Prime Minister, would return home on the bus (Howell, 2006). In 1945 with a massive majority he was Prime Minister and the Labour Party settled into its first period of real power with the East End apparently holding the reins (p. 197).

The loss of power, of control, of any feeling of the working class having any centrality in the life of the country is the story of the last forty years. It is reflected on by Father Reilly, one of the informants of the *TNEE* team. He talks of a situation where:

people from another part of the world are dumped on you, there isn't enough housing to go around. Local people get called racist because of the lack of housing. We are the backyard of the richest city in Britain. But we haven't the resources here. (p. 216)

This problem of resources was at the heart of political struggles in Tower Hamlets in the 1970s and 1980s. These struggles began with squatting and the involvement of members of *Race Today* in the struggle over housing allocation and the position of homeless Bengali men. They developed as a consequence of changes in legislation (most significantly the Homeless Persons Act 1977) and changes in the political control of the local council. It seems clear that these struggles changed that nature of the Bengali community, and that *violence* and the threat of violence was a powerful part of this dynamic. One of the teams close informants explains:

I am not one to condone violence. But eye for an eye did really calm things. When we were attacked we used to retreat back home. That time is over. In more recent years when a Bengali is stabbed a white boy would be attacked in retaliation. Defending yourself did work in a curious way. Bengali boys had been those who were picked on. The whites had been physically stronger, but that changed. Bengali boys realised that Bengalis would be picked on unless they stood up for themselves. "we give as good as we get" became the attitude. It did bring violence to an end. This applied to Bethnal Green Road and Roman Road as well as Brick Lane. (p. 69)

This behaviour is not addressed through the rational schema offered by *TNEE* team, and it would seem that violence and the associated patterns of hatred go beyond simple stereotyping. They relate to a process whereby ethnicity became politicised in Tower Hamlets by parties and groupings from the Left, though to the Far Right and the BNP. It is clear that none of these (not even Respect with its class rhetoric) seriously attempted to develop an integrated politics based on the needs of the local working class as a whole (see Glyn, 2006). The texture of this political history and its

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impact upon local perceptions and understandings is not developed in *TNEE*.

### The Welfare State

The authors of *TNEE* see the development of the welfare state, in its quest for universal rules, to have been too bureaucratic and too successful in assisting new migrants. This assistance is seen to be at the expense of resident working-class people. While there is occasional recognition of scarce resources, this is never seen as a central issue, which seems remarkable in the context of Tower Hamlets.

In developing their argument they echo Johnathon Rose's critique of the cultural establishment and extend it to an number of groups variously identified as the "liberal middle classes", an "emerging intellectual and political elite", the "ruling class" and "social workers". This view of political change is stated most clearly in the assertion that the contemporary class structure of Britain is:

Now dominated by a *political class*, drawing power from the operation of state services and mobilised around the ideology of cultural tolerance and social and economic inclusiveness and with a mission to integrate subordinate culturally specific communities. (pp. 6–7)

The timing of this development and the ways this political class relates to other economic classes is not made clear, and this is a fundamental weakness in the approach adopted in *TNEE*. Under the Thatcher government the nature of the welfare state became reconstructed and this process was extended by New Labour in the belief that "globalisation" represented an unstoppable economic process that required states to adapt to the new needs of capital and of markets. This has been associated with the collapse of any of the sustained critique of market driven inequalities that was the life blood of social democratic thought. The East End of London is a dramatic demonstration of this process. Finance capital in ascendance, new housing markets opening up old working class areas to an ascendant middle class. Changes such as these have been reflected in a political science literature that talks of the "hollowing out" of the welfare state and the shift over to "workfare" as Keynes is replaced by Schumpeter. As part of this council housing has become increasingly seen as a deviant form of accommodation in a property orientated society. Under this government, no council houses have been built for the past three years and less have been built in the last decade than any since the war. Some of the consequences of this were worked out on the streets of Tower Hamlets.

Without challenging these ideas it seems unlikely that any thoughts the authors have of on "Reclaiming Social Democracy" will have little pur-

chase. Their emphasis the exclusion of the manual working class from this process and the dangers of an increasingly polarized society with all its attendant instabilities is deeply important as is their perception of an increasingly invasive state. They cite Frank Furedi's (2001) critique of New Labour in relation to the demonization of the working class people of Tower Hamlets and quote Labour establishment figures in evidence. Such comments are both lacking both in understanding and in memory of the party's history. It was after all Richard Crossman, a leading intellectual and patrician member of the Wilson cabinets who expressed the view that:

the differences which divide mankind are . . . of course matters of race and culture which are, emotionally at least, as important as economics and self-interest - probably more important. Liberal progressives and Communists share the view that there is such a thing as a universal human being who can be united by universal and rational principles, and they believe that differences of colour and culture and history are incidental and superficial compared to the unifying principles of mankind. I believe that our main effort must be to control racial and cultural passions. (Crossman, 1977: 44)

Not much multi-cultural commitment there! Perhaps therefore it is not surprising that successive governments made no attempt to involve working-class people in the kind of discussion that Michael Collins was calling for.

The other side of the story of *TNEE* however, relates to the integration of poor Bangladeshis and their generous treatment through the agencies of welfare. This is neither well made nor convincing. One of the families housed on the Teviot Estate, for example had previously been in hostel accommodation and it seems that this use of temporary accommodation by housing officers was widespread (Glynn, 2006). To claim that migrant Bengalis are not poor because they compare themselves with people living in Bangladesh may (at a stretch) have some veracity when applied to the first generation but it can hardly have any purchase upon the second. The location of this group (though the operation of housing and labour markets) as one of the most poor segments of the British population is unlikely to be changed by the inclusive policies of this new political class.

Perhaps the biggest disappointment of *TNEE* relates to the way in which two highly skilled social anthropologists chose to use the case study of Tower Hamlets to represent "UK society" and provide the basis for a political intervention into debates about the future of the welfare state. Much of the material they present offers important insight into the lifestyles and kinship patterns of both groups that could have been extended perhaps through the secondary literature and details of Northern cities. This would have placed them on firm ground and added significantly to our understanding of the dynamics of class and ethnic relations in Britain's inner cities.

In her review in *IRR News* Jenny Bourne commented that *TNEE* demon-

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strates most clearly “the facility with which academics can make answers gleaned from questionnaires and interviews mean absolutely anything, according to their intellectual preconceptions and political predispositions”. At the time I thought that this might be rather harsh. However it now seems worrying close to the mark.

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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