

'An important contribution to Black British history that brings to life the characters and communities resisting policing.'

Akala

BLACK

RESISTANCE

TO BRITISH

POLICING

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Futures of Black resistance: disruption, rebellion, abolition

Staring up, shivering on a cold, hard, blue bed, I kept reading the words glaring at me from the ceiling: 'Do you have information about a crime? If so, call Crimestoppers anonymously'. I imagined how I might feel if I had witnessed a crime, and how reading those words might affect me. The silent interrogation, positioned to catch the eye as it opens from the bed of the custody cell, implied a criminal association and a guilty secret. The message lingered: the situation you're in can be resolved only by consenting to and colluding with the power of the police – the same powers used to forcibly detain you. I was one of over a hundred people arrested and charged with offences including violent disorder at BLM direct actions that disrupted transport hubs and shopping centres across England between 2014 and 2016. Transnational connections with activists in Europe and North America were bolstered by a far-reaching social media campaign. This wave of militant protest led by young Black activists catapulted Black resistance to policing back into a national conversation that few could ignore.

Angered by the failure of the courts to acknowledge the injustice of police killings, particularly that of Mark Duggan (Chapter 3), younger activists upped the ante. Building links of solidarity with the emergent BLM movement in the US, UK-based branches of the campaign, many led by young Black feminist and Black queer activists, emerged in cities across England. Using direct action,

they protested a range of issues including the indefinite incarceration of undocumented people, deportations, deaths in police custody, racist criminalisation, deaths of migrants attempting to cross Europe's borders,¹ and the penal system more generally. These campaigns of Black solidarity attempted to make connections between police violence, border controls and other forms of state racism. Like the radical youth of previous generations, they experimented with ideas and concepts that produced new forms of resistance, unfamiliar political alliances and, for many, counter-intuitive political targets. But it is via this process of learning through practical action and prolonged, often critical, reflection that new ways of understanding state racism and organising to resist it are often forged.

As in Chapter 4, what follows focuses on Black resistance to policing in twenty-first-century Britain. Here, I want to push the boundaries of how policing can be resisted, and what demands can be made for radical change. It begins with the newer waves of protests and rebellion against police racism. Shutting down shopping centres, roads and transport hubs engenders fresh ways of thinking about protest. Shopping centres are spaces familiar to young people, and blocking roads or transport hubs forces the media and government to pay attention to protests which would otherwise be ignored. Crucially, however, these protests also disrupt critical capital flows – the profit-making of commercial spaces or the transport of goods, disrupting capitalism in ways that echo strike action. These radical forms of protest reflect radical demands made by BLM activists, who argue that the police are beyond reform.

Whereas the previous chapter outlined the recent growth of policing and prisons, this chapter details how activists are demanding the erosion of police and prison power, alongside the provision of alternative social policies and community-led solutions to reducing violence and harm. This requires a radical vision for a world in which police and prisons are abolished. This movement rejects the assumption that 'bad' people are sent to prison, but

instead illuminates the ways in which prison punishes working-class people and attempts to lock away social problems, rather than addressing them at their root.

The final section connects this emergent form of Black organising against policing to more spontaneous rebellion against police violence. Here, I argue against the distinction made between peaceful, legitimate protest and the revolts which respond to an instance of police brutality. What may appear as merely reactive is, I argue, connected to young people's knowledge and lived experience of police racism, and should not be dismissed as apolitical, illegitimate or misguided forms of Black resistance. It is through this wider understanding that we can see Black resistance to policing beyond organised campaigns and protests, and into the everyday and the spontaneous, among people who are often not identified as political or activists. Thus, while protest can arise in spaces that feel unfamiliar, political resistance also emerges from people too often dismissed as unconnected to movements for change.

The breaking down of the barriers between different forms of resistance coincides with the dismantling of the categories from which police and prisons draw their legitimacy and power: a good or bad person, peaceful or violent, innocent or guilty. Rather than seeing criminalised people as simply bad and guilty, we need a more radical vision which views them as people who are oppressed, harmed by a deeply unjust society. In fact, the prison system caters mainly to some of the most marginalised and vulnerable people in society. Rather than prisons being used to provide safety on principles of morality and justice, I argue that their primary targets are among the most oppressed and neglected people in society. It is with this in mind that we must understand the police and prison system as causing more violence to people experiencing social problems, rather than addressing the root causes – inequality, exploitation and harm. Specifically, I argue that Black resistance to British policing must not only use radical forms of resistance; it

must also provide a radical vision for a future in which police and prisons are no longer how we solve social problems.

Disrupting transport, commerce and business-as-usual: Black Lives Matter in the UK

One of the first targets in this wave of BLM solidarity action was Westfield in Shepherd's Bush (west London), the largest indoor shopping centre in London. On 10 December 2014, I was one of hundreds of protesters who gathered in and outside the enormous building, while an outsized Westfield security presence attempted to regulate the premises. It was clear that Westfield was determined to keep shops open and continue turning a profit for itself and its franchisees in the run-up to Christmas. Crucially, however, it was near-impossible to tell protesters apart from other members of the public. While some activists staged a die-in inside, covering the wide corridors with their bodies, others blocked the busy roads outside. When different parts of the protest eventually converged outside Westfield, they were addressed by Black campaigners, such as Marcia Rigg, sister of Sean Rigg, who died in 2008 (see Chapter 2). Older activists used the space to educate younger protesters about police killings in the UK, since it was police racism in the US that dominated mainstream news coverage in Britain. Eric Garner had been killed by police in New York, with footage of him being strangled by officers going viral. 'You've all heard of Eric Garner, but how many of you have heard of Joy Gardner?' one speaker asked the crowd. They went on to talk about the death of Joy following an immigration raid at her home in Haringey in 1993, and the ongoing campaign for justice led by her mother (Chapter 2).

The protest had become more than an expression of anger at police racism, or a social disruption to amplify demands for justice. The gathering was also a space of learning, in which people were able to absorb and take away testimony of struggles hitherto sidelined. This would aid young protestors better to understand

the histories of racism in Britain which often remain underreported and underappreciated. Following the speeches, protesters moved back into Westfield, past the security guards who were standing powerless in front of the main entrance, and proceeded to chant, occupy and block the spaces where people were attempting to shop. Westfield was completely shut down for the evening, losing customers, revenue and profit. Although the protest had been peaceful, many of us were eventually surrounded and kettled by police vans and officers in riot gear. After a long standoff in the freezing cold, I was among the seventy-six arrested.²

Speaking to older activists sometime later, there was confusion about why Westfield Shopping Centre was targeted as part of resistance to police violence. When they were younger, they had protested police racism and injustices outside institutions of power such as government buildings, police stations or the courts. What is the connection between a shopping centre and racist policing? Why target a commercial hub like Westfield, if you want to stop Black people dying at the hands of the state? These straightforward questions were surprisingly difficult to answer. Yet the targets appeared to make perfect sense to the hundreds of young people who attended the Westfield protest, as well as those who had attended similar actions in North America, where for instance, Macy's and other department stores were shut down by BLM protesters.

Subsequent UK BLM protests in 2016 extended to transport networks. In Nottingham (East Midlands), activists bound their arms together across a busy tramline in the city centre during rush hour. Thousands marched in Manchester, bringing the Oxford Road shopping district to a standstill. A road near Birmingham City Airport and the M4 motorway near London's Heathrow Airport were also blocked by activists, drawing attention to the detention and deportation of migrants.³ The hundreds of people who supported and participated in these coordinated actions, risking arrest in the process, will have had different understandings of

why these targets were identified. But below, I give three broad explanations for why I think shopping centres and transport hubs were the chosen targets of these direct actions.

First, over successive decades, in both Britain and the US, many public spaces have been privatised. Places where people gather, meet and trade goods were once public high streets, markets and squares, but increasingly they are private or semi-private shopping centres,⁴ and these have become the focal points of many cities. These easily identifiable yet privately owned spaces are often more familiar to young people than the government buildings traditionally targeted within earlier campaigns against police racism. Shopping malls are often the spaces where young people congregate, and although they are heavily policed and surveilled, they are generally warm, dry, large spaces in which to socialise.⁵ In short, demonstrations in shopping centres such as Westfield were popular partly owing to their familiarity and accessibility – spaces young people felt confident to navigate.

Secondly, in a society where public spaces are being decimated, and shopping and transport have become central to public life, shutting them down is likely to attract far more public and media attention than other forms of protest. Traditional demonstrations, typically outside public institutions – even, for example, Downing Street – often barely receive a mention, but novel political actions that differ from the usual A-to-B march catch the eye of the press. Furthermore, occupying the town square has a long protest tradition, and the centrality of the shopping centre in social and commercial life means that the shopping centre is a modern version of the square. While shutting down motorways near airports formed a coherent narrative about resistance to deportations, the other shutdowns also offered a fresh angle that attracted wide attention from both mainstream and social media.

The third possible explanation reads the protest as more creative and experimental. Shutting down commercial spaces and transport hubs disrupts the normal functioning of capitalism and

is, in that sense, comparable to industrial action. For previous generations of activists, the strike was one of the most effective ways to bring about political change. As widely documented elsewhere, under capitalism, big business and industry always influence political decision-making.⁶ Therefore, disrupting profit-making by halting production until management or politicians agreed to negotiate workers' demands is an important part of working-class, as well as anti-colonial and anti-racist, history.

At the start of this book, we saw examples of this in the Caribbean during the 1930s, when widespread strike action brought about massive social improvements for poor Black people across the region. Britain, of course, is no different – previous generations of activists regularly used the strike as a powerful political tool. The Grunwick photo processors' strike in Willesden, north London during the 1970s saw South Asian women battle police on the picket line to challenge racial discrimination and have their union recognised.⁷ The decision to host the Black People's Day of Action in 1981 (see Chapter 1) on a Monday forced the tens of thousands in attendance to withhold their labour or skip school. This involved a march and protest on Fleet Street, then London's newspaper quarter, to challenge the racist coverage of the New Cross Fire. It disrupted the functioning of the City of London on a busy working day.⁸

Following the defeat of the Miners' Strike in the mid-1980s, widespread reforms eroded the power of unions, reducing both their political influence and eventually their membership, thereby making strike action more difficult.⁹ Trade union membership for people aged under thirty in Britain is dramatically lower than that of their parents' generation, and it is not uncommon for younger people to have little or no understanding of the nature and purpose of trade unions. This is compounded by the disappearance of lower-wage jobs in large factories, as they are replaced with a rise in precarious jobs in the service sector such as catering or call-centres, where it is more difficult to organise workers.¹⁰

The power of ordinary people in Britain to pursue political demands through industrial action has thus been severely eroded. Of course, Black and other racialised minorities have often struggled to bring anti-racist demands to trade union actions. However, the barriers to shutting down capital flows at the point of production does not mean that they cannot be disrupted elsewhere. Indeed, some political theorists have indicated that shutting down cities can be an effective political tool, particularly following observations in the Global South.¹¹ In these actions, revenue streams are not disrupted by workers withdrawing their labour, but by activists using their bodies to occupy spaces of consumption and transit.

This new iteration of the strike does not require formalised links of solidarity between workers in different industries to fight against capital. In the instances I have cited, it mobilises Black and anti-racist solidarities in order to fight against racial violence by bringing people to one or more key commercial spaces or transit hubs. Like the anti-colonial and Black Power movement of the twentieth century, these actions treat state power and the power of capital as connected – disrupting commerce or transit is recognised to be as effective as shutting down government agencies. In other words, as one potential form of action became inaccessible, a new one emerged: the rise of consumerism made shopping centres and transport hubs symbols of power, easily identifiable and effective political targets.

Of the seventy-six people arrested at Westfield that evening in 2014, all but one of the charges of violent disorder were dropped; one teenager (a young Black man on his first protest) was found guilty of assault, and given a non-custodial sentence. Since then however, many other young anti-racist activists have faced serious charges and prolonged court battles in similar actions. The response of the state illustrates the threat that disruptions at points of consumption and transit pose to the maintenance of social order. The panicked response of the government and police to comparable disruptions to the City of London and its profitability,

such as Occupy in 2011 (occupiers were forcibly moved from the London Stock Exchange to St Paul's Cathedral) or Extinction Rebellion (XR) in 2019 (all XR protests in the City were banned by the police), demonstrates the authorities' focus on the prevention of disruption in such places.

It is noteworthy, however, that the mass arrests during Occupy and XR followed a prolonged occupation, whereas the shutting down of Westfield resulted in mass arrests within a matter of hours. While this form of collective punishment is not unprecedented, the police response to the Westfield demonstration was reflected in the policing of subsequent BLM actions. It is therefore impossible to ignore the intensity of violence that the police use when responding to Black youth in protest.¹² Using direct action to grab public attention and force those in power to listen, even if for only a short period of time, was certainly not new for the anti-racist activists in 2014. What was new were the targets they identified, and how these actions communicated a connection between different institutions of power. The radical creativity and risk taken by these young, Black, often feminist and/or queer, activists re-centred the city as not simply a space of power, work and consumption, but a site of radical resistance and protest. This wave of protest marked another important development for a generation of anti-racist activists resisting policing, as it reaffirmed the interconnections between racist police violence and the penal system more generally.

Beyond reform: against policing and prisons

In May 2020, in response to the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, some of the largest protests in US history took place. The harrowing footage of Floyd with a knee on his neck for nearly nine minutes struck a chord with activists across the globe, and demonstrations in solidarity began in the UK the following month. These would become the largest anti-racist protests in

British history, with hundreds of thousands of people taking to the streets in cities, towns and villages across the country. While many of these protests used familiar tactics of congregating in town centres and outside government buildings, their sheer scale made them impossible to ignore.

These mobilisations took place over consecutive weekends for nearly two months. The predominantly younger people who organised them protested against racism in British policing, education, healthcare and work. Boris Johnson's Conservative government paid lip service to the demonstrations, setting up a commission led by Tony Sewell, a highly divisive academic with a long history of disavowing the existence of institutional racism (Chapter 2). Sir Keir Starmer, the leader of the Labour Party, was criticised for describing BLM as a 'moment' rather than a movement, and their demands for criminal justice reform as 'nonsense'. He was forced to qualify his statements, saying that he would receive unconscious bias training, a popular but futile liberal remedy for racism.¹³

This more radical aspect of the movement criticizes, first, the abject failure of policing in improving public safety and second, the fact that prisons are filled with working-class and racialised people who have often experienced harm or violence themselves. The final critique is that prisons bring more trauma and harm to such people, exacerbating rather than ameliorating the social problems that lead to them being imprisoned in the first place. Abolitionists therefore argue for constructive alternatives to these ineffective attempts to 'police away' social problems. It is worth restating that calls for the abolition of the police and prison system do not argue that every prison should close tomorrow and every officer be sacked the day after; they argue that social problems can be resolved only through social responses.

Chapter 4 detailed how the state has continually expanded the power of the police and prison system. The creation of hundreds of criminal offences, surveillance technologies and powers such

as injunctions has inevitably led to an extraordinary expansion in the use of prisons. The assumption that prison – locking a human being in a cage for a set period of time – is the best way to solve a social problem such as drug possession, theft or violence, has become ‘common sense’. It is erroneously assumed, much as it used to be for capital punishment, that the fear of imprisonment deters people from committing crimes, and that actual imprisonment consequently deters them from reoffending. But the continual growth of prisons, with no long-term reduction in violence within low-income communities, indicates that they are by no means a deterrent. The levels of recidivism add further weight to the failures of the purported benefit of prisons.

People with a history of mental health problems, special educational needs, problematic drug use, trauma, homelessness, precarious legal status, school exclusion, child abuse and domestic violence are grossly overrepresented in prisons.¹⁴ But rather than decriminalising drugs and investing in the social and other services that could address these social problems, the police and prison system is used to problematise the people rather than the issues they face. As Angela Davis argues,

Prisons do not disappear social problems, they disappear human beings. Homelessness, unemployment, drug addiction, mental illness, and illiteracy are only a few of the problems that disappear from public view when the human beings contending with them are relegated to cages.¹⁵

Prisons also cause long-term social, emotional and physical harm to the people they incarcerate. In other words, policing and prisons are forms of state violence which add more violence to the problems they claim to solve.¹⁶ The state uses a range of tools and tropes to create divisions in society between people whom we should consider innocent or guilty, or who should be thought of as law-abiding or criminal. These dichotomies are necessary as state power is premised on the assumption that the police, courts and

prisons are fair and just, and those subjected to punishment are morally degenerate individuals who deserve or need to be locked away from the rest of society. This was clearly demonstrated during colonial policing against the Kikuyu ‘gangs’ in Kenya and the Chinese Malay ‘communist terrorist gangs’ in Malaya. It is just as clear for those identified as ‘gangsters’, ‘extremists’ or ‘foreign nationals’ today (Chapter 5).

One of the more radical demands of the BLM protests was therefore based on a vision of police and prison abolition. This is not a demand for the abolition of the penal system tomorrow, in the way that historical campaigns called for an immediate end to slavery. Police and prison abolition argues for abolitionist reforms. Such reforms would erode society’s reliance on the police and prison systems, and instead empower community-led and social solutions to the inequalities which lead to violence and harm in the first place. Abolitionist reforms are therefore part of a strategy which works towards a future without policing. Thus, while BLM protests were sparked by police brutality and racism, their critique of policing goes beyond these stark kinds of injustice.

British governance in the twenty-first century has claimed that young ‘offenders cope poorly with life because they exhibit various cognitive deficits’¹⁷ – in other words, they are unable to think in a way which is considered ‘normal’. Citing an academic study from the 1980s, the Home Office claims that offenders aged between fifteen and twenty-five lack impulse control, are poor at controlling their emotions, are poor problem solvers, exhibit rigid and inflexible thinking, do not recognise the consequences of their behaviour and cannot see another person’s perspective.¹⁸ Those of us who know young people, or remember being young ourselves, might well recognise such traits in many who are still maturing socially and emotionally. But what the government is doing here is important. They are listing the unique character faults, pitched as a static fact of their existence, in those it imprisons – distinguishing them from the rest of society and proposing ways in which they

should be moulded by the criminal justice system to normalise their personalities.

Assuming that state institutions are fair and just always renders their use of force as falling outside the parameters of immorality or criminality. While historically this has been used to justify imperial violence, in the post-colonial period we see the notion evolving. Decisions of the state: those to bomb foreign civilians,¹⁹ execute domestic civilians²⁰ or criminalise drugs used by the poor or racialised minorities,²¹ are not held to account or scrutinised by the criminal justice system as they would be had they been made by individuals. The politicians, military commanders and CEOs responsible for war, mass exploitation or the destruction of the planet, are not targets of the law. The prison system is not designed for them, rather it is designed for working-class people (disproportionately Black and racialised minorities) that make up the vast majority of the imprisoned population. Thus, the prison system not only seeks to control people considered disorderly, it also serves to afford the state a total monopoly on the legitimate use of violence. As Derecka Purnell states:

Police manage inequality by keeping the dispossessed from the owners, the Black from the white, the homeless from the housed, the beggars from the employed. Reforms make police polite managers of inequality. Abolition makes police and inequality obsolete.²²

Prison abolition, popularised by activists such as Angela Davis in the 1970s and 1980s, helped the American radical left to envision a future in which prisons are no longer needed. Premised on the simple observation that police and prisons have done little to make life safer and have little effect on reducing violence or harm, prison abolition activists demonstrate how the prison, rather than being an institution which is moral and just, serves to provide the state with a violent tool that can be used to control the masses.

The abolition of prisons has been a popular demand among radical activists for decades, especially in the US, but is becoming

increasingly influential among a new generation of anti-racists in Britain. Prison abolition is not simply about closing prisons and reducing police power; it is about reducing society's reliance on police and prisons. The movement argues that community social problems are better solved with community-led social solutions which address their root causes. For instance, provision of secure housing, free education, creating gainful employment with strong democratic trade unions to represent worker rights, are a more salutary and effective means of reducing criminal activity such as theft. Teaching young men to dismantle sexist assumptions while building restorative and transformative justice mechanisms is one of the ways we can work towards reducing gender-based violence.²³ Decriminalising drugs and providing social care and emotional support for people with addiction problems is better than locking them up for drug offences. Prison abolition involves working towards a more humane society which is less exploitative, while always envisaging an end point in which prisons are no longer how society deals with social problems.²⁴

Importantly, these abolitionist reforms should not be misinterpreted as a liberal appeal for a return to the welfare state. As Chapter 1 outlined, Britain's post-war consensus was still a place in which Black and working-class life was criminalised, with police and prisons still playing a central role in disciplining exploited workers, controlling populations and imposing violence. Rather, abolitionist reforms work towards a vision of a world which is free from capitalist exploitation, racism, patriarchy and the violent control of the state. It enables activists and communities to develop incremental changes in their own lives and their localities, as well as making demands on the government for progressive reform, while simultaneously working towards dismantling the existing institutions of power and building community-led alternatives. This resistance to policing seeks to break down the barriers between reform and revolution, by showing how reforms can bring us closer to more systemic changes, by empowering

Black resistance to British policing

communities and eroding their reliance on the police and prison system. Therefore, trade union organising, campaigns for better housing, youth work, community-led mental health provision, domestic violence services, educational initiatives and many other forms of grass-roots organising, can and should be considered part of a movement for abolition. These initiatives can all move us closer to a world in which relationships to work, power and each other are revolutionised. The politics of abolition provides a vision for Black resistance to policing in the twenty-first century which allows for a continuity with older anti-colonial and anti-capitalist struggles. Abolition provides a politics which, like the Black Power movements of the past, is grassroots-oriented and internationalist. Vitality, it offers new strategies and demands, and a vision to revolutionise social relations across the world – the job of abolitionists is to identify where the possibilities of a different world arise, and develop a collective understanding of what can bring us closer to it.

Resistance everywhere

The BLM mobilisations are just one example of how police and prisons are resisted by international networks, large organised protests and popular campaigns. But importantly, breaking down the distinction between ‘innocent’ victims of police brutality and people prosecuted for crimes can also be found among smaller campaigns and sporadic uprisings. In July 2017, Rashan Charles was killed as a police officer knelt on his back during an arrest in Hackney (east London). Protesters demonstrating in Hackney’s Kingsland High Street after Rashan’s death were met by riot police. Predictably, this led to a confrontation, as protesters from the local area resisted the riot shields and batons laying siege to a community in mourning.

While it was revealed that no illegal items were found on Rashan Charles, the police press releases had already been reproduced

Futures of Black resistance

across the media: images of a young Black man in a baseball cap, smoking, accompanied headlines that claimed Rashan boasted on social media of ‘drug dealing’ and that he was ‘hard to kill’.²⁵ The criminalisation of Rashan Charles demonstrates the limitations of ‘innocence’ as an argument against policing and prisons. Would the actions of the officers who were present at his death be more legitimate if drugs or weapons had been found on Rashan’s body? Are people who are found in possession of prohibited items less worthy of civil liberties, humanity, forgiveness or life? The press and police fabricated a narrative around Rashan Charles that portrayed him as a violent drug dealer (much like Mark Duggan in Chapter 4). But it is not enough simply to prove that these accusations were false – what abolitionists call the ‘problem of innocence’²⁶ requires us to dismantle the divisions between ‘guilty’ and ‘innocent’ people.

No doubt there is violence which precedes the criminalisation of certain drugs. There are economic environments which lead to people selling criminalised drugs. There are psychosocial conditions which lead people into taking such drugs problematically. But these cannot be solved by policing. Instead, policing exacerbates risk and harm by bringing more violence and harassment through searches, raids, imprisonment and, in the case of Rashan Charles, death. The social problems which lead people to break laws or harm others cannot be addressed by police and prisons. If Rashan Charles, or anyone else, is suspected of breaking the law or causing harm, it is vital that solutions minimising our reliance on the police and prison system are prioritised, with criminal justice always the last resort. This is not simply due to its ineffectiveness in reducing harm and improving safety long-term, but also because these institutions compound and increase violence and harm. Resistance to policing and the ‘problem of innocence’ can also be seen in spontaneous responses to policing, as in the case that follows.

In August 2018, police followed a young Black man into a McDonalds restaurant in Kingsland Road, Hackney, a stone’s

throw from where Rashan Charles was killed the previous year. Officers wrestled him to the ground, restraining him and striking him. But unlike the newsagents where Rashan was killed, this McDonalds was full of young, predominantly Black, people. While some of the young people recorded the incident on their mobile phones, others intervened physically, attempting to stop the assault with their bodies. In the recorded footage one officer can be heard swearing at the young people, while another draws his taser and points it at the crowd.

The police and media led a public campaign claiming the incident to be a 'breakdown in society', calling for people to stop recording officers on their phones and for harsher sentences for those who intervene in arrests.²⁷ The killing of another Black man, under similar circumstances just over a year before, seems to have escaped their attention. If such a 'hostile crowd' had been present during the restraining of Rashan Charles, might he still be alive today? And to what extent did that event influence the reaction of the young people in McDonalds? It is impossible to say. What is clear, however, is that direct action by onlookers and other spontaneous forms of protest are the predictable consequence of a system of racist policing which stops, searches, detains, arrests and kills.

For these young Black people, violence from the police does not constitute a 'breakdown in society'; it is the state functioning as normal. The police violence in the above two incidents was unquestioned by the press; on the contrary, the police were provided a platform to state their own, unproven, case. The young people of Hackney who took action against the police in both these cases did not wait to determine the extent to which Rashan Charles or the young man assaulted by officers in McDonalds was 'innocent'. The police were not recognised as the solution to whatever problem led to them arriving on the scene. The experience of policing had developed a racialised and class consciousness which led to collective action that did not require formal coordination or planning.

The young people in that moment identified a threat, and collectively saw an opportunity to resist. The violent power of the police was considered illegitimate *per se* by the local community and spontaneously resisted. They knew what was at stake for intervening in an arrest, yet put themselves at risk in solidarity with someone facing police violence. Abolition is not just an alternative to policing, it is a practice of care against police violence which is embedded in the everyday. Abolition is not just a long-term vision for dismantling prisons and borders, it is a lived practice of collective resistance and protection. While protests are met with riot squads, and direct action is criminalised, preventing possible harm or death is something some young people are clearly willing to take into their own hands. These snapshots of how organised campaigns against deaths at the hands of police and spontaneous responses to criminalisation can converge, help to give us a better understanding of state violence and the range of responses to it.

Conclusion

The constantly shifting nature of suspect communities, harbouring 'terrorists', 'gangsters' or 'foreign nationals', reveals the futility of searching for an ideal category of 'innocent' deserving of protection. The growth of prisons on the British mainland follows the growth of these suspect communities, often drawn from those associated with former colonies. The fight against police racism necessitates the fight against police and prisons themselves, and the logic they rely on, which delineates society into the respectable and the deviant, criminal and law-abiding, citizen and non-citizen – shifting dichotomies to which racialisation is always an element. Colonialism and racism don't simply punish 'criminals', they actually produce criminality through the oppressions they perpetuate and the state violence on which their power relies. But it is by casting the net so wide that they engulf entire communities, threaten the freedom of a generation, and bring criminalisation so close, that

Black resistance to British policing

collectivity, solidarity and common cause are formed. This chapter, like the others, has offered just a few snapshots of the ways in which racism's rapidly evolving pursuit of power and control can motivate a multitude of dissenters.

The wave of anti-racist direct actions against policing between 2014 and 2016, and again in 2020, began in the US, where campaigns against prisons and police violence are often one and the same. Transnational connections led to visits to the UK from Black organisations challenging policing and incarceration in the US, sharing political ideas that ranged from Black feminist and Black queer politics, to analyses of problems such as racist criminalisation and the prison industrial complex. These transnational links of solidarity under the banner of BLM helped a new generation of anti-racists in Britain to incorporate abolitionist thought into their work. Rather than arguing that 'innocent' people are being targeted by police and prisons, prison abolitionists show how we can re-organise society to erode the power of police and prisons, and empower community-led organisations which can provide safety and harm-reduction in ways that don't rely on state violence.

Vitaly, Black resistance to British policing takes a range of forms. First, many of these are well-organised, involving legal campaigns, mass demonstrations and international networks of solidarity. Shut-downs and protests at sites of commerce and transit are connected to organised mobilisations outside government buildings and police stations. Secondly, spontaneous rebellions against policing are as important as more formalised resistance. When England's Black and other youths in urban areas passionately articulate a rejection of racism and state violence, they cannot be dismissed as mindless criminals (Chapter 3) or contrasted with 'legitimate' peaceful protesters. Thirdly, everyday forms of resistance to surveillance and the policing of everyday life are a vital component of Black resistance to policing. Non-compliance among young people who witness police violence or harassment is

Futures of Black resistance

also a vital form of resistance. These are also rarely considered to be political acts, but they are based on the collective assumption that policing can only continue the way it is if we stand by and allow it. Dismantling the boundaries between the organised and the everyday, the formal and the spontaneous, reveals the scale and frequency with which people are rejecting the control, policing and punishment which constantly loom as a threat to those the state deems deviant.

Notes

- 73 Amnesty International, 'Trapped in the Matrix'.
- 74 Metropolitan Police & National Physical Laboratory, Metropolitan Police Service Live Facial Recognition Trials (2020), 17, www.met.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/downloads/central/advice/met/facial-recognition/met-evaluation-report.pdf (accessed 13 October 2020).
- 75 Williams and Kind, *Data-Driven Policing*.
- 76 Virinder Kalra and Tariq Mehmood, 'Resisting technologies of surveillance and suspicion', in Nisha Kapoor, Virinder Kalra and James Rhodes, *The State of Race* (London: Palgrave, 2013).
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Chapter 6 – Futures of Black resistance: disruption, rebellion, abolition

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Conclusion

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