What a Shoddy Job: A Critical Review of the 2021 Report of the UK Government on Racial and Ethnic Disparities

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Abstract

This paper critically reviews the 2021 report of the UK government on racial and ethnic disparities (which was tagged the "Sewell's report"). The Sewell's commission investigated the current dynamics of racial and ethnic disparities in the UK in four key areas: education and training; employment, fairness at work and enterprise; crime and policing; and health. It reported not only interesting findings and conclusions, but also recommended series of policy measures under four broad themes: building trust; promoting fairness; creating agency; and achieving inclusivity. A critical review of the report revealed a series of fundamental, preliminary, and substantive issues that undermine the credibility of its findings, conclusion, and recommendations. These issues, which are constitutional problematic, problem definition, biased methodology, skewed findings, and inaccurate conclusions, questioned the substance of the commission's report, and fostered effective grounds for critics and oppositions to question the acceptability and legitimacy of the panel or commission's findings, conclusions, and recommendations. These issues largely emanated from the composition of the commissioners, which lacked technical knowledge and social scientific understanding of racism as a conceptual frame to investigate racial and ethnic disparities, and thus produced a shoddy report that did not reflect the realities and lives of Black and other minority ethnic groups in the UK.

Keywords

Racism, BAME, Racial and Ethnic Disparities, Racialisation, Sewell's Report

1. Introduction

The killing of George Floyd by the Minneapolis police in May 2020 sparked a

wave of protests and civil unrests, as millions took to the street to protest against police brutality and demand justice for Black people that were gruesomely murdered by police across the United States (Cappelli, 2020). The scale of global solidarity that these protests and movements engendered reverberated in more than 50 countries, and revealed a widespread outrage and discontent against police violence, racism, and social injustices across the world. In the UK, the protest organised by the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM) witnessed a massive turnout of protesters in 260 towns and cities (Mohdin, Swann, & Bannock, 2020).

The implication of these protests and demonstrations is the sudden shift in consciousness, in which many protesters are not only interested in abolishing racism, but the questioning of slavery, colonialism and imperialism that gave rise to racism and sustained it, in the contemporary epoch. From Bristol, Manchester, London, Glasgow, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Oxford, Sheffield, Plymouth, Durham to Cardiff, the revolutionary mood, and attitudes that the protests generated, was expressed in questioning the legacies of the British state in slavery and the linking of capitalism to racism, and the toppling of the statue of British slave trader Edward Colston in Bristol. This revolutionary shift in people's consciousness was a threat to the British state and its capitalist establishment. Despite the counter-protest of far-right groups, the movement waxed stronger, and the police was not able to quell it.

Having realised that repression from police or military would not stop the movement, but aggravate it, the British state under the current Conservative government offered a series of concessions to the protesters as a way of de-escalating the tension. One of these concessions was the setting up of a commission to investigate race and ethnic disparities in the UK to investigate the demands of the BLM movement in July 2020. The commission on racial and ethnic disparities was headed by Dr Tony Sewell as the chairman with 10 other commissioners. The commission concluded its assignment after five months and submitted its outcomes and recommendation, which were tagged the "Sewell Report" in February 2021, to the government for action and implementation. The controversy that was generated following the official publication of Sewell's report was that institutional racism no longer exists in the UK (Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, 2021). The spate of public reaction, especially from charities and Black, Asian and other Minority ethnic groups (BAME) communities to this conclusion, cast a dark cloud over the report. The reactions of the commissioners to this assertion were that such conclusion emanated from the government, and not from the commission.

The fundamental question that remains is whether there is no institutional racism in the UK, or the commission had no evidence of institutional racism in its investigation. Understanding this question underscores the need to undertake a comprehensive review of the report. While Sewell's report highlights important factors and issues that underpin the exclusionary practices that legitimised and reproduced racism through racial and ethnic disparities in areas of the policing and criminal justice system, health, housing, employment, etc, the report is not

without its difficulties. The issues observed in the report revealed its problematic nature, which could be stated as follows: *constitutional problematic*, *problem definition*, *biased methodology*, *skewed findings*, and *inaccurate conclusions*. These issues are what this paper seeks to address below.

2. Constitutional Problematic

The first is the constitutional problematic. The report's findings are undermined by the credibility issues associated with the constitution of membership of the commission (commissioners), and this is what I regard here as "constitutional problematic". The notion of constitutional problematic emanated from Farhang and Wawro's (2004) observation of how the constitution of US Federal Court of Appeal judges could influence the decision-making dynamics of the panel. Drawing on the studies of Revesz (1997) and Cross and Tiller (1998), which revealed that the decision of a panel could be influenced not only by their ideological position, but also the ideological positions of other members of Federal Bench, Farhang and Wawro argued that the ideological representation of panel membership has an effect on the collective decision of the panel rather than that of the individual members of the panel. Following Farhang and Wawro, constitutional problematic here is not about how the ideological positions of Sewell's commission members (which is important) shape their findings, but how the ideology of the government shapes its constitution of the Sewell's commission.

Available evidence revealed that racism was used by the Conservative government in the late 1950s and early 1960s against Black and other minority ethnic groups (BAME) when they first migrated to the UK (Miles, 1982; Carter et al., 1987). In this regard, the British government racialised against BAME communities to protect the Whiteness character of the British state against Blacks and Asian immigrants from commonwealth countries (Banton, 2005), and the consequences of such racialisation was the enactment of the 1962 Immigration Act that critics have described as a racist law. With this evidence, it can be argued that racism has been rooted in the politics and ideology of the Conservative (Tory) party since the 1950s. In fact, the recent refugee policy and current Nationality and Borders Bill (currently going through Parliament) have demonstrated how the rhetoric of nationalism or national interests has been utilised by the Conservatives to mask several policies and laws that have racist underpinnings. Therefore, the ideological position of the current Conservative government on racism is well known and problematic. It is likely to be problematic and generate trust issues if such Conservative government were to constitute a commission on racial and ethnic disparities, because the position of the government is likely to shape the constitution of Sewell's commission. What is constitutional problematic in this regard, is that the ideological position of the Conservative party reflects the selection of commissioners. This poses a credibility problem for the findings and recommendations of the Sewell report.

The nature of the commission on race and ethnic disparities is a sensitive panel that requires due diligence, and thorough oversight of the appointment of

the commissioners. The constitution of the commission's membership (commissioners) should have reflected an important criterion, which is the appointment of experts on racism and ethnicity. In fact, the commission should not comprise those with little or expertise on the theory of race, racism, and ethnic relations, with sociological and psychological backgrounds. This is because the understanding of racial and ethnic disparity starts from the understanding of racism within the theoretical traditions of social science; this would help in coalescing the problem of racism into appropriate concepts that are relevant in collecting data on racial and ethnic disparity, and aid the empirical investigation that the commission was mandated to undertaking. In other words, the benefit of having experts as commissioners is that it would have helped the commission in ensuring that definitional and theoretical issues associated with racism, and racial and ethnic disparities, were properly evaluated prior to the commission's sitting. Unfortunately, social scientists, especially sociologists and psychologists, were not appointed into the commission as commissioners, and the backgrounds of the commissioners were clearly stated on page 4 of the report:–

> The Commission was established with 10 of us drawn from a variety of fields spanning science, education, economics, broadcasting, medicine, and policing. And, with one exception, all from ethnic minority backgrounds.

In social science, there is a consensus that racism is socially constructed (Miles & Brown, 2003; Guess, 2006; Pager & Shepherd, 2008; Clair & Dennis, 2015; Groothuis, 2020), and the consequences of racism manifest as racial and ethnic disparities in education, health, policing, the criminal justice system, etc. Being an anti-racism advocate and activist or having experienced racism does not imply having a technical knowledge about racism. The implication of appointing commissioners who do not have a vast sociological and psychological understanding of racism is that relevant knowledge of racism would not been derived from technical knowledge and concepts, but rather derived from activism, everyday language and common-sense understanding of racism. The nomenclature of these commissioners revealed the dispositions of individuals who may be active in anti-racism campaigns, but such activism is rooted in an experiential and common-sense understanding of racism and, thus, depicts a narrow understanding of racism. Since most of these commissioners are not experts or possess academic/technical knowledge on racism and ethnicity, a resort to everyday language and common-sense judgement that is technically inferior to the technical knowledge would shape their frameworks and understanding necessary to undertake a sensitive assignment.

Perhaps, the specialised knowledge may be needed to shape the preliminary understanding of the commission's terms of reference and provide the direction and guidance for the commission; and the appointment of sociologists and psychologists on that commission would have provided a technical wherewithal that could help to produce robust findings that will not only shape public policy, but facilitate structural, institutional, social and individual change in society on rac-

ism. The common-sense meaning, and everyday language, of racism would not demonstrate an appropriate programme of action and better policy, and the best it could get is a superficial attempt at looking at racial and ethnic disparity without addressing the systemic and structural contexts that sustain and reproduce racism in the society.

The selection of non-specialists as commissioners is shaped by the ideological position of the current Conservative government on racism, and this suggests that the terms of reference of the commission might have been skewed by the government towards a particular direction to produce findings and recommendations that would never reflect the reality of the racial and ethnic disparities in the UK, as the report later showed. The selection of the commissioners by the British government was carefully crafted to ensure that its findings and recommendations did not conflict with the ideological position of the Conservative government.

The issue posed by constitutional problematic undermined and questioned the credibility and legitimacy of the report, even though these are the preliminary issues (discrete problems that predated the inauguration of the commission) that should have minor influence on the commission's findings and recommendations. The constitutional problematic associated with the report stems from the constitution of the commission, which is an issue that constitutes a problem. Its consequences did not only question the potential outcomes and report of the Sewell commission, but also the morality and legitimacy of the commission's findings, conclusion, and recommendations.

3. Problem Definition

How was the problem of ethnic and racial disparities posed? This question underscores the lacuna inherent in Sewell's report. To investigate important issues like racism or racial and ethnic disparities, the problem must be posed concretely. A well-articulated statement of the problem is fundamental towards establishing a credible foundation for such investigation and renders the clarifications of conceptual, methodological, and theoretical obstacles that could be encountered during the investigation less problematic (McGaghie et al., 2001; Creswell, 2012; Newman & Covrig, 2013). For instance, in the introductory page of the report, the commission stated that they "do not believe that the UK is yet a post-racial society which has completed the long journey to equality of opportunity", and that "outright racism still exists in the UK, whether it surfaces as graffiti on someone's business, violence in the street, or prejudice in the labour market. It can cause a unique and indelible pain for the individual affected and has no place in any civilised society" (p. 9). This assertion is an important statement that could have been critically utilised as the starting point of problem definition. The statement is a potential ground for defining and stating the problem, and the commission should have developed it further in posing the problem concretely, mapping out the historical trajectory of racial and ethnic disparities

from the experience of racism that is rooted in the migration of Blacks and other ethnic minorities in 1950s and 1960s by using the experience of first-generation immigrants, the second-generation and third-generation immigrants, BAME millennials, the Windrush scandal, racial profiling, police brutality (death of BAME suspects in police custody), racialisation of police stop and search, and the emergence of BAME mayors, MPs, ministers, councillors and others. These issues should have coalescence around four important questions: How was racial and ethnic disparity in the last 20 years? How is it now? What has changed? Why the need for the commission's investigation? What are the consequences of not addressing racial and ethnic disparity now?

Stating the problem would have provided enough contextual details to establish and understand what is to be investigated and why it is important to the UK as a country or society. Unfortunately, the readers got lost as to why the report—its finding, conclusions and recommendation—must be taken seriously. The danger of not stating the problem in the report demonstrates clearly that it does not give the readers and the British public information about whether progress has been made or not in the context of bridging the racial and ethnic gap. If progress has been made, in which areas and contexts? Whether the commissioners understand the problem? Whether its findings and recommendations are trustworthy, and credible to be accepted by all parties and institutions? Not stating and defining the problem constitutes the problematic dynamite that has been laid at the heart of the report.

4. Biased Methodology

The important principle that anti-Semitism activists always agitated for is that the definition of anti-Semitism could be better defined and described by the community (Jewish people) who experienced it. This principle revolves around the methodological issue that shapes the debate about anti-Semitism, by highlighting the questions of who can define and describe anti-Semitism, who is defining it and from what perspectives, and how can the experience of anti-Semitism be known. This is a subtle attempt by the Jewish community to inform non-Jewish communities to desist from defining anti-Semitism, especially when they had not experienced it.

If this methodological principle is applicable to the inquiry on racial and ethnic disparity in the UK, then it is the BAME community that experienced racial and ethnic disparity in all facets of institutional, national and everyday lives that could be in a better position to define and describe what is racial and ethnic disparity and how are they experiencing it in their daily lives. Although racial and ethnic disparities can be studies by non-BAME individuals, the experiential insights needed for such investigation would be lacking if they have not experienced it. The investigation into racial and ethnic disparity requires a comparative approach, where data and evidence are utilised to make a comparative analysis of the gap in racial and ethnic disparities (maybe 10 years ago) and the cur-

rent gap in racial and ethnic disparities, whether such gap is widening or reducing, and in what sector or contexts is the racial and ethnic disparity declining or widening. This connotes that both qualitative and quantitative methodologies are important in investigating the experience of racial and ethnic disparity.

As a methodological strategy, BAME individuals, civil society groups and NGOs in BAME communities would have been more instrumental in providing experiential and qualitative evidence on what racial and ethnic disparities are, why they persist and whether the gap in ethnic and racial disparity is declining or widening. Are these individuals and organisations in BAME communities allowed to give testimony to the racial inequality commission? Was oral evidence from the BAME community, individuals and organisations obtained for part of the findings of the report? The answer to these questions depends on the sources, evidence and data that the commission relies on to make important conclusions. However, evidence from the commission report revealed that the commission relied extensively on data and evidence provided by the government agencies such as Office of National Statistics (ONS), Racial Disparity Unit, Home Office and Public Health England (RDU) (see pages 10, 30, 48-50 of the report).

The limitation of the evidence and data used by the commission to arrive at its conclusion demonstrated that oral evidence from the BAME community was not part of the data used in the commission. Methodologically, the commissioners did not invite individuals, groups, and organisations in the BAME community to submit evidence or testify. Biased methodology here means that method of collecting data is derived from settings where experiential basis of reality is lacking. In this regard, Sewell's commission utilised a biased methodology because the experience of BAME communities was not part of the data used in the commission's investigation. This demonstrates that evidence relied on by the commission is one-sided, narrow, flawed and biased. The implication of this preferential methodology is that conclusions of the report, especially the conclusion that there was no evidence of institutional racism in the UK or that racial and ethnic disparity is not the consequence of racism, are based on biased data and flawed methodology. The findings in the report are, therefore, not based on balanced data, but biased data obtained only from government agencies and departments.

5. Skewed Findings

Since the evidence and data used in the investigation of racial and ethnic disparity by the commission are derived from a single source—the government source—the findings in the report are skewed towards a particular end. In Sewell's report, the skewed findings ensued when the balance of evidence and data from one source were not contrasted with other, or alternative, sources, and therefore the commission had no option but to rely on a single source. Although the report noted that the commission engaged the services of some university academics to provide framework and evidence, the evidence from these academics has little bearing on the data obtained from government sources, especially the Cabinet Of-

fice's Race and Disparity Unit (RDU). Since the commission was established by the British government, if the evidence and data used in the report depended on government sources, then the findings of such investigations are being tele-guided towards a particular outcome that are favourable only to the government.

For instance, one finding that revealed that "family breakdown as one of the main reasons for poor outcomes" for the BAME community (p. 7) is a simplistic explanation that tends to sidestep the structural factors that cause racial and ethnic disparities. Further findings from the report that "we increasingly felt that an unexplored approach to closing disparity gaps was to examine the extent individuals and their communities could help themselves through their own agency, rather than wait for invisible external forces to assemble to do the job" (p. 7) is an attempt to blame the individuals for the problem of racial and ethnic disparities rather than the system.

Therefore, by focusing on an individual's or group's specifics, the skewed findings in this report ignore the structural context that gave rise to racial and ethnic disparities. The structural cause of racial and ethnic disparities, by my own reckoning, emanates from the system of capitalism that underpinned the British society, and the organic crisis of the British capitalism, which has been responsible for a lack of full employment, housing shortages, and inadequate funding of state schools and education. In other words, if there were enough standard houses, full employment in skilled sectors, and free funding of state schools to the private school standard, there would not be racial and ethnic discrimination and disparities in employment, housing and education.

If the resources of the society are equally distributed and allocated, there would not be racial and ethnic disparities between the BAME and White population. Under capitalism, the resources of the society are not evenly distributed in society, and this produces inequality among classes. This inequality facilitates racial and ethnic disparities, because the little provided by capitalism to other classes is being distributed to a section of the population through racialisation (Ogunrotifa, 2022). Since British capitalism cannot afford to provide for all citizens or resolve these problems, there is a shortage and British citizens are left with no option but to fight for these little-available resources. In distributing these limited resources and opportunities, racism was activated through the process of racialisation, where there was a discrimination against the BAME community in the distribution of these resources and legitimated exclusionary practices.

Racialisation has been defined as "an ideological process that involves racialising benefits, privileges, and opportunities to one group [possibly an ethnic group] over other groups by the capitalist ruling class and the state, and legitimising it by using policies, media, laws, regulations, and institutional practices as a means of entrenching division and disunity in the society and preserving their system of control under capitalism" (Ogunrotifa, 2022: p. 240). As overt references to inferiority, superiority, distinct races, and racial hierarchy are rare

in the contemporary era, racism is still practised through racialisation. The commission's findings, that "the big challenge of our age is not overt racial prejudice, it is building on and advancing the progress won by the struggles of the past 50 years" (p. 27), revealed that the commission does not understand how racism is reproduced and practised in the contemporary epoch. In fact, overt racial prejudice is out of fashion, but racism is being practised through racialisation, and it is through racialisation that racism is reproduced in the widening of the racial and ethnic disparities in the contemporary time.

Indeed, racialisation occurs when enacted policies, laws, and regulations have been overtly and covertly racist because it is used to legitimate exclusionary practices and racialisation against sections of the population. For instance, the analysis of the austerity budget implemented by the Conservative government from 2010 has revealed that the cumulative effect of tax and benefit changes since 2010 has made BAME women emerge worse hit and the poorest Black and Asian women some £2,000 worse off, while the wealthiest people were slightly better off (Khan & Shaheen, 2017). The budget presented by the then UK Chancellor (George Osborne) did not refer to race or BAME. A policy, law and regulation do not need to refer to a biological theory of inferiority and superiority to be a racist policy, and anyone who seeks to see a policy, law and regulation as a reference to race would never see one as far as the current public policy is concerned.

Because British capitalism cannot afford to provide these benefits to all citizens, racialisation was used against the BAME communities in accessing these resources and as a way of placating the White population, who are also struggling to have access to these resources and benefits. Racialisation ensured that the BAME population occupied inferior class positions and ensured that disparity was foisted in these sectors. The New Commonwealth migrants (Blacks and Asian) came to the UK in the 1950s and 1960s at the time of decline of British capitalism as an imperialist power (Miles, 1982), and that British capitalism was experiencing an organic crisis despite modest economic growth. This crisis of British capitalism, as Geiger (2017) observed, that British post-war recovery experienced a slower rate of economic growth:

"Many accounts of British development since 1945 are directed at finding an explanation for the slower economic growth rate which Britain experienced compared to that of other western European countries. In this context, some analysts have attributed the slower economic growth to the relatively high British defence expenditures. These accounts reflect two empirical observations: firstly, Britain spent more on defence than other countries and secondly, the British economy grew less rapidly than other Western economies. The implication of these analyses is that Britain's relative economic decline could have been prevented if policymakers had not spent so much on defence".

Geiger's crisis of British capitalism was the bane of racial and ethnic disparity

in the 1960s and 1970s. If British capitalism had resolved these social problems of housing, unemployment, and education, the problem of racism would not have degenerated into violent protests and riots; rather, it would have been reduced to cultural differences among the ethnic groups. Whenever British capitalism experiences recession and unemployment, exclusionary practices are legitimated against BAME in terms of access to resources—employment, housing, and education. The crisis of British capitalism led to widening employment rates in the 1980s and into the 1990s, following the deindustrialisation and recessions, and later in 2008 when the global financial crisis ensued and the business closure and banking collapse. The consequences of the capitalist crisis led to huge unemployment and austerity programmes under the Conservative government, when cuts in social spending affected the BAME community in terms of education and health. This finding was obscure in the commission's report, because the ideological basis of establishing the commission is to resolve the disparity among ethnic groups in the UK within the framework of capitalism. This is reflected in the commission's observations of wealth gaps, home ownership, cultural traditions, family strains, social mobility, family influence, socio-economic background, religion, parental breakup, and lone parent families as the factors responsible for racial and ethnic disparity. These factors are just the symptoms of racial and ethnic disparities, and not the cause. The reporting of these factors as the cause was a subtle attempt at bracketing off capitalism as the main culprit responsible for the disparities among ethnic groups in the UK.

6. Inaccurate Conclusion

Most of the conclusions did not reflect reality and therefore are not technically or conceptually grounded to foster social change and changes in social psychology of racism at the individual and group levels. There are two conclusions in the report that tend to undermine the struggle against racism or seek to denounce the achievement made by the BAME communities against racism in the last 30 years. The first is that there is no evidence that institutional racism exists in the UK. This is the conclusion that the UK government capitalised on to declare that the UK is no longer an institutionally racist country. However, evidence in the report revealed that the practice of stop and search (see p. 15, 153) and discrimination in the mental health service contradicted such conclusion. The police practice of stop and search demonstrates the existence of institutional racism. In fact, this is what Rattansi (2005: p. 289) regarded as institutional racialisation, where racialisation is utilised to foster exclusionary practices of profiling BAME individuals as potential criminals and pacify and placate the White population that crime is under control. The commission further stated that "our findings on Black youth homicide are distressing reading, with young Black men 24 times more likely to die of homicide than their White counterparts. It is this data that has led us to supporting a reconceptualised idea of stop and search" (see p. 7). This finding is disingenuous and dubious for many reasons. First, the

stop and search policy of policing predates the homicide situation in Black communities. Second, the stop and search policy is the expressivity of racialisation of crime in which BAME communities are profiled as the targets. The stop and search policy is a manifestation of the ideology of racism in British society, in which the state and the British ruling class are the architects.

In the context of mental health, the Sewell's commission further reported that:

The Wessely Review found Black people were 8 times more likely to be subjected to community treatment orders than White people, and 4 times more likely to be detained. Rates are much lower for the Black African and Black Caribbean groups. Rates for Asian groups tend to be lower than for Black but higher than White groups, with the exception of the Indian and Chinese ethnic groups for whom there is near parity. Such disparity is often taken as evidence of racism… The Commission does not believe that the evidence it reviewed offers support to claims of discrimination within psychiatry (see pp. 222-223).

The fundamental issue is not whether the disparities in mental health service accessibility among the ethnic groups or whether mental health disparities have racist underpinning, but how institutional racialisation has shaped the way in which racism is rooted in the procedures and practices of mental health services. The 2003 report by the National Institute for Mental Health in England (NIHME) has confirmed this assertion, with evidence that revealed that people from BAME communities are likely to be declared risky to the public (NIHME, 2003), and then be detained under the Mental Health Act (1983) and be given drugs by depot injection; be excessively restrained and controlled when in the hospital; and be overestimated as risky within hospitals. At the same time, other problems that BAME individuals experienced, as Cole (2016) noted, are wrongly attributed to mental health issues and they are likely to be detained in police custody under section 136 of the Mental Health Act. These reports contradicted the claims of the commission that there was no evidence of institutional racism in the UK.

The second conclusion is that racial and ethnic disparities do not have a connection with racism. In the report, it was stated that "we found that most of the disparities we examined, which some attribute to racial discrimination, often do not have their origins in racism" (see p. 11). This conclusion is contradicted by the historical evidence that demonstrates how racial and ethnic disparities in the UK are deeply connected to racism. It is, therefore, important to denounce the commission's conclusion for the sake of history, by providing a historical basis for the current trajectory of racial and ethnic disparities in the UK.

The history of racial and ethnic disparity stems from the arrival of new C migrants into Britain in the 1950s and 1960s (Carter et al., 1987; Hansen, 2000; Banton, 2005; McKay, 2008), and this immigration was stimulated by a shortage of labour in the British economy in the post-war years (Miles, 1982). Although these new migrants were part of the working class, who sell their labour power, they occupied the position of manual labour (often semi-skilled and unskilled

labour) with low wages and poor working conditions, and thus made the immigrants inferior to the indigenous White population in terms of their class positions. Because of the gaps, racial and ethnic disparity ensued between the indigenous White population and the New Commonwealth migrants. The New Commonwealth migrants (Asian and Black Caribbean) came to the UK at a time when the British capitalism was experiencing an organic crisis despite modest economic growth (Geiger, 2017). The performance of the British economy was slower due to excessive military expenditure (ibid), which prevented the British state from investing in social services—education, health, and housing. Therefore, British capitalism was not able to resolve the problems posed by infrastructural decay, housing shortages and cuts in education and health expenditure.

The New Commonwealth migrants are the "replacement labour force, coming to Britain to occupy positions vacated by individuals who had moved into other sectors of wage-labour employment" (Miles, 1982: p. 171). In other words, the migrant labourers are moving into jobs that indigenous White populations no longer want. The British capitalism faced acute labour shortages and the British ruling class, together with the British state, wanted more migrant labour to fill the positions that were considered as semi-skilled and unskilled labour to produce economic growth. When the New Commonwealth migrants came to the UK, they did not have the finance and technical skills like some sections of the White working class; they were relatively poorer, earned low wages and lived in houses of a poor standard compared to their White working-class counterparts (Cole, 2016). This is the origin of the racial and ethnic disparities between the BAME immigrants and the indigenous White population.

The arrival of Black and Asian immigrants exposed the brewing the crisis of British capitalism and unmasked the incompetence of the British ruling class and the state in solving the housing problem. Miles and Brown (2003: p. 106) observed that the British economy was already in crisis following the decline of capitalist production, and the decay of the urban infrastructure (including housing) starting from the 1950s:

> "In many areas of working-class residence in Britain, the decline of capitalist production and the decay of the urban infrastructure (consequences of uneven development of capitalism) coincided temporarily with the arrival and settlement of migrants from the Caribbean and Asian continents during the 1950s and 1960s."

The decay in the urban infrastructure caused the public's resentment towards local social services provision and culminated in increasing pressure from the White population, especially the working class and the middle class, about the funding cuts and the low quality of local services. The British ruling class and their lackeys in government did not take responsibility for the problem of capitalism under their watch, but rather made immigrants the scapegoats and cited them as the problem. The narrative of the British ruling class was that the hous-

ing shortage and unemployment were caused by the influx of the New Commonwealth immigrants. This is what Miles (1989) regarded as the racialisation of the section of the working class by the British state.

The New Commonwealth migrants came to Britain to sell their labour power, but they were met with an increasing negative political and ideological reaction, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, which succeeded in applying racism to migration. The widespread opposition to the new migrants gave expression to racist belief and sentiment, even within the working-class union or organisations, which led to them being negatively racialised in the allocations of jobs and housing, and assigned a specialised position lower than that of the White working class. The class position of these new migrants is what Phizacklea and Miles (1980) regarded as "class fraction" and what Miles (1982) later regarded as the "racialised fraction of the working class". In other words, the British ruling class consigned these new migrants into a class position that was lower than the average White working class. The structural positioning of BAME migrants, who were the first generations that experienced low wages, poor working conditions, few opportunities for advancement and unstable employment, was the outset of racial and ethnic discrimination. With racialisation, the new migrants, as Miles (1982) observed, were denied promotion in semi-skilled and unskilled jobs or in recruitment into skilled and professional jobs. It was the structure of the British capitalism and the machinations of the British ruling class that were responsible for material inequalities of BAME migrants, who were placed on the bottom rung below the White working class, and hence the occurrence of disparities between the White population and other ethnic groups. The same British ruling class who advocated for labour migration of these BAME first generations into the UK was the same ruling class who used racialisation against them to pacify the White population. Therefore, racism through the process of racialisation was utilised by the British ruling class to protect their capitalist interests, in the creation of class factions (BAME migrant labour) to reduce labour costs and divide the working class for capitalistic motives.

However, the critical question here is that, was the experience of racism and racial discrimination that consigned the BAME first generations into semi-skilled and unskilled manual labour also experienced by the BAME second generations? The answer to this lies in the role of education in the reproduction of racial and ethnic disparities. Following their education in Britain, the BAME second generation often "refuse wage labour at the subordinate level of their parents" (Howe, 1973: p. 45). The cycle of racial and ethnic disparity is produced and reproduced when racialisation was activated in preventing the BAME second generation from accessing wage labour at a higher level of skills and wages, when they are as qualified as those of their White counterparts, whom they are in competition with (Ballard & Holden, 1975).

The massive unemployment that ensued following the organic crisis of British capitalism in the 1970s manifested in the form in which "there were fewer op-

portunities to enter labour at all" (Miles, 1982: p. 177). This depicts that the British economy was not able to provide full employment and, hence, the population of BAME second generation were "confined to the role of a constituted reserve army of labour" (ibid). In this regard, fewer jobs with higher wages were very limited, and racialisation was utilised against the BAME second generation to pacify and placate the White population, by giving them the job. With unemployment, the crisis of British capitalism meant the disappearance of jobs that were previously available to the BAME youths, as the racialisation was activated against them in getting those jobs or making those jobs withdrawn.

To the BAME second generations, the role of education was *sine qua non* in regards their resistance against racism. The second generation is much better educated than their first-generation parents, and thus gives them a vantage position to compete with the indigenous White working class. Are they given the skilled jobs with higher wages and good conditions of work? If no, why? This is where racialisation is activated, because the little-available skilled jobs are given to the White working class, while the BAME second generation are racialised and discriminated against. Hence, the reproduction of ethnic and racial disparities between the White population and the BAME second generations.

The education pursuit and success of BAME second generations was questioned by a number of studies in the 1970s and early 1980s (Driver, 1977; Giles, 1977; Edwards, 1979; Tomlinson, 1978; 1981; Stone, 1981; Troyna, 1984), whose findings revealed that the BAME second generation have a lower level of examination success and are more likely to drop out of education at the age of 16 compared to the children of the White working class. The explanation for this was not provided in these studies, but a credible explanation for this can be found in the work of Demie (2003), who argued that stereotyping, teachers' low expectations, exclusions, and head teachers' poor leadership on equality issues and, more broadly, racism in educational institutions were responsible for this occurrence. In this sense, this ideology of racism was activated and reproduced when Black children, especially children of Caribbean migrants, were labelled as "Educationally Sub-Normal" (ESN) and expected to fail by their teachers at schools (Andrews, 2013; Wallace & Joseph-Saslibury, 2021). The racism experienced by Black children included them being put in low achievers' classes, or classes for children with lower-than-average IQ scores and no prospect of taking "O" level exams (Gillborn, 1997; Wright, Standen, & Patel, 2010). These racist practices and prejudice affected the morale of the children, as many Black children opted out of education because they lost faith in the school system, and thus achieved low educational attainment (Little, 1975; Mabey, 1981, 1986). Due to this issue of racism in school, the Black Caribbean community established the Black supplementary school movement (BSSM), or what was regarded as "Saturday school" to fill the gaps in mainstream schooling, and offering Black students the opportunities to catch up in science, English and mathematics, and improve numerical skills and focus on Black culture and history (Mirza & Reay, 1997;

Andrews, 2013) on evenings and weekends. The BSSM was created to resist racism and fight against the inequality that Black children were experiencing in mainstream schooling in the 1960s and 1970s. The consequences of the racist ideology in the British school system against Black students (who are second generation migrants) mean that they continue to do semi-skilled and unskilled manual labour that their parents experienced and are structurally placed on the bottom rung of the working class on low wages (as a racialised fraction of the working class), and thus deepen and reinforce the existing pattern of ethnic and racial disparity experienced by their parents.

With the second generation and their level of education and skills, there seems to be an improvement in getting professional and skilled jobs with higher wages compared to their parents, but the data for this is not known. The question of how many of the second generation completed high school or passed GSCEs, how many completed higher education, how many were engaged in manual labour, or professional and skilled jobs, is germane. The compilation of this data, as well as the answers to these questions, are what were expected in the Sewell report, but unfortunately were lacking.

The interest of the British ruling class in the reproduction of racism is to ensure the continuous reproduction of BAME semi-skilled and unskilled manual labour as cheap labour with low cost for their capitalist businesses, and to ensure that they remain as a racialised part of the working class who will not be able to unite with the White working class to challenge the oppressive capitalist system. The reproduction of ideology of racism in the British school system through the process of racialisation against the BAME second generation was to reproduce class relations of manual (semi-skilled and unskilled) labour, for the service of capitalism, the consequence of which is reflected in the continuous reproduction of racial and ethnic disparities. Therefore, the continuous reproduction of manual labour among the BAME community is the continuous reproduction of lower-class positions, whose wages and access to opportunities and career progressions are inferior to the skilled White working class.

However, this experience of ethnic and racial disparities is not limited to the BAME second generation, but is also peculiar to third generation and other generations, which I regarded as "BAME millennials" (that is, BAME children born after 1996). What was the proportion of BAME third generation that completed high school or passed GSCEs compared to White students? What was the proportion of BAME third generation and millennials that completed higher education compared to their White counterparts? How many BAME third generation and millennials are engaged in manual labour, skilled and professional jobs compared to their White counterparts? The data to understand this is crucial to mapping out whether racial and ethnic disparity is narrowing or widening. Unfortunately, Sewell's report did not provide this information. Despite having access to government data, it is disingenuous on the part of the commissioners to miss this important reality needed to guide the government and the public

about the changing patterns in ethnic disparities in the UK.

However, appreciable progress has been made in BAME communities in education in the last 30 years, as sections of BAME students achieved more educational success compared to White working-class children, as Khan (2017: p. 24) observed:

> Perhaps the most common evidence invoked to deny that racism persists is that middle-class Chinese and Indian pupils outperform white British pupils. And yet those pupils, who outperform white British pupils in school, are much less likely to get a first or 2:1 at university, more likely to be unemployed after graduation, and are less likely to be well paid at work.

Khan's observation has revealed how racism in employment has undermined the appreciable progress that BAME communities have made in education. Furthermore, the ideology of racism is still being reproduced in the British school system, as teachers have lower academic expectations for BAME students (Gillborn et al., 2012), in which BAME students were disproportionately allocated to lower-ranked and less academically rigorous classes in schools (Strand, 2012) compared to their White counterparts. With stereotyped teachers' expectations, the BAME students were offered the least educational help because they were considered as "lost causes" and faced exclusion (Demie, 2021). As a result, BAME students, especially Black Caribbean pupils, were awarded comparatively low grades on GCSE and A-level assessments, and frequently overrepresented in special education programmes (Gillborn et al., 2016; 2017).

Another area where racism is reproduced in the British school system is the choice of subjects, especially in secondary schools. The observation by Gillborn et al. (2012: p. 130) provided a context to demonstrate this assertion more profoundly:

> Academic selection occurs throughout children's school lives in England, and can have a huge impact on their educational opportunities. However, the key points of selection, and the processes that lie behind them, are increasingly hidden. For example, students in primary school are assessed and ranked by teachers who then place them in different "interventions" that can lead to academic routes or more "remedial" action (Bradbury, 2011). Later, students are assessed (sometimes using IQ tests) on entry to secondary school and may be placed in hierarchical groups that restrict their curriculum and determine entry to low status examinations when they are 16.

In the reproduction of racism, the school advisers and counsellors (who are mostly White) are reported to always discourage BAME students from choosing Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects, or telling them that they cannot do STEM subjects, and rather encourage them to choose subjects such as social care, business, music, cookery, and other subjects whose end products result in semi-skilled jobs or lower-class positions. The implication of dissuading the BAME students from choosing STEM subjects is the foreclo-

sure of their future ambition as scientists, engineers, technologists and innovators, and ensures they are restricted to semi-skilled jobs with relatively average wages compared to some of their White counterparts in skilled, professional, and technical jobs with higher wages.

The intended structuring of future BAME workers into semi-skilled jobs is the continuation and reproduction of racist ideology that seeks to consign them to the lower-class positions, like those experienced by their migrant first- and second-generation parents and grandparents. The consequences of the reproduction of the racist ideology in subject selection in secondary school is to reinforce the existing racial and ethnic disparity in terms of lower wages in semi-skilled jobs that BAME students would be subjected in the future, in comparison to their White counterparts, who are "destined" for high-skilled jobs in STEM subjects. This is a clear case of institutional racism, especially in the British educational context, which contrasted the findings of Sewell's commission that there was no evidence of institutional racism in the UK.

With respect to employment, racism fosters racial and ethnic disparities in relation to how it affects the chances of BAME individuals who have the same qualifications as their White counterparts. The observation of Cole (2016: p. 39) succinctly captured this reality more profoundly:

> Racism in recruitment adversely affects those whose names do not appear to be White British. British Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black people are also paid less on average than those with similar qualifications from either White British or Indian backgrounds, the latter reflecting a social class advantage.

This observation suggested that the disproportionate representation of minorities' low incomes was due to racism. In contrast to the commission's report, the evidence provided by Cole has demonstrated that the existence of racism has more significant impact on life chances and is culpable in the reproduction of racial and ethnic disparities than geography, family influence, socio-economic background, culture, and religion.

Finally, the other ways racialisation is utilised in reproducing racism and racial and ethnic disparity are twofold. The first is through job application, where applicants are required to state their ethnic classification. This ethnic classification in job applications is in five categories: 1) White—a) English, b) Scottish, c) Welsh, d) Irish, e) Any other White background; 2) Mixed—a) White and Black Caribbean, b) White and Black African, c) White and Asian, d) Any other mixed backgrounds; 3) Asian and Asian British—a) Indian, b) Pakistani, c) Bangladeshi, d) Chinese, e) Any other Asian background; 4) Black and Black British—a) Black Caribbean, b) Black African, c) Any other Black background; 5) Any other ethnic background, please provide details. This ethnic classification often produced racialised essentialism of names (Wykes, 2017), in which racialisation of foreign or Muslim names, as Cole (2016) observed, could be transformed into being disqualified or not shortlisted for interview based on the identified ethnic

origin whenever the ethnic box is ticked.

The arguments and facts presented here have debunked the findings of the Sewell commission in that racial and ethnic disparity is not caused by racism. In fact, it is the commission's lack of technical knowledge and definition of racism that has inhibited their ability to unravel the extent of racial and ethnic disparities, and how such disparities are part of the consequences of racism in society. For the commission to claim or conclude that such disparities do not have their origins in racism demonstrates their technical incompetence at investigating the consequences of racism—racial and ethnic disparities for the British government. Therefore, this conclusion is not based on the reality of what racism is about.

7. Conclusion

This paper has offered a critical review of the 2021 report of the UK government on racial and ethnic disparities (which was dubbed the "Sewell report") and highlighted important issues in the report. Despite the promise of investigating the racial and ethnic disparities in the UK comprehensively, the report is fraught with several contradictions and problems that betray the sense of enthusiasm of its supporters or confirms the scepticism of the commission's critics. These issues, which are constitutional problematic, problem definition, biased methodology, skewed findings, and inaccurate conclusions, did not only undermine the credibility of the report (findings and conclusions) but rendered its recommendations to be cosmetic and simplistic.

Throughout the report, racialisation was never mentioned. Therefore, if racism and its consequences—racial and ethnic disparities—cannot be understood vis-à-vis racialisation, what then is the commission investigating on ethnic and racial disparities? Unlike Macpherson's commission, whose report brought the concept of institutional racism into the currency of scholarly and policy debates and enabled us to understand racism within the structural context of policing, Sewell's report is devoid of any technical and conceptual articulations that would enable us to understand racial and ethnic disparities, both structurally and institutionally.

The cosmetic nature of the commission's recommendations is just simplistic suggestions that will not address the issue of racial and ethnic disparities, structurally and systematically. Three instances have demonstrated this assertion more profoundly. The first recommendation is about building trust and promoting fairness, but the question is, how can we build trust and promote fairness when racial discrimination and distrust are structurally and institutionally embedded at the heart of the capitalist system? The second recommendation of creating agency to solve the problem of racial and ethnic disparities seems like soundbites, especially when the contemporary expression of racism is not overt but expressed and practised in the context of institutional racialisation. Creating a new agency or strengthening the Equality and Human Rights Commission is

akin to using administrative or bureaucratic methods to solve an ideological question, which is a futile attempt. The third is the failure of the commission to understand the artificiality of racial and ethnic disparities. In other words, racial and ethnic disparities are artificially created by the British ruling class through the system of capitalism in connivance with the British state. The disparities among ethnic groups in the UK will not have occurred if British capitalism had resolved the problem of employment, housing, education, and health that caused inequalities and disparities. It was surprising that the commission did not recommend a budgetary reversal of the austerity programme (e.g., cuts in welfare provisions and cuts in social spending on education, health, etc.), which has deepened racial and ethnic disparities since 2010 and which the current Conservative government has instituted.

The recommendations suggested by the Sewell commission are cosmetic, because they do not address the structural root that underpins racial and ethnic disparities in the UK. The recommendations suggested by the commission will only paper over the cracks without facilitating social change about racism or identify the institutional and systemic contexts that heralded and sustained racial and ethnic disparities and disbanded it. Sewell's report speaks volumes for the "competence" of the commissioners who did a shoddy job in fleshing out the real issue of racism and, by extension, racialisation that underpins racial and ethnic disparities in the UK in the contemporary context. However, the commissioners and their supporters will argue that timing is an issue, as five months is not enough to do a thorough job. However, timing is not an issue for commissioners who are out of their depth and lack technical and conceptual understanding of racism and its racial and ethnic disparities, which they are commissioned to investigate.

Despite these shortcomings, the report acknowledged that some achievements and concessions have been won by the BAME communities on equality issues in the last 40 years with more BAME MPs, councillors, mayors, ministers, CEOs, and top government functionaries. Yet, institutional racism is still rife in British society, and Sewell's report did not articulate frameworks through which we can address racial and ethnic disparities, two decades into the twenty-first century.

The consequences of racism—racial and ethnic disparities—are widened because current dynamics of institutional racialisation take a different nomenclature compared to the experiences of the past, and the fight against racism and racial and ethnic disparities is not going to be won on the terms in which it was fought in the last 40 years. Therefore, those expecting Sewell's report to provide any credible findings and recommendations that would facilitate closing the current gap of racial and ethnic disparities in the UK had, therefore, better think again. This is because the root of racial and ethnic disparities, as identified in this paper, is far deeper and more complicated than what the findings and recommendations in Sewell's report encompass. Sewell's report is only beneficial and useful to the British ruling class and its lackeys in government who are

looking for a cosmetic solution to racial and ethnic disparities, without addressing the structural context of its existence and sustenance.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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