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The Intersection of Race, Class and Politics  
in the North East of England, 1919-1939.

H E Martin

PhD

2021

# The Intersection of Race, Class and Politics in the North East of England, 1919-1939.

Hannah Elizabeth Martin

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Northumbria at Newcastle for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy Research undertaken in the Faculty of Engineering and Environmental Science.

March 2021

## Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others.

Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this thesis has been approved. Approval has been sought and granted by the University Ethics Committee on 15 January 2018.

I declare that the Word Count of this Thesis is 90,033 words.

Hannah Martin

Signature:

Date: 05 March 2021

## Thesis Abstract

The North East of England in the interwar period was a region where the presence of 'race' figured in multiple ways within the everyday lives of an ethnically diverse working class. This thesis revisits traditional narratives of North East social and labour history to highlight the material and less-tangible presence of 'race' and develop an inclusive place-based historical geography of working class communities in the region. Conceptually, this thesis brings together literatures on representations, conditions and agency to revisit archival material. It draws from a variety of national, regional and local archives as well as detailed engagement with newspaper collections. Methodologically, this thesis is centred on a critical historical geography approach which foregrounds the use of intersectional theory to uncover everyday experiences of marginalised communities and 'turn up the volume' of previously under-represented perspectives. The thesis is concentrated on three empirical cuts – representations, conditions and agency – which centre minority ethnic experiences and embed them within and against existing North East labour histories by shifting analysis from exceptional episodes of disorder and violence to the everyday experiences of 'race' within an ethnically diverse working class. This thesis provides original empirical contributions to regional histories in addition to a broader conceptual development to a variety of sub-fields across the humanities and social sciences to highlight moments and experiences that have often been on the periphery of analysis and contribute to the reconceptualization of representations, conditions and agency explicitly through the lens of the everyday.

## Acknowledgements

Throughout this PhD journey, many people have made a profound impact on my work and personal life and I would like to acknowledge their support and guidance.

Firstly, I wish to thank my supervisors, Paul Griffin and John Clayton. They have provided me with endless and invaluable insight over the last three years and I am grateful for their excellent supervision. They have not only been integral in the development of my thesis work, but also read drafts of papers for publication, listened to practice conference presentations, commented on funding applications and supported my wider aims and public engagement efforts. Thank you both for all of your support!

It is often suggested that PhD's can be an isolating and lonely experience, but thanks to my fellow PGR's at Northumbria this certainly was not the case. From regular coffee breaks to weekly socials, you have all kept me going, picked me up when I felt down, provided an ear to vent my frustrations and been there to celebrate my successes. Without such an inclusive and positive environment, the PhD experience would have not been the same!

I have received generous financial support throughout my PhD which has supported archive visits and attendance at international conferences. I would like to thank the Society for the Study of Labour History, the Sociological Review Foundation, the Historical Geography Research Group, the Social and Cultural Geography Research Group, the Society for Nautical Studies and the Northumbria Graduate School for their generous financial support.

I would like to thank my parents and family who have been with me throughout this journey. I would especially like to thank Eleonore, who I met during my masters at Durham, for all of her interest in my work and emotional support (wine). It has been a great experience to be on the PhD journey together and I think that the fact that our projects were so different, and we were at different institutions made us all the better equipped to support each other.

There is one person who I mentally could not have done this PhD without. I met my partner Adam when I was just starting my PhD. He has been a proof-reader (albeit an unenthusiastic one), personal cheerleader and empathetic ear to all of the challenges I have faced over the last three and a half years. I truly appreciate everything he has done and continues to do to support me.

Finally, I wish to dedicate this thesis to my late-grandmother Megan Eilbeck. From a young age she curated our shared love of history. She frequently recalled her memories as a child growing up in wartime County Durham as I listened with fascination, she shared her love for ancient Egyptian history and took us to local museums at every possible opportunity. As a retired teacher, she had a passion for knowledge and learning that she shared with my brother and I throughout our childhood. Shortly before she passed away, she gifted me a scrapbook she had made for me. In this, she wrote that her hopes and dreams for me were to 'be happy and clever enough to pass exams in order to achieve whatever future you wish'. She was so very proud of me when I began my undergraduate degree and I know how proud she would have been to watch me continuing in higher education. I am truly grateful to have been blessed with such a strong, intelligent and determined woman in my life.

## Author's Note – Use of language

From the outset of this thesis the challenge of determining linguistic descriptors for the communities I am researching was a continuous contemplation providing many associated challenges. The language used in this thesis does attribute labels and this is a limitation I am aware of and keen to reflect upon, but equally I am keen not to detract from the wider research purpose by continually caveating my choice of language throughout the thesis. As such, I briefly comment upon this challenge before addressing it in more detail in a later chapter. The thesis is centred on the everyday experiences of Adenese, Yemeni, Somali, West Indian and West African communities living in the North East of England in the interwar period. The terms used to collectively describe these men in the archival record, 'Coloured Alien Seamen', is anachronistic, unacceptable and unrepresentative to the communities I am researching. Identity is a fluid social construct and I acknowledge explicitly that there is no all-encompassing way to employ language to describe these heterogeneous communities. Nevertheless, I do need to use collectivised language in this thesis as the experiences considered are, to an important degree, shared through these identities. After significant thought, reflection and research, which is outlined in detail in Chapter 3 (4.2), I have used BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) when collectively referring to minority ethnic communities in an attempt to capture the commonalities, as well as heterogeneity, of experiences of racialisation, minoritisation and marginalisation. Alongside using BAME as a collective description, when I am discussing individual groups or communities, I use more specific language such as West Indian, West African or Adenese. When referring to the Adenese, Yemeni and Somali community in South Shields, I employ the term 'Arab Community'. Although this is used largely in a historical context, and a source of contestation today, it was used frequently by members of the community as a means of collectivising their identity and acknowledging their unity in Islam and common geographical heritage, whilst being attentive to their national and ethnic diversity. 'BAME' is a term that is not deemed acceptable by all and seen as potentially restrictive and homogenising in current debates. I acknowledge these debates and will explore the use of language in more detail in Chapter 3 (4.2).



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## Abbreviations and Acronyms

Beamish Regional Resource Centre (BRRC)

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME)

British Newspaper Archive (BNA)

Illustrated Police News (IPN)

National Sailors' and Firemen's Union (NSFU)

National Union of Seamen (NUS)

North East Coast Exhibition (NECE)

Seamen's Minority Movement (SMM)

South Tyneside Libraries (STL)

The National Archives (TNA)

Tyne and Wear Archives (TWA)

Warwick Modern Records Centre (WMRC)

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# **Chapter 1 – Introduction: the intersection of race, class and politics – towards an inclusive place-based history**

## **1.1 – Introduction**

Living geographically close to the area you are historically researching has both its benefits and challenges. Being able to visit the area frequently, to either access archival material or walk through the streets that you have regularly encountered in the archive, gives a sense of tangibility to otherwise abstract locations, events and experiences that you have uncovered. A sense of responsibility develops regarding the histories you are uncovering; a need to produce meaningful, inclusive histories and usable pasts. This proximity also poses challenges; it is often tempting to return to the archives for ‘one last search’ and it can be challenging to work with the material you have and not continue infinitely to search for more.

The contemporary urban environment in South Shields, a significant location explored throughout this thesis, is a legacy of both visible and invisible materialities of ‘race’ and minoritized communities which have resided in this township throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Walking across the Mill Dam in South Shields from the council-owned car park, past the newly constructed BT call centre and ASDA supermarket to reach the local archives in The Word, it would be easy to pay no attention to the architectural remnants which provide a glimpse into the globalised history and industrial significance of this place. As this thesis will explore, the Mill Dam (Figure 1.1) was a crucial, albeit volatile, space where hundreds of unemployed seafarers would gather on a daily basis in search of work. It was a site of work, travel, conflict, contestation, political demonstrations, encounter and

cosmopolitanism which was deeply embedded into the everyday lives of those living across the township.

**Figure 1.1** – A view across Mill Dam to the Customs House and the river, 1939.  
(South Tyneside Photo Archive)



The old Customs House is now a theatre and the Seamen’s Mission remains tucked away in an adjacent side street. Most of the winding streets where the working class seafaring population resided were cleared in the 1940s and remain wasteland. In front of the riverbank, a memorial stands (Figure 1.2), erected in 1990 to commemorate the sailors of the Merchant Navy who sailed from South Shields and lost their lives in the Second World War.

**Figure 1.2** – Photograph of Merchant Navy Memorial, The Mill Dam, South Shields. Taken by Hannah Martin, 2019.



The celebration of South Shield’s maritime heritage is well recognised in the immediate area and the port and shipyards provide a material landscape today from which this history is often remembered. These architectural remnants perhaps make the historic image of South Shields as a port town more imaginable than the culturally regenerated Newcastle Quayside for example, where docks and shipyards have been replaced with bars, music venues and world-renowned centres of art. While the

heritage of the maritime industries is visible in South Shields, such representations struggle to acknowledge the diverse histories and more conflictual episodes associated with moments of racial contestation and exclusion in the industry and in the township itself. This thesis does not seek to dismiss contemporary perceptions of the history of the maritime industry in the North East but rather expand and diversify the available narratives to remember and foreground the history of an ethnically diverse working class living in the North East of England in the interwar period.

When you are aware of the global history of a place such as the Mill Dam, it becomes perhaps easier to feel the immaterial presence of an often difficult and contested history. Standing in the space where racialised riots unfolded, where police arrested BAME men who would later be deported from Newcastle Central Station and where BAME communities confronted and contested the violent conditions they faced in everyday life, it becomes apparent that the presence of ‘race’ in this area is there to be felt and cannot only be explored through material remnants.

This thesis is centred upon the presence and experience of ‘race’ in the North East of England in the early twentieth century. Exploring the presence of minority ethnic communities historically, in a period where minority groups were heavily marginalised by local and national structures, has been fraught with methodological challenges. Yet in centring analysis on everyday experiences and paying attention to unreported moments, the BAME presence in North East history begins to emerge. In order to explore the presence and experience of ‘race’ across the region, three lenses – representations, conditions and agency – are used throughout the empirical research and will be outlined in more detail later in this chapter. The material uncovered speaks to an atmospheric and circulating understanding of racialised presence, as well as a material, place-based and experiential approach to racial inequality.



When one thinks of established labour history and historical representations of working people in the North East of England in the early twentieth century, the image is often dominated by white male coal miners and/or ship builders who worked hard and participated in the masculine Geordie culture of socialising in the pub afterwards (Figure 1.3).<sup>1</sup> Although the experiences of these men were central in the development of working class culture and identity in the region, the actuality of everyday life in these communities was not as homogeneous as its celebrated histories often portray. The superficial ‘whiteness’ of Geordie culture, both historically and contemporarily has been explored in detail (see Nayak, 2003). Nayak demonstrates that although the region has, albeit often problematically, ‘assumed the mantle of the homogeneous ‘white highlands’ (Nayak, 2003, p.38), when one takes a closer look at the North East region, the actualities of its ethnic diversity begins to emerge. This ‘residue of migrant history’ (Nayak, 2003, p.41), when it does emerge is not always progressive. For example, names of public houses in central Newcastle, such as ‘Blackie Boy’ in the Bigg Market, ‘hint at a nostalgic period of racial inequality’ (Nayak, 2003, p.41).

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<sup>1</sup> Advert for Newcastle Brown Ale: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SuT5sSY6svg> [date accessed: 23 December 2020]

**Figure 1.3** – Still from Newcastle Brown Ale Advert, filmed at Beamish Museum, County Durham. 2012.



In a podcast discussing Small Axe’s *Mangrove* film, which is centred on the everyday experience of racial discrimination, and even violence, in police and judiciary prosecution in Black communities in 1970s London, Professor Kehinde Andrews argues that BAME histories seldom receive attention as they either do not fit the narrative that we are comfortable with, or, they have not been exposed to the same level of academic research that white histories have (Andrews and Mckenzie-Witter, 2020). This framing complements an understanding of the ‘whiteness’ of working class histories in the North East. It further justifies the significance of revisiting and challenging established historical narratives to uncover the visible and invisible presence of ‘race’ in the region.

The North East of England in the early twentieth century was not an occupationally, ethnically and isolated homogeneous entity. Through the exportation of coal, along established trade and shipping networks, certain spaces within the region, predominantly the coastal port towns, were hubs of exchange of people and ideas, as well as goods. This led to the coastal port towns of the North East of England becoming the most ethnically diverse settlements in Britain at this time (Tabili, 2011).

This thesis asserts that historical narratives are too often containerised, for example race histories, labour histories, gender histories or class histories, when actually there is much to be gained in unbounding these rigid sub-disciplinary confines to produce and celebrate history at the intersection of these fields (Stovall, 2012). The research presented is primarily a historical geography of the presence of ‘race’ in the North East. It is centred upon foregrounding the everyday experiences of an ethnically diverse working class in order to contribute, not to the development of a history of labour or a history of race, but a more inclusive place-based history at the intersection of race, class, gender and politics in interwar Britain. The interwar years are a significant period to revisit when developing an inclusive history of the region. Not only was there an increase in organised labour activity, such as the 1926 General Strike (Laybourn, 1993) and the 1936 Jarrow Crusade (Perry, 2005), but the violent conditions of economic depression and wider atmospheres of popular racism encountered in everyday life by the working class provide a backdrop from which traditional histories of the region can be revisited and diversified.

2019 marked the centenary of the Seaport Riots which took place in nine port towns across Britain, including South Shields, with similar riots taking place across Europe (Perry, 2019) and the Americas (Evans, 1994). The 1919 Seaport Riots have received substantial attention in the wider historiography (Jenkinson, 2009), yet these moments of sensationalised and racialised disorder were not isolated experiences that were simply the result of the sum of popular racism and economic depression. The riot in South Shields was embedded into the everyday experiences of an ethnically diverse working class and, as this thesis will argue, should not be simplistically thought of as representative of the daily experiences of BAME communities in the region.

Centenaries offer the opportunity to critically revisit such moments and as Stovall (2017, n.p.) argues:

‘Historians often choose major anniversaries as ways of reassessing and mobilizing interest in the past... therefore, the study of anniversaries serves both to facilitate an intensive, microhistorical study of a given event, and to mobilize and benefit from public interest in that event and in history in general.’

In this regard, centenaries provide crucial opportunities, as Wilson (2010, p.165) demonstrates in his work on the bicentenary of the abolition of slavery in Britain, ‘where the previously ignored, suppressed or forgotten histories’ can be revisited and this line of thought is relevant not only when reconsidering 1919 but the wider histories of BAME experiences in the early twentieth century.

Throughout 2019, several reflective public-facing responses revisiting the 1919 riots have been prevalent, including the Great War to Race Riots walks in Liverpool and wider media coverage of other sites of rioting such as Cardiff (From Great War to Race Riots, 2019; Museum of Cardiff, 2019). In March 2019, the local North East branch of the Historical Association organised a public panel discussion at the South Shields Museum which included Leyla Al-Sayadi, founder of the Yemeni Project,<sup>2</sup> Dr Jacqueline Jenkinson, prominent historian of the 1919 riots, my supervisor, Dr Paul Griffin, and myself. Presenting my work alongside Leyla Al-Sayadi’s was a moment where I really noticed the salience and relevance of my research in contemporary terms. Throughout the discussion we argued the need for more inclusive histories of working class communities in the region, and especially histories that include BAME perspectives in more than just times of violence or unrest.

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<sup>2</sup> The Yemeni Project, launched in 2016, is a community developed website which collates the memories, experiences and histories of the South Shields Yemeni Community. <http://www.theyemeniproject.org.uk/> [date accessed: 15 November 2020]

Associating particular community histories with violent events is likely to cause unease with contemporary communities as has been stressed by The Yemeni Project in South Shields (The Yemeni Project, 2019). When developing the Yemeni Project, Leyla Al-Sayadi wrote:

‘When I started this project nearly 2 years ago, I was completely unaware of the journey I would be taking. Aiming to put together what has seemed an increasingly forgotten history has been an exciting and at times daunting task.... I believe this history is something for all of South Shields and the North East of England to take pride in ... The integration of Yemeni seamen into South Shields was not without ups and downs and this site has not ignored that. The end result, however, is that united we have stood and in 2015 I believe this issue as a relevant as it has ever been.’ (Leyla Al-Sayadi, founder of The Yemeni Project, n.d.)

As her comments here suggest, the experiences of BAME communities in the North East can be viewed as an ‘increasingly forgotten history’ and one certainly ‘not without its ups and downs’ and this is something that I have been persistently reminded of when researching this thesis and presenting my work to both academic and public audiences. Methodologically, this thesis draws upon various archives and source material in order to uncover everyday experiences, centre the BAME presence and essentially ‘turn up the volume’ of these marginalised histories. As will be explored in detail in Chapter 3, I am not doing this by reading against the archival grain (Stoler, 2010), but rather using primarily ‘white’ archives to legitimately draw out BAME experiences. This will allow an inclusive history of the working class in the North East of England to develop and contribute to existing scholarship, not by creating a history about racialised violence or disorder, but about the everyday presence of ‘race’ in working class communities, including experiences of conflict and also going beyond such divisive characterisations.

The traditional histories of race and class in the region (Jenkinson, 2009; Lawless, 1995; Tabili, 2011) are revisited through a historical geography lens. The historical geography approach complements and challenges narrative and chronological histories by employing a theoretical framework drawn from across the social sciences, to not only revisit events and characterise historical scenes but also begin to think beyond the historical moment to encompass less visible processes and experiences in everyday life.

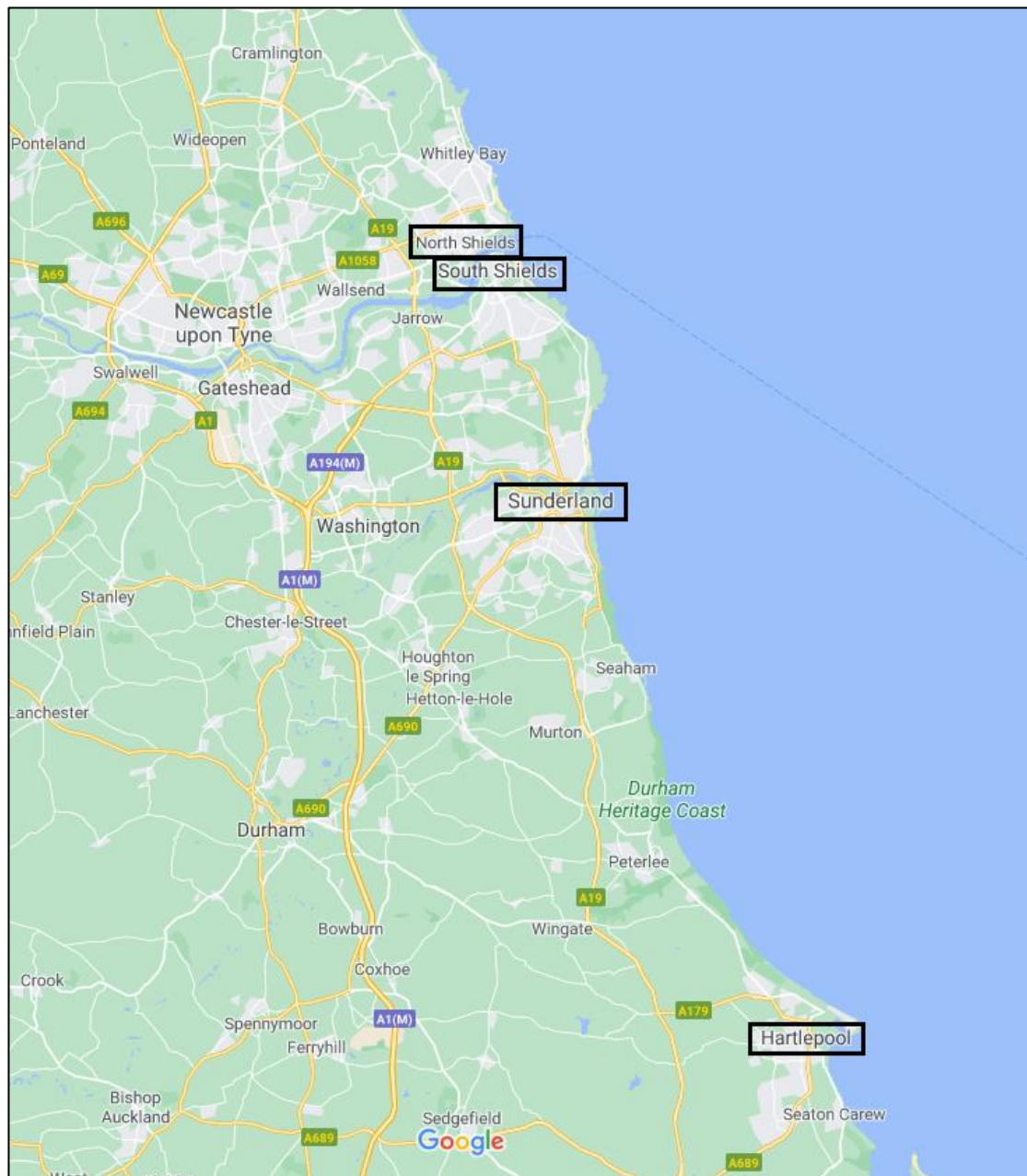
This introductory chapter will continue with a brief contextual overview of the socioeconomic and political landscape of the North East of England in the interwar period, 1919-1939. The chapter will then go on to outline the key arguments, objectives and research questions that have motivated this thesis. A structural overview of the contents of the thesis will be developed to conclude this chapter to provide an insight into the conceptual and methodological approach followed in this thesis.

## **1.2 – The North East of England in the interwar period, 1919-1939**

In the early twentieth century, South Shields was the fifth largest port town in Britain, alongside Cardiff, Liverpool, Glasgow and London, and was home to a significant maritime community since the creation of a Roman settlement in the second century AD (Tabili, 2011). The other substantial port towns in the region in this period were located in North Shields, Sunderland and Hartlepool (Figure 1.4). The North East port towns were largely reliant on the exportation of goods from the Northern industries such as coal and steel. Port town settlements were the most ethnically diverse settlements in Britain in 1919, following mass immigration of

BAME workers from across the British Empire during the First World War (Tabili, 2011). Much of this thesis focuses on the port towns of the North East. However, it must be remembered that these were not bounded entities. Rather, they were situated in complex regional, national and international networks which preceded the interwar period and shaped life for decades following.

**Figure 1.4 – Map of North East Port Towns (Google Maps)**



This is not a locality study in a sense that it restricts analysis to one population, in one place, at one time. This thesis centres analysis on the relationship between people from within, across and beyond the North East of England and the relational landscapes – both material and immaterial – through which they lived their everyday lives. As Massey (2005) has argued, space is never static but rather in constant development – a product of multiple conditions and encounters navigated in everyday life. The experiences foregrounded in this thesis demonstrate that presence of ‘race’ in the North East in the interwar period was inherently connected and relational in space and time.

That being said, this thesis has a temporal remit, 1919-1939, for largely pragmatic reasons. The interwar period in Britain was an era of significant change. The transition from wartime to peacetime was marred by economic depression and challenging socioeconomic conditions. In addition, the everyday lives of the working class were influenced by local, national and international political agendas. The decision to begin analysis in 1919 and end in 1939, clearly situates this work around the significant global events of the First and Second World War. Indeed, the First World War led to increased BAME migration from across the British Empire primarily to overcome the severe labour deficit in the maritime industries (Jenkinson, 2017). Nevertheless, the years 1919-1939 did not exist in isolation, and this thesis stresses the relationally constructed temporalities both preceding and following the interwar period. Crucially, the thesis acknowledges that the legacies of slavery and imperialism, spanning centuries before 1919, were integral to the everyday experience of BAME communities living in the North East of England in the interwar period.

One example of the relational nature of temporalities and a globalised notion of space can be seen at the North East Coast Exhibition (NECE) held on Newcastle’s



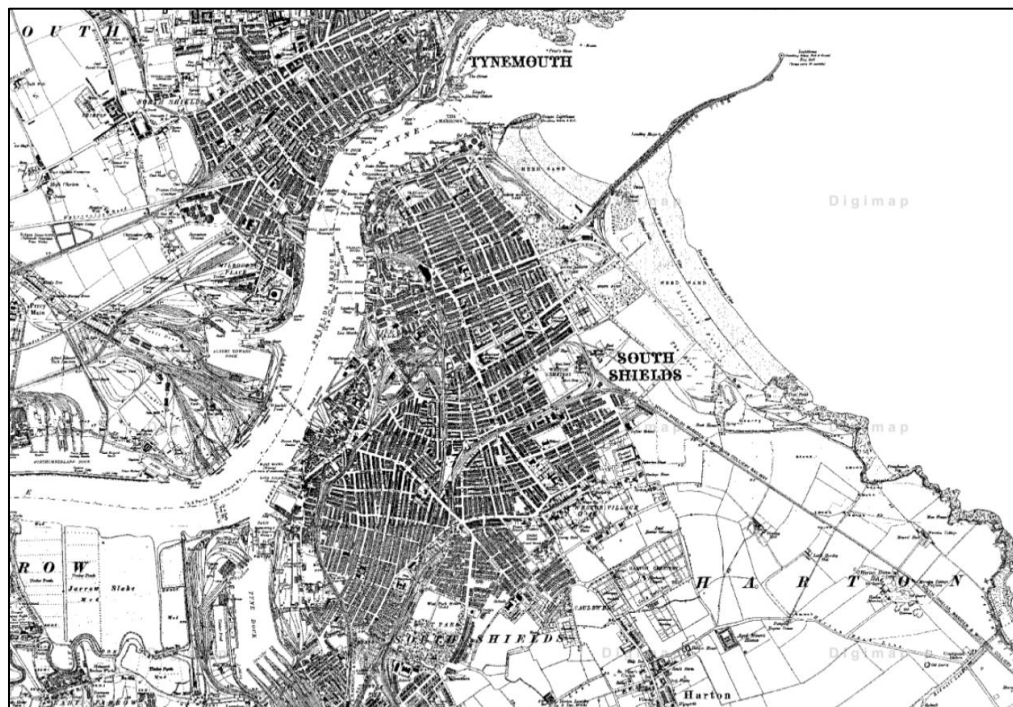
Town Moor in the summer of 1929 which provided the opportunity for thousands of visitors from across the region and beyond to encounter representations of racial difference in an embodied and banal way as part of a celebration of Northern industry and empire. One of the most popular ‘amusements’ at the NECE was an ‘African Village’ which reconstructed the ‘everyday lives’ of ‘colonial natives’ in Newcastle City. The significance, mobility and co-constitutive nature of encounters with these representations of racial difference will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2. A relational understanding of the space-time geographies of everyday life through a historical geography lens suggests that the experiences of those living in South Shields, North Shields, Sunderland and Hartlepool are not obscure or inconsequential, but rather are part of a global history of the experience of ‘race’ in the early twentieth century, through spectacles such as that within the exhibition noted above as well as the more mundane daily experiences within port towns. This thesis suggests that this relational approach to understanding the everyday is integral in enhancing our understanding and experience of ‘race’ and racialisation in modern society.

Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the port towns of the North East, especially South Shields, experienced mass transformation and rapid population growth as a result of increased demand for the exportation of products from across the region. For example, the maps below (Figure 1.5) demonstrate visually the growth of the township. Throughout the early twentieth century, and more prominently during the First World War, there was rapid migration from across Britain, Europe and the British Empire where workers sought to take advantage of the abundance of work which was largely available in Merchant Shipping and its supporting industries (Jenkinson, 2017).

**Figure 1.5 – South Shields 1860 and 1920 (Historic OS Maps)**



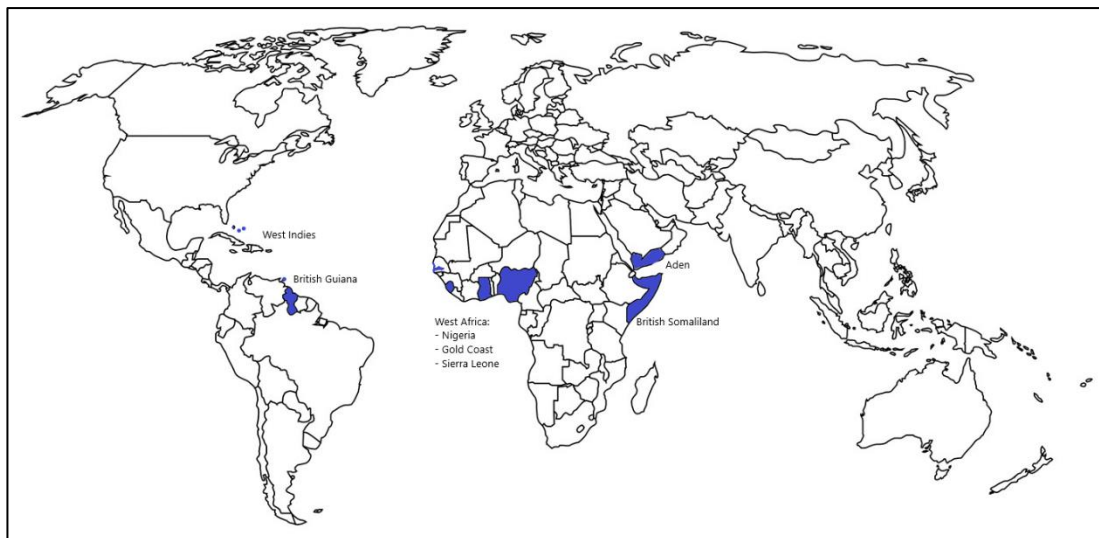
1860



1920

Due to the ethnic diversity present and demography of the region during the period of inquiry, this thesis largely centres analysis on the experiences of migrants from the Port of Aden, the Aden Protectorate, the West Indies and West Africa who were employed in, or connected to, the Merchant Shipping Industry (Figure 1.6). The majority of these men were British Subjects or British Protected Persons and were therefore eligible to work and reside in Britain through their imperial subject status. BAME seafarers began to settle in the region in the early twentieth century. The first ‘Arab Boarding House’ in South Shields being licensed to Ali Said in August 1909.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 1.6** – Geographical approximation of origins of BAME Seafarers living in the North East of England in the interwar period



The migration of thousands of BAME British Colonial Seafarers to British port towns, such as South Shields, was a strategic response by the British government to combat the severe deficit in labour that was being experienced in the Merchant Shipping Industry from the outset of the First World War (Jenkinson, 2017). During the First World War the number of BAME seafarers in port towns across the region,

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<sup>3</sup> South Shields Corporation. Minutes of proceedings. Watch Committee Report. Vol.28, July - December 1909, p.257.

and indeed across Britain, increased rapidly. Once the war ended, the global demand for trade reduced and thousands of men were demobilised from the armed forces. Unemployment levels increased dramatically in the Merchant Shipping Industry and the port towns in which they were a primary employer (Jenkinson, 2017). The positive flux of an ethnically diverse workforce led to a racialisation of employment practices and social conditions in the port towns of the North East which have contributed towards decades of contestation between white and BAME seafarers over the right to work and reside in Britain. These experiences will be explored throughout this thesis. The analysis is centred on the interwar period, 1919-1939, and acknowledges that many of the political structures present at that time have much longer histories and the repercussions of events and experiences in the interwar period shaped future decades of inter-ethnic working class relations.

The 1920s and 1930s were marred by severe economic depression, institutionally racist policies and wider socioeconomic tensions which all intersected in ethnically diverse working class communities in specific ways. Although there are some significant works on South Shields in this period (Lawless, 1995; Tabili, 2011) they largely provide a narrative account of only one community in one locality. This thesis takes a relational approach to enhance these narrative histories by situating historical experiences alongside current debates on representations, conditions and agency in order to develop a more inclusive history of the working class across the North East of England. This thesis complements and contributes to the literature that is available, by critically revisiting narrative histories to further develop a knowledge of the experience of ‘race’ in the region and how this experience unfolded in everyday life. This approach allows recognised, as well as less known everyday experiences – such as circulating representations of racial difference in colonial exhibitions,

advertisements and the media – to be considered alongside the actions of key actors and the influence of critical spaces and places all situated within relational landscapes at the local, regional, national and international level. This combination of circulatory representations alongside the lived experience of ‘race’ and racism is a central contribution of the thesis.

### **1.3– Historicising the presence of ‘race’ in the North East: thesis aims**

The everyday experiences of BAME communities living in South Shields in the early twentieth century were ruptured with moments of extreme violence and contestation which has shaped how this thesis explores the presence of ‘race’ in the region. Perhaps two of the most prominent moments, which have been significantly explored in the wider historiography, were the 1919 and 1930 South Shields riots. As these moments are significant to the unfolding of this thesis as a whole, they are briefly introduced below to contextualise the discussion for any reader unfamiliar with the associated histories.

In February 1919, violence broke out between BAME and white seafarers on the Mill Dam in South Shields. Tensions in the town had been building for several months due to exclusionary employment conditions alongside wider forms of racism, economic depression and the socioeconomic challenges associated with the transition from wartime to peacetime (Jenkinson, 2009; Lawless, 1995). On the 4<sup>th</sup> February 1919, outside of the South Shields Shipping Office, an Arab crew was refused employment. According the reports, one of the affected men protested the injustice and J.B. Fye, a Cooks and Stewards Union Official, confronted the protester and

stated, “You black bastards this ship is not for you!” (Jenkinson, 2009). The Arab responded by slapping Fye and violence broke out among the onlooking crowd (Lawless, 1995). The violence lasted throughout the day and spread from the Mill Dam into adjacent areas such as Holborn. The Durham Light Infantry were called in to quell the riot and eight Arabs were arrested (Jenkinson, 2009).

Eleven years later, in August 1930, a similar level of violence was experienced between BAME and white communities on the Mill Dam in South Shields. This incident again was connected to the exclusionary conditions prevalent in the merchant shipping industry and the racism within the National Union of Seamen (NUS) and wider community. It was a moment where BAME seafarers protested alongside members of the Seamen’s Minority Movement (SMM) to contest the exclusionary conditions being imposed in the industry through the newly implemented discriminatory project, the Rota System, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6 (3.2). According to newspaper coverage, on the morning of 2<sup>nd</sup> August white and BAME seafarers congregated on the Mill Dam in search of employment. A call for an engine room crew was made and a picket-line of SMM members and BAME seamen formed in front of the NUS offices. The crowd became agitated and when several white seafarers attempted to sign on, a rush was made, and a riot ensued. Sixteen Arabs were arrested and later deported for their alleged involvement in instigating and participating in the riot (Lawless, 1995).

These episodes are briefly introduced here but explored in detail throughout the thesis. Although these riots were central to BAME experiences in the region, this thesis explicitly expands analysis away from these moments to uncover the wider webs of everyday experiences and encounters in which they were situated. In order to achieve this, the thesis explores everyday experiences through three distinct cuts –

representations, conditions and agency – to centre marginalised experiences and develop a more inclusive account of working class experiences in the North East. In this regard, certain central historical sources and moments may be revisited throughout the thesis and explored from alternate perspectives in order to demonstrate the multiple and dynamic nature of the everyday experience. This approach indicates how the same moment, such as the riots above, can be understood in different ways depending on the means through which you understand and explore everyday life. Such a framing is crucial for disrupting a singular understanding of an event or linear understanding of causality for scenes such as those discussed above (see also Griffin and Martin, 2021). It also provides an analysis that engages with a longer trajectory of experience that works within and beyond the events noted above.

Several narrative histories considering the social and cultural integration of migrants into the North East communities in which they lived (Carr, 2005; Jenkinson, 2009; Lawless, 1995; Tabili, 1994a, 2011), and their precarious position in times of industrial dispute (Byrne, 1994) exist. However, there is a marked absence of sustained analysis of the everyday experiences of ‘race’ within the ethnically diverse working class communities across the region. Much of the historiography centres upon exceptional episodes of racialised disorder, such as the 1919 and 1930 ‘race’ riots in South Shields (Byrne, 1994; Jenkinson, 2009). Alternatives dedicate analysis to one community (Lawless, 1995), or multiple migrant communities living within one locality (Tabili, 1994a, 2011).

This thesis seeks to revisit these historical narratives with a critical gaze, employing contemporary debates from across the social sciences, to reconceptualise the intersecting geographies of race, class and politics that were experienced by BAME individuals and communities living in the port towns of the North East of

England in the interwar period. By expanding analysis of the everyday experiences of BAME individuals from one community in one locality (Lawless, 1995; Tabili, 2011), and adopting a relational understanding of place-based histories, it is possible to produce a more inclusive account which recognises and considers the heterogeneity of the working class in the region. A relational framing which is attentive to the intersectional nature of the everyday experience demonstrates the complexities of everyday life and the dynamic experience of 'race' in working class communities in early twentieth century Britain. This approach has begun to allow questions to be addressed that would be less feasible at a national scale and allows for more inclusive place-based histories to be developed and be embedded into the wider history of North East labour and society.

Far too often race histories and labour histories are not sufficiently discussed in dialogue but rather confined to separate analysis (Stovall, 2012). In response, this thesis challenges how class histories and race histories are conceptualised and places the BAME experience as central to, rather than on the periphery of, analysis. By acknowledging the agency of migrant workers as members of the wider working class and their ability to shape and determine their own physical, cultural and political environments (Herod, 2001), it becomes clear that 'race' was a central constitutive element to the formation of the British working class (Virdee, 2014) and consequently to inter and intra-class contestation. Even though the mobilities of BAME seafarers were constituted in subordinate ways, they were active in the formation of a working-class consciousness as they contested and challenged the socio-economic and political conditions that were imposed upon them (Featherstone, 2012). There has been a shift in labour history from the late 1990s onwards away from seeing class as the be-all and end-all of labour studies and acknowledging that the working class shared and



interacted with multiple identities dependant on social, economic, political and temporal contexts (Navickas, 2011). The central argument of this thesis has been developed by considering literatures of encounter, conditions and agency in dialogue with each other and in employing conceptual debates with the historical material available. The following three key research questions have subsequently emerged:

1. How were representations of racial difference experienced and negotiated within and through everyday encounters in the North East of England?
2. To what extent did 'exceptional episodes' of racialised disorder intersect with the geographies and conditions of everyday life within ethnically diverse working class communities in interwar Britain?
3. How did everyday moments of resistance and agency contribute to the lives of ethnically diverse communities across the North East of England in the early twentieth century?

In order to address these questions, the empirical chapters are organised thematically, foregrounding analysis on representations, conditions and agency. The overarching empirical and conceptual arguments cut across the thesis in its entirety. Each research question contains 'the everyday' as this is the central conceptual tool which has been employed throughout the thesis. The everyday will be explored conceptually in detail in Chapter 2 but as will be demonstrated, the everyday has been captured and utilised in multifarious ways in each chapter to bring seemingly disparate elements and experiences together in order to access and foreground moments, experiences and stories which have, thus far, not received sustained attention in the wider historiography. This thesis suggests that all three 'cuts' are constitutive of a historical approach to race and racism as an everyday experience. This introduction will now provide a brief overview of the thesis structure.

## 1.4 – Outline of the thesis

Following this introductory chapter, **Chapter 2** develops the conceptual framework and theoretical engagements of this thesis. The multi-disciplinary nature of this thesis speaks to a variety of fields and subfields across the humanities and social sciences and utilises literatures of race, racism, racialisation, encounter, agency and solidarity alongside one another to underpin arguments concerning representations as a form of encounter, the influence of conditions on everyday life and the significance of everyday agency through a historical geography lens. The chapter builds on existing work on ethnic minority communities in the North East of England in the early twentieth century (Jenkinson, 2009; Lawless, 1995; Tabili, 1994a; 2011), and brings these narrative histories into dialogue with more theoretical works in the social sciences, such as the geographies of everyday life and intersectionality, to overarchingly frame this thesis contribution. The chapter will demonstrate the multidisciplinary capabilities of historical geography and how it can bring seemingly disconnected concepts within the humanities and social sciences together to create an innovative framework founded upon an intersectional understanding of the everyday to revisit historical narratives.

**Chapter 3** reflects on the extensive use of archival materials throughout this thesis and the methodology that has been employed in order to uncover everyday BAME experiences in the North East of England in the interwar period. The chapter begins with an in-depth review of current methodological approaches in historical geography which are attentive to archival absences, partiality and power. There is a growing body of scholarship in historical geography which acknowledges the challenges faced by researchers who are reliant on fragmentary archival collections.

Archival absences, or initially perceived absences, have been a significant focus throughout this thesis and I have actively sought out material which brings attention to marginalised voices and ‘turns up the volume’ of their testimony. The chapter will then go on to outline the contribution that can be made when including an intersectionality framing in historical research. It is argued that following this methodology allows for a deepened understanding of how, and why, BAME experiences are present, absent and/or marginalised in the archival record. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the intricacies of my own research practice. An assortment of material has been used in this thesis from Colonial Office and Home Office files at The National Archives, to local civil files, photographs and Seafaring Union documents. This chapter contributes to ongoing research in historical geography which explores archival fragments and absences. It makes a clear call for more work to be done in this area and foregrounds the merits of using a methodology which has a clear theoretical engagement when researching marginalised histories; developing, and sharing, practices that focus on subdued or constrained voices and ‘turn up the volume’ of their testimony.

The empirical analysis of this thesis begins in earnest in **Chapter 4** which develops an understanding of how BAME individuals were represented as distinctly ‘other’ from white society and the impact this had on everyday life. The chapter considers how a banal and atmospherically circulating imperialised knowledge, permeated the everyday experiences in Britain in the early twentieth century through a variety of affectual encounters with racialised representations of difference. The chapter explores the grounding of these representations in the context of North East England. A variety of examples of representations will be used, which build upon literary (Said, 1978) and media (Hall, 2013) representations, expanding analysis to

colonial exhibitions and imperial product advertising reflective of everyday life. The inter-textual (Hall, 2013) and atmospheric (Closs Stephens, 2016) nature of representations of race in interwar Britain furthers the acknowledgement of the interrelationship between representations, knowledge, feeling and action (Owen, 2012) in ethnically diverse working class communities. Understanding engagement with representations as a type of encounter is relatively underdeveloped in the literatures of encounter, which tend to focus on more grounded, embodied and interactional experiences (For example: Askins, 2016; Amin, 2002; Clayton, 2009; Nayak, 2012; Wise and Velayutham, 2009). This chapter contributes to work on inclusive place-based histories by iterating the diverse perspectives that can be gained when representations are understood as encounters and their centrality. Crucially, for thinking through such atmospheres as everyday encounters, these representations are then considered alongside the seemingly more grounded materials discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

**Chapter 5** explores embodied encounters in the ethnically diverse working class communities across the North East, bringing together circulating representations and spatialised experiences to produce an account which is indicative of the everyday. The chapter contributes an understanding that the politics of place in inter-war port towns, and the wider regions in which they were situated, provided unequal conditions which shaped everyday experiences. Furthering an understanding of settlement specific exclusionary conditions, the chapter will go on to unpack everyday inter-ethnic encounters through a spectrum of behaviours in and against domestic spaces, such as Arab Boarding Houses, to argue that imperial and racialised ideologies permeated the actuality of lived experiences in specific ways. The chapter will discuss courts, policing and the judicial system through a lens of the everyday and argue that law and

order in interwar port settlements was organised and responded to racialised representations of everyday life. Building upon Sarat and Kearns' (2009, p.8) suggestion that 'law does not just happen to the everyday; it is produced and reproduced in everyday encounters', the chapter will articulate how BAME everyday experiences of law and the judicial system reveals how everyday conditions and everyday encounters intersected in everyday life.

**Chapter 6** revisits the circulating representations and exclusionary conditions discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 to demonstrate how such experiences were contested in everyday encounters between BAME and white communities. BAME individuals and communities experienced multifarious forms of discrimination, othering and exclusionary conditions in their everyday lives in interwar Britain. These challenging experiences and circulating representations of otherness were not simply accepted and endured by marginalised groups living across North East England. The chapter draws significantly on the lens of the everyday to outline how exclusionary conditions and experiences were engaged with and contested by BAME and white communities together in their everyday lives. The chapter engages with more mundane and 'quiet' everyday actions in order to contribute to evolving debates on agency at the intersection of political, labour and historical geography (Emery, 2018; Hastings and Cumbers, 2019; Martin, 2021; McFarland, 2017; Newbery, 2013; Peck, 2018). Essentially, this chapter argues for thinking beyond a simplistic combination of labour and race histories, as well as simplistic characterisation of resistance/domination, with a more nuanced approach to stress the plurality within place-based events and the intersection of race and class (Massey, 2005). Through foregrounding smaller, less visible and not always successful acts, and in expanding a conceptualising of agency away from the worker, the workplace and the working day, this chapter argues that

everyday acts should not be diminished but rather seen as purposeful and central in sustaining BAME communities and being enacted alongside more transformative and collective acts of resistant agency.

**Chapter 7** concludes this thesis. It brings together the theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions made in each chapter. This thesis not only moves beyond the traditional historical narratives of the region but stresses the importance and salience of revisiting minority histories through a critical lens and ‘turning up the volume’ on BAME everyday experiences and histories. The chapter will conclude with a call for the development of more inclusive, public and usable pasts and reinforces the contemporary relevance of how an awareness of minority histories strengthens our understanding and negotiation of everyday life in multicultural Britain today. Overall, this thesis provides a distinct contribution not only to developing more inclusive place-based histories of the working class in the North East but stresses the merits of undertaking such research through the lens of the everyday.

## **Chapter 2 – Conceptualising the everyday experiences of an ethnically diverse working class in twentieth century Britain**

### **2.1 – Introduction**

Hostile, and often violent, inter-ethnic relationships have punctuated the history of the working class in Britain throughout the twentieth century. Whilst larger politically and economically disruptive racialised events have received great scholarly attention (Amin, 2005; Evans, 1980; Jenkinson, 2009; Rowe, 1998), longer histories through everyday and more mundane experiences are often overlooked. The multi-disciplinary nature of this thesis speaks to a variety of fields and subfields across the humanities and social sciences and this chapter brings together literatures of race, racism, racialisation, encounter, agency and solidarity to conceptually frame the engagement with archival material throughout this thesis.

This chapter builds on existing works on ethnic minority communities in the North East of England in the early twentieth century (Jenkinson, 2009; Lawless, 1995; Tabili, 1994a, 2011), and brings these narrative histories into dialogue with more conceptual works in the social sciences. This provides the theoretical framing of this thesis and contributes to the development of an inclusive place-based history of the region. The result is not necessarily a more representative history, as the archival challenges faced when attempting to uncover marginalised experiences are significant (discussed in Chapter 3). Rather than ‘representative’ this thesis seeks to ‘turn up the volume’ of marginalised experiences, voices and perspectives and foreground them in the creation of a history which is sensitive to the marginality of their experiences and indicative of wider everyday experiences of a multi-ethnic working class. This is significant in a region where working class histories are often centred upon the

dominantly white male industries of coalmining, metalworking and ship building (Colls, 2000; Green and Pollard, 2007). This critical approach to representation suggests a more nuanced and subtle approach to authorship on historical narratives where events and experiences are not over interpreted or imposed.

There has though, been an increased body of work that stresses the marginal nature of the black presence in British history and begins to draw attention to minority experiences within a multi-ethnic working class (Bressey, 2010; Eddo-Lodge, 2018; Fryer, 1984; Olusoga, 2016; Tabili, 2011; Virdee, 2014). Stovall (2012) stresses the need to produce inclusive histories and does so by focussing attention on the examinations of the intersections between class, race and gender. Understandings of ‘race’<sup>4</sup>, racism, marginalisation and exclusion in contemporary Britain are rooted in historical legacies and webs of power (Dwyer and Bressey, 2008). The BAME experience is central to developing an inclusive understanding of the working class experience, whether that be through foregrounding experiences of exclusion within trade unions or uncovering the intricacies of everyday encounter among working people, for example. This thesis suggests that to marginalise such perspectives demonstrates an ignorance to the role of racism and ‘race’ in the creation and development of the British working class (Bressey, 2010).

There is still much work to be done in order to create an inclusive account of the everyday experience of working people, and therefore it is not enough to engage with only one body of literature, but rather critically revisit and understand labour histories, labour geographies and wider social histories in dialogue with one another

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<sup>4</sup>This thesis uses a combination of ‘race’ and race dependant on whether the socially constructed nature of ‘race’ is being foregrounded or thinking about the more material and historically tangible aspects of race as a lived process or experience.



(Mitchell, 1996). Typically, histories of race and histories of labour have not been considered or developed in conversation with each other but rather confined to separate spheres of analysis (Stovall, 2012). The central thread of this thesis is to foreground analysis on these complex intersections.

This chapter begins with a short discussion of two significant, overarching theoretical concepts which are developed throughout the thesis: geographies of everyday life and intersectionality. Following this, multiple literatures concerning representations, encounters and processes of othering will be explored in order to frame geographies of everyday life and intersectionality as processes experienced through an atmospheric and relational lens. The language of atmosphere has been employed to attempt to capture the material and immaterial presence and experiences of 'race' in everyday life in early twentieth century Britain. Through engaging with atmospheres and the presence of 'race' in a historical context, it becomes evident that, as Closs Stephens (2016, p.182) has argued in her work on atmospheres of nationalism, 'national feelings cannot be traced back to a single sovereign source but rather emanate from multiple constituencies as part of a nebulous, diffuse atmosphere'. Understanding representations as an encounter (through circulating and atmospheric influences such as advertising and exhibitions) is relatively underdeveloped in the literatures of encounter. Indeed, these literatures tend to focus on more grounded, embodied and interactional experiences (For example: Askins, 2016; Amin, 2002; Clayton, 2009; Nayak, 2012; Wise and Velayutham, 2009), which contributes to framing encounters through a less embodied and representational lens. An atmospheric awareness is significant throughout this thesis, as this is fundamentally a geographical study. The chapter will also conceptualise the co-constitutive nature of everyday exclusionary conditions and the racialisation of

disorder and especially foreground the duality of the racialisation of space and the spatialisation of race (Lipsitz, 2007).

The chapter will culminate by expanding the dialogue of representation, encounter and racialisation to encompass everyday agency and contestation. BAME working people should not be seen as passive victims of exclusionary conditions (Kelliher, 2020; Tabili, 1994a). As Ashe et al. (2016, p.35) note, there is a ‘long history of racialised minorities collectively fighting back against violence and harassment through physical resistance, political mobilisation and cultural action’. This thesis argues that by bringing literature of racialisation and encounter into conversation with conceptualisations of everyday agency distinctly contributes to evolving debates on agency at the intersection of labour and historical geography (Emery, 2018; Hastings and Cumbers, 2019; Martin, 2021; McFarland, 2017; Newbery, 2013; Peck, 2018).

As will be established, there is much to be gained in revisiting existing narrative historical accounts of BAME communities in the North East of England throughout the early twentieth century (Jenkinson, 2009; Lawless, 1995; Tabili, 2011) with a critical historical geography lens to explore the contribution that can be made in inter-disciplinary research. It will be demonstrated how seemingly disconnected concepts within the humanities and social sciences can be brought together to create an innovative framework, revisit historical narratives and contribute to the development of an inclusive account of the everyday experiences of an ethnically diverse working class.

## **2.2 – Overarching themes**

Although multifarious works (such as racialisation, representations, conditions and agency) are explored later in detail, I wish to immediately foreground two key concepts which have profoundly shaped how the intersection of race, class and politics in the North East of England throughout the interwar period has been approached. Here, I will now briefly outline my understanding of ‘geographies of everyday life’ and ‘intersectionality’ before employing them in more specific and applied ways. Bringing these two key concepts together from the outset, not only contributes to the conceptual framing of the thesis but has also facilitated how archival material has been utilised in the empirical chapters.

### **2.2.1 – Geographies of everyday life**

The concept of the ‘everyday’ attempts to appreciate the significance of routine actions, behaviours and experiences whilst detracting from a sole focus on exceptional moments (For example: Bennett and Watson, 2003; Clayton, 2018; Essed, 2008; Mitchell, 2000; Pink, 2012; Scott, 2009; Wise and Velayutham, 2009). Despite the everyday being a challenging concept to define (Clayton, 2009; Highmore, 2002), it can be used as a tool and mechanism through which we can begin to develop an inclusive account of the experiences of a multi-ethnic working class where marginalised experiences and the ‘daily negotiation of ethnic difference’ (Amin, 2002, p.959) become central to analysis.

The multiplicity of everyday life ensures that seemingly unremarkable actions, behaviours, routines, relationships and experiences are understood as providing an

insight into how difference – ethnic, racial, religious, sociocultural – is a lived experience (Wise and Velayutham, 2009). This is the definition of the everyday upon which the analysis presented in this thesis is developed. There is a need to ‘take the mundane seriously’ (Back, 2015, p.821) and pay attention to the wider spectrum of experiences that make up everyday life (Neal and Murji, 2015). Such foregrounding of the everyday provides an opportunity for revisiting place-based histories, particularly with an emphasis upon race and intersectionality.

Moments of exceptionality, for example the 1919 Seaport Riots, have become central to the popular understandings of BAME histories in Britain during the early twentieth century (Evans, 1980; Jenkinson, 2009). These moments are often presented as exceptional, isolated and particular episodes of racialised disorder (Byrne, 1977). Nevertheless, the perceived ‘exceptionality’ of these moments overplays the spontaneity of the event and perhaps pays less attention to the wider local, national and global webs of experiences and dissent that they were situated in (Griffin and Martin, 2021). As Highmore (2002, p.3) suggests ‘the non-everyday (the exceptional) is there to be found in the heart of the everyday’. An unbounded and fluid understanding of the everyday (Highmore, 2002; Neal and Murji, 2015; Robinson, 2015) will be used as a conceptual tool throughout this thesis to develop an inclusive account of the experiences of BAME individuals living and working in the North East of England in the interwar period.

Later in this chapter, the everyday will be explored in multiple ways and in dialogue with a range of other literatures. For instance, inter-ethnic encounters, representations, racism, agency and the racialisation of disorder all took place within the arenas of everyday life and will be unpacked theoretically. The significance of the geographies of everyday life in this thesis, and its usefulness as a means of uncovering

the BAME presence in the archival record, perhaps will indicate how widespread ‘race’ – as a social category and as a material experience – was within early twentieth century Britain. This awareness is central when revising historical narratives to develop inclusive place-based histories. The challenges of employing an everyday approach to archival research will be explored methodologically in Chapter 3, whilst the practical application of the everyday is present across the three empirical chapters.

### **2.2.2 – Intersectionality**

The second conceptual tool which profoundly shapes this thesis is intersectionality. Thirty years ago, Kimberlé Crenshaw, an American legal scholar, first coined the term intersectionality in order to explain the precarious and unique position African American women were in because of both their race and gender (Crenshaw, 1989). Rather than supporting dominant approaches, which tended to approach discrimination along a single-axis or additive framework, Crenshaw (1989) argued that discrimination faced by African American women was intersectional, that is, dependant on overlapping and co-constitutional aspects. This work has been seminal in conceptualising discrimination as built upon multiple interlocking factors.

Although the roots of intersectionality are to be found in American anti-racist feminist scholarship, and it is important for those employing intersectional analysis to acknowledge this (Hopkins, 2019), the theory has been utilised across vast disciplinary and geographical fields.<sup>5</sup> Crenshaw (1991, p.1296) suggests that ‘intersectionality

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<sup>5</sup> See Hopkins, 2019, for an in-depth review of the multiple applications, and future potential applications, of intersectional analysis across the social sciences.

might be more broadly useful as a way of mediating the tension between assertions of multiple identity and the ongoing necessity of group politics'. Intersectionality is far from a contained entity, but rather a conceptual tool which can be employed in order to enhance understandings of experiences which are centred around multiple, interlocking and intersectional identity politics (Carbado et al., 2013). There is a need for the reader to understand what intersectionality is and what it can do in order to develop a framework through which it complements and strengthens the empirical analysis in this thesis (Carbado et al., 2013; Hopkins, 2019).

Intersectionality enhances the understanding of the marginalisation and everyday experiences of BAME individuals living in interwar Britain through an attentiveness to the cross-cutting, plural and partial nature of their identities and how such processes shape interactions with the spaces in which people lived and worked. Yet it is important to understand that intersectionality is far from a static and stable lens of analysis but sensitive to temporal, spatial, socioeconomic, political and historical influences. Yuval-Davis (2015) develops the concept of 'situated intersectionality' to stress the issues of translocality, transcalarity and transtemporality and their need to be contextualised in intersectional analysis. Yuval-Davis (2015, p.95) states that in her approach:

'Issues of translocality – i.e. the ways particular categories of social divisions have different meanings – and often different relative power – in the different spaces in which the analysed social relations take place; of transcalarity – i.e. the ways different social divisions have often different meanings and power when we examine them in small-scale households or neighbourhoods, in particular cities, states, regions and globally; and of transtemporality – i.e. how these meanings and power change historically and even in different points in people's life cycle.'

Yuval-Davis' (2015) understanding is central to employing intersectionality as a situated discourse, sensitive and receptive to a wide range of spatially and temporally

contingent factors. This awareness of situated intersectionality has proved to be a significant influence throughout this thesis, as will be demonstrated in the methodology and empirical chapters. In interwar Britain, BAME individuals and communities experienced exclusion, marginalisation and racialisation in different ways at different moments, in different spaces and through different social actors, all dependant on wider influencing factors. It is this plurality that the thesis aims to attend to in its efforts to ‘turn up the volume’ of marginalised experiences.

Although intersectionality has received significant attention in social and political geography (For example: Bilge, 2013; Hopkins, 2019; Valentine, 2007; Walby et al., 2012), its application in historical geography has been somewhat limited (although see Brown and Yaffe, 2017; Kelliher, 2017). There is much to be gained in integrating more intersectional analysis in historical geography. Kelliher (2018) notes that conceptualising intersectionality and historical geographies of solidarity, for example, in conversation with one another could support the development of an approach which is more sensitive to the ‘dynamics of power, privilege, and oppression at work in relationships between particular individuals and groups’ (Kelliher, 2018, p.3). This understanding is in line with the application of intersectionality in this thesis, which seeks to contribute to an understanding of intersectional historical geographies of exclusion, racialisation and marginalisation and be attentive to the temporality and spatiality of such experiences. In Chapter 3, I explore the merits of employing an intersectional approach in archival methods and historical geography practice.

Intersectionality and the geographies of everyday life are significant conceptual tools which have been employed throughout this thesis and will be later developed in more detail in conversation with wider literatures. Empirically, considering intersectionality and the geographies of everyday life in conversation with

each other has allowed archival records to be critically revisited to produce more meaningful and inclusive histories of the everyday life of an ethnically diverse working class. For example, in Chapter 5 I demonstrate how revisiting historical press reports of seemingly exceptional episodes of racialised disorder, with an understanding the intersectional nature of BAME seafarers and the exclusionary conditions they faced in everyday life, allows these moments to be understood not as ‘exceptional’ moments of racialised violence, but more as an everyday experience of contestation and agency. The atmospheric construction of othering alongside the embodied experience of representations and encounters will now be discussed – bringing together geographies of everyday life and intersectionality to develop an inclusive place-based history of BAME experiences in interwar Britain.

### **2.3 – Representations, encounters and processes of othering**

Throughout history, and still today, processes of othering have been used as a means of categorically dividing populations along socially constructed and relational lines (Hall, 1996b). Social constructs, such as race, class and gender, are situated within complex power structures and determined by specific historic and geographic contexts (Jackson and Penrose, 1994). Processes of othering create dominant discourses in society which lead to the perception of sections of the population as innately different. These processes often present those not included, as a threat to social and political order (Ahmed, 2014). Emotional connections are made through these processes whereby members of the majority group position themselves against ‘others’ who ‘are ‘not us’ and in not being us, endanger what is ours’ (Ahmed, 2014,



p.1). These are divisional, and simultaneously unifying, for certain groups of the population, processes sustain the legitimacy of the powerful. They also influence those who are less powerful, but still belong to the majority group, while conditioning the everyday lives and identities of the subordinate (Jensen, 2011).

Processes of othering were not experienced in abstraction but through a variety of affectual and embodied encounters in everyday life. This section aims to bring together literature on processes of othering, geographies of encounter and representation to develop a framework through which the everyday experiences of a multi-ethnic working class living in interwar Britain can be further understood. Processes of othering, racialisation and encounter are inherently connected and rooted in the power to represent and position groups within a population as ‘other’ depending on socially constructed categories such as race, class and gender (Hall, 1996b).

The language of encounter is explored throughout this thesis as a conceptually charged construct which is fundamentally centred on experiences of encountering difference (Wilson, 2017). I understand ‘geographies of encounter’ as moments which are indicative of how people negotiate difference through a variety of embodied, affective and representational practices. This thesis contributes to an aggregational understanding of representations, encounters and conditions to better understand the experience of ‘race’ in everyday life. Tracing the independent influence of specific encounters and representations is impossible due to the constraints of the archive, yet the presence of ‘race’ in everyday life in interwar Britain can be uncovered when these experiences are understood in aggregational and atmospheric terms (Closs Stephens, 2016). Existing work on encounters tend to focus on embodied and interactional experiences (For example: Askins, 2016; Amin, 2002; Clayton, 2009; Nayak, 2012; Wise and Velayutham, 2009). However, I argue that experiences with representations

of racialised bodies and culture should be understood as an encounter. This will be explored through empirical material in Chapter 4, to stress that representations, and the emotional and physical responses they influenced, were a significant way that BAME communities in interwar Britain experienced ‘race’ in their everyday lives and a significant way that ‘race’ has remained present in the archival record.

### **2.3.1 – Circulating atmospheres of representations and encounters**

In order to understand how processes of othering and representations were historically experienced by BAME individuals and communities there is a need to acknowledge how ‘race’ was constructed in interwar Britain. These processes were influenced from “above”, by policy makers, the government etc., but very much engaged with and maintained by everyday experiences within ethnically diverse working class communities.

In Imperial Britain, racial theory was the most commonly employed tool to divide overseas BAME populations from those white British nationals residing in the metropole and white subjects in the colonies (Constantine, 1999). ‘Race’ is a socially constructed concept which attempts to create a hierarchy of supremacy founded upon the idea of recognisable difference which aligns physical, intellectual, social and political aptitudes with biologically determined phenotypes (Hall, 1996b; Jackson and Penrose, 1994; Omi and Winant, 2014). Racial theory in Britain served to benefit the economic and cultural interests of the dominant, white, groups in society. It was used to legitimise the religious ‘civilising’ mission of Empire, specifically imperial expansion, colonial domination and exploitation. Racial theory thus became a central

component in the organisation of society, explicitly linked with systems of control, oppression and manipulation (Omi and Winant, 2014). The application of racially orientated processes and practices profoundly shaped, and continue to shape, the historical, political, social, cultural and economic climate of Britain and the various implications of this will be considered throughout this chapter.

Although racialised processes of othering were, and still are, a central part of British society, there are other intersectional ways that the population was divided. Othering is not a fixed and contained entity but rather it is multiple, processual and dynamic,

‘in the sense that it touches upon several different forms of social differentiation, and that othering as a concept can therefore be combined with what has later been conceptualised as intersectionality or interlocking systems of oppression.’ (Jensen, 2011, p.65)

With such provocations in mind, it becomes increasingly acknowledged that processes of othering, especially in early twentieth century Britain, interacted with not only race, but also gender, class, nationality, occupation, age, literacy, and many other identity components. Foregrounding an understanding of intersectionality as central to the creation, maintenance and experience of processes of othering (Hopkins, 2019) allows a greater sensitivity to be given to the origins of the theory whilst ensuring an applied knowledge to specific empirical findings. As such, this thesis aims to pursue, not only how processes of othering were developed in interwar Britain, but how the intersectional representation of ‘imperial others’ shaped experiences, behaviours and interactions of a multi-ethnic working class at the everyday level.

Imperial constructions of racial differences were processes which spanned centuries and the racialised hierarchy that emerged from such processes was sensitive

to wider temporal, geopolitical and socioeconomic conditions. Stuart Hall (1996b) usefully considers race as a ‘floating signifier’, as a concept which is founded on classification systems of difference, where meaning is never fixed but the subject of a constant process of redefinition and appropriation. The meaning, significance and experience of ‘race’ is lost, appropriated, represented and re-signified in different ways in different cultures, at different times and, perhaps most significantly for this thesis, in different historical formations (Hall, 1996b). This fluid understanding of ‘race’ allows different and contested articulations of ‘race’ to be foregrounded in conversation with wider discursive, and I argue atmospheric, processes of othering, representation and encounter. Although these processes are centred upon socially constructed differences, they were experienced materially and performatively in the everyday as visible signifiers of racial difference. They were ‘read’ and responded to in conditioned ways (Hall, 1996b). An affect oriented approach, as Pavoni and Tulumello (2020, p.50) have employed in their work on urban violence and fear, allows an insight to be gained not only in ‘how the production of narratives [of violence and fear] is conditioned by wider sociospatial circumstances, but also how these very narratives are produced by, and in turn (re)produce, the sociospatial materiality of the urban’. The representation of BAME communities as inherently violent and a threat to social order permeated the everyday lives of these communities living in port towns in interwar Britain, and these narratives and representations of violence are explored empirically in Chapter 4 (4).

In order to contribute to an understanding of representations as encounter, the atmospheric nature of encounters and processes of othering must be understood. Closs Stephens (2016, p.182), argues for thinking of nationalism as a ‘set of feelings circulating in the air’ which consequently, ‘cannot be traced back to a single sovereign

source but rather emanate from multiple constituencies as part of a nebulous, diffuse atmosphere'. This builds upon Billig's (1995) ideas of banal nationalisms which turns focus from extraordinary actions and episodes of overt nationalism, to how it is ingrained in everyday, mundane routines, behaviours and environments. He suggests that just because certain nationalistic behaviours and modalities become ingrained in everyday life and are consequently accepted and no longer directly viewed as nationalism, does not mean that they are any less significant than explicit forms of nationalism (Billig, 1995). Banal nationalism can be seen in the production and reproduction of everyday symbols, in popular culture, consumption, education and political campaigns.

In Britain, the Union Jack Flag itself is a symbol of a unified national identity and its habitual presence at national and international events and outside of public buildings for example, often attracts very little attention despite its symbolic importance in reaffirming the national identity (Billig, 1995). This continual 'flagging' of national identity can lie dormant and un-politicised for any length of time but then can be brought to the forefront at times of national crisis and used to bring the population of the nation state together against a perceived enemy, which has undergone a process of othering to differentiate it from the nation state (Billig, 1995).

Bringing together the works of Billig (1995), Closs Stephens (2016), and wider affectual approaches to racialised atmospheres (for example, Hall, et al., 2013; Pavoni and Tulumello, 2020), with literatures of representations (Hall, 2013) and encounters (Wilson, 2017) contributes to furthering an understanding of representations as an atmospheric encounter. This thesis argues, especially in Chapter 4, that a banal and atmospherically circulating, imperialised knowledge, permeated the everyday experiences of the working classes in Britain in the early twentieth century through

affectual encounters with representations and embodied encounters with BAME individuals and communities. In regard to this thesis, I use the term affectual or atmospheric encounters to bring attention to the less material and less visible encounters in everyday life. For example, personal and collective encounters with the wider realm of representations of difference such as those prevalent in advertising, popular culture, education, media and exhibitions.

Although encounters and representations are rarely discussed in dialogue with one another, Wilson (2017, p.458) argues that we do not just see the world we live in, but experience it through our senses and suggests that it is perhaps beneficial to think of encounters 'as events that enact a shift in sensory perception'. I argue that the atmospheric experiences of encountering racialised representations of BAME individuals – in the media, advertising, visual and material culture, and so on – elicited an emotive response both from those 'reading' the representation from the outside but also from those who the representation sought to represent.

Atmospheres of racialised exclusion and hostility punctuated the everyday lives of BAME communities living in working class Britain. This atmosphere was fed through a variety of representations which intersected with one another to be read inter-textually (Hall, 2013). This means that they were drawn upon at different times, in different spaces and in different ways in everyday moments of encounter within ethnically diverse working class communities. Encounters, representations, processes and platforms for othering did not exist in isolation but were dependant on each other and the meanings of such were accumulated in webs of wider imperial and social experiences. Hall (2013) brings attention to the inter-textuality of processes of othering and representation, where there is an accumulation of meaning across different texts, images and representations of 'others': 'where one image refers to

another, or has its meaning altered by being ‘read’ in the contexts of other images’ (Hall, 2013, p.222). Such inter-textuality can be seen in the multiplicity of images, representations and imaginaries presented in interwar Britain regarding BAME individuals and communities as these representations were not created, encountered or experienced in isolation from one another but interacted to produce a complex imaginative geography in the minds of those living across Britain and the Empire. For example, as will be detailed in Chapter 4, orientalist representations of BAME culture as ‘uncivilised’ and ‘other’ from white British culture, was represented in various forms in everyday life. From imagery on colonial product packaging and stories in exploration novels, to the construction of an ‘African Village’ as an ‘amusement’ at the North East Coast Exhibition. These racialised representations accumulated meaning in the minds of those consuming such encounters. As can be seen in various newspaper articles and letters to the editor of the *Shields Gazette* in the 1930s, these representations were interpreted and rearticulated by white individuals and communities across the region. However, in more ethnically diverse communities, such as port towns in interwar Britain, white members of the community would have interacted with BAME individuals in their everyday lives. They would often encounter a conflicting understanding of the heavily stereotyped and racialised images and representations they were exposed to and the actuality of their street-level ‘encounters’ with ‘imperial others’.

Wilson (2017) calls for further research to be undertaken concerning the temporality and spatiality of encounter and this is something I develop through the lens of everyday representations in Chapter 4. I suggest that there was a circulating body of representations present in interwar Britain which was not spatially or temporally bounded, but rather served as an invisible repository which was drawn

from and added to simultaneously throughout the period. In essence, as Wilson (2017, p.463) summarises:

‘In reflecting on how one’s capacity to affect and be affected is shaped, Anderson (2014, p.85) has argued that ‘capacities have been formed through past encounters, that repeat, with variation, in the habits, repertoires and dispositions of bodies’. Recent geographical interest in habit has demonstrated how situated encounters are affected by social processes that operate ‘elsewhere and in other times’ (Ahmed, 2002, p.562) and so not only draw from previous encounters but also tend towards the future and thus the ‘risk of the new’ (Dewsbury and Bissell, 2015, p.22).’

An acute awareness to the temporality of encounters and representations further supports the idea of these experiences, both embodied and atmospheric, as simultaneously circulatory and inter-textual. As well as temporally discursive processes, this thesis is fundamentally a geographical study and so the influence of space and place on affectual encounters and representations will be discussed.

As will be explored empirically in Chapter 4, racialised representations of certain spaces in port towns, where there was a relatively high number of BAME individuals, led to place-based stigmas to form in the minds of those living in these towns and those in national and local institutions, such as councils and seafaring unions. Anderson (1987), in her work on Chinatowns, demonstrates the confluence of representations, both visual and in institutional practice, with place-based stigmas and assumptions. Spaces such as ‘Chinatowns’, or in the case of South Shields, the ‘Arab Colony’, demonstrate how racial ideologies can shape spaces through representations of those places. This can include representations of spaces as violent, immoral and insanitary for example, being circulated atmospherically throughout the population who would then draw from their encounters with these representations and places in everyday life.



This complements Said's (1978) work on 'imaginative geographies'. The way in which we think about places and their populations is heavily conditioned by the representation of those places we are exposed to in everyday life. These influences can create an 'imaginative geography' of that place, which acts as a lens through which we are able to understand what we are experiencing (Said, 1993). The exoticisation of the colonial dominions as backward and barbarous, through a multitude of representations, heavily shaped how subjects from the colonies and metropole interacted throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century (Said, 1993). This section will now go on to further pursue the ideas outlined above in direct reference to the 'imperial other' in interwar Britain.

### **2.3.2 – Encountering the 'Imperial Other'**

This thesis is centred upon foregrounding the everyday experiences of BAME individuals and communities living and working in ethnically diverse working class settlements across the North East of England throughout the interwar period. The majority of BAME individuals living in the region were seafarers, or connected to the seafaring industry, and were also British Colonial Subjects or British Protected Persons.<sup>6</sup> Resultingly, analysing the relationship between imperialism and processes of othering, everyday encounters and representations is central to the thesis approach.

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<sup>6</sup> Before 1949, the term 'British Colonial Subject' or 'British Subject' referred to almost all of the citizens of the British Empire who lived in Crown Colonies or Dominions. The term 'British Protected Person' was used to refer to those who were nationals of a British Protectorate.

There has been a substantial debate in imperial history as to how the working classes in Britain experienced and developed a knowledge of empire and its subjects. Some argue that a working class experience of empire was largely a top-down process, where society gained and accepted imperial knowledge from those in positions of authority (Colley, 2005; Killingray, 2008; MacKenzie, 1986). Others argue that the working class relationship with empire was engaged with, contested, and developed, from below (Porter, 2006; Potter, 2007; Thompson, 2005). To some extent, regardless of the means through which the working classes acquired a knowledge of empire, or an imperialised identity, knowledge alone is not enough to determine the everyday working class experience but needs to be understood in conversation with embodied encounters where such knowledges were reproduced.

A knowledge of empire and its subjects was acquired by the working classes through their encounters with representations in their everyday lives. This shaped an interrelationship between knowledge, feelings, behaviours and actions (Owen, 2012; Thompson, 2005). Virdee (2014) suggests that national identities, racism and exclusive nationalism were an elitist top-down construction and that sections of the working class interacted with this in different ways. It is this relationship between structural conditions and representations associated with othering processes of racism, and the articulation of racism ‘from below’ that this thesis seeks to pursue.

As Wilson (2017, p.453) argues, the age of Empire was an era of encounter, as ‘exploration, boundary-making, economic exploitation and cultural imperialism, produced diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination replete with narratives of encounter’. These ‘colonial encounters’ were reproduced to the masses in Britain through a variety of representations. The ways in which working class communities in interwar Britain experienced representations of empire was historically coded,

conceptually charged and is worthy of sustained analysis. Representations and encounters with racialised difference were significant platforms through which the working classes developed a knowledge of the empire and its subjects. For example, as will be explored in detail in Chapter 4 (2.1), in 1936 a reporter for the *Shields Gazette* rather embarrassingly admits to inaccurately using his knowledge of *Arabian Nights* as a means of understanding his meeting with an Arab Boarding House Keeper inside his Boarding House in the township (*Shields Gazette*, 20 April 1936).

Thompson (2005) argues that in imperial histories too much attention is often ascribed to means of imperial dissemination that the working class did not access on a daily basis. The greatest and most affective experience of imperialism within working class communities was not costly leisure activities, such as film and theatre, but rather imperialisms which permeated the home, the workplace and everyday life (Thompson, 2005). These everyday mediums of encountering and representing the other will now be outlined notably through imperial product packaging, racialised advertising and colonial exhibitions. They will be explored empirically in more detail in Chapter 4.

Popular culture, and the advertisement and consumption of imperial goods, were some of the principal platforms through which imperialised representations of racial difference were encountered in everyday life. For the most part, these representations were largely visual (Thompson, 2005) but were experienced inter-textually (Hall, 2013) with wider representations in novels and in the press, for example. From imperial advertising on product packaging and marketing billboards to illustrated children's books and annuals, images of empire and representations of their populations were socially accessible (Virdee, 2014). Tracing the independent influence of each of these representations on everyday life is impossible due to the

constraints of the archive, yet I argue that it is the aggregating influence of such representations that shaped embodied everyday inter-ethnic encounters. This perspective is indicative of how encounters are affected by wider processes and circulating ideologies which operate across various temporalities – drawing from past experiences whilst synchronously accumulating and informing future encounters (Wilson, 2017).

The consumption of imperial goods in Britain was much more than simply purchasing the commodities of empire to fulfil domestic needs. Consumption is not an isolated action of purchasing and physically consuming goods (Crang, 2013). Through encountering the imagery on product packaging, for example, imperial goods were, consciously or unconsciously, imbued with ideologies, representations and imaginaries of empire (Hall, 2013; May, 1996). Engaging with these visual representations in a banal way in everyday life was one way in which working class communities in Britain encountered a distorted representation of empire and its people.

During the inter-war period, over half of the food in Britain was imported and the Empire Marketing Board heavily supported, through a patriotic sense of duty, the purchasing of imperial goods (O'Connor, 2009). From Indian tea and South African wine to Imperial Leather Soap and Huntley and Palmers Palace Biscuits, exoticized images of empire, imperial conquest and colonial subjects were banally brought into the working class home (McClintock, 1995). The images on product packaging represented places and people across the empire yet were encountered within the homes and the routine of everyday life of the working classes. For the most part, images on imperial product packaging relied upon the presentation of the colonies as exotic landscapes, for example jungles or deserts, and the colonial subjects as

primitive, exotic and often enacting behaviours of servitude (Pieterse, 1992). Wilson (2017, p.462) calls for further research to pursue an understanding of how ‘encounters might lend themselves to commodification’ and foreground the damaging consequences they might have. I argue that this can be contributed to by viewing visual representations as a form of encounter. In this regard, thinking through representation and encounter within the North East of England in the interwar period, gives a more grounded sense of some of the experiences covered in the empirical chapters.

This racialised visualisation of empire and imperial subjects on product packaging led to a ‘commodity racism’ (McClintock, 1995, p.33) to surface which transposed narratives of imperial prowess to consumer spectacles. The visual nature of these representations further developed a link between empire and the domestic imagination (Hall, 2013). McClintock (1995, p.209) states that:

‘Commodity racism became distinct from scientific racism in its capacity to expand beyond the literate, propertied elite through the marketing of commodity spectacle... Imperial kitsch as consumer spectacle, by contrast, could package, market and distribute evolutionary racism on a hitherto unimagined scale. No pre-existing form of organised racism had ever before been able to reach so large and so differentiated mass of the populace. Thus, as domestic commodities were mass marketed through their appeal to imperial jingoism, commodity jingoism itself helped reinvent and maintain British national unity in the face of deepening imperial competition and colonial resistance.’

Chapter 4 of this thesis explores everyday encounters with representations on imperial products as a form of commodity racism in the North East in more detail. These commercialised encounters demonstrate the co-constitutive nature of the banality of racialised advertising and the visual representation of British Colonial subjects, with everyday experiences of marginalisation and exclusion.

Colonial exhibitions were significant – albeit infrequent – moments where working class communities in the North East of England in the interwar period could experience atmospheres of nationalism, imperial racial hierarchies and patriotism through representations and encounters (Barke, 2014; Bressey, 2010; Closs Stephens, 2016; Hughes, 2014; Virdee, 2014). Held in most major cities throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century these exhibitions ‘transformed from their earlier focus on the arts and industry to increasing displays of alleged British national and racial superiority’ and proved extremely popular among the masses (Virdee, 2014, p.62). Ethnic ‘peep shows’ and ‘human zoos’, portraying native villages and indigenous populations going about their ‘everyday life’, sharpened the sense of difference which was overtly racialised by emphasising the limited socioeconomic development of foreign and colonial communities in comparison with the British (Hughes, 2014; Virdee, 2014). In 1929 Newcastle was host to the North East Coast Exhibition where, alongside industrial and engineering exhibitions, an ‘African Village’ amusement was installed. The significance of Newcastle’s ‘African Village’ as an insight into how popular representations and embodied encounters interact with experiences of othering, is discussed in detail in Chapter 4 (3). In doing so, it demonstrates the multiple intersections between cultural, racialised events, representations and encounters and the materiality of everyday working class life.

In order to produce a representative account of everyday experience, the means through which ideas of empire and its people were encountered, understood and reproduced must be considered. It was against the backdrop of banal imperial exposure, and the inter-textuality of multiple representations and platforms for othering, that the white British working class developed their own ideas of empire and colonial subjects and such ideas would be clearly rearticulated, not only in exceptional

episodes of racialised disorder, but also in everyday exchanges. Knowing about the empire was not a passive experience (Owen, 2012; Thompson, 2005), imperial imaginaries were a central part of the actual everyday working class experience considered here. Nevertheless, processes of othering and the representations they evoked did not exist in a vacuum but were situated in complex racialised landscapes of exclusionary conditions which profoundly shaped the everyday experience of BAME individuals and communities living and working in interwar Britain. It is the combination of circulating representations and the conditions of everyday life that this thesis looks to attend to in exploring the presence of ‘race’ and racism in the North East.

#### **2.4 –Exclusionary conditions and the racialisation of disorder**

Thus far, this chapter has defined the major theoretical concepts that will be used in this thesis: encounters, representations and the geographies of everyday life, and outlined the contributions that can be made by understanding these concepts as circulating atmospheres (Closs Stephens, 2016). Although this atmospheric awareness is significant throughout this thesis, there is also a need to simultaneously consider more embodied encounters and interactions in the spaces through which everyday life is lived. Although ‘race’ is constructed socially, it has material and lived consequences. This section brings together the literatures discussed thus far with work on everyday conditions and the racialisation of disorder to demonstrate the spatial intricacies on atmospheric processes underpinning this construct.

The spaces in which we live are not bound or static entities where we simply experience everyday encounters. Rather, as argued by Massey (2005), space is always under construction and the product of multiple conditions and encounters which have long histories. Employing an awareness to the constructed and temporally dynamic nature of place allows both an awareness of the unpredictable nature of embodied encounters and that of also the wider conditions in which these everyday experiences are situated (Wilson, 2017). These conditions of everyday life (Laurie and Shaw, 2018) and their wider impacts will be discussed in detail forthwith, in order to further the understanding of how ‘the lived experience of race has a spatial dimension, and the lived experience of space has a racial dimension’ (Lipsitz, 2007, p.12). This understanding is specifically applied to interwar ethnically diverse port settlements in the discussion reported here.

Employing the lens of the everyday with an understanding of conditions and racialisation supports this thesis in one of its primary aims: looking beyond conflictual or spectacular multi-ethnic histories (Nayak, 2003; Tabili, 2011). Askins (2016) in her work on the everyday geographies of befriending, stresses that inter-ethnic encounters are far from simplistically positive or easy but are situated in intricate negotiations of emotional geographies enacted in both private and public spaces. As such, attending to everyday emotional experiences related to wider exclusionary conditions and specific events that have been racialised, such as the 1919 riots, brings literature connecting emotional geographies and race (Nayak, 2011) into conversation with works that stress the atmospheric (Closs Stephens, 2016) and spatialised (Lipsitz, 2007) experience of inter-ethnic encounters. This theoretical framing is complementary to the largely narrative historical works on BAME communities in the North East of England in the early twentieth century (Jenkinson, 2009; Lawless, 1995;



Tabili, 2011). Further, this framing allows the empirical investigations developed in Chapter 5, to argue that the politics of place experienced in inter-war port towns, and the wider regions in which they were situated, provided unequal conditions which shaped everyday experiences.

#### **2.4.1 – Conditions of everyday life**

The preceding section outlined that experiences of othering did not exist independently in interwar Britain. Instead, they were atmospheric, maintained and rearticulated in everyday life. Space is not a neutral medium through which everyday life is lived, but rather constituted by, and constitutive of, an array of conditions which establish, as Laurie and Shaw (2018, p.8) note:

‘the very geographies of being, the existential resources that nourish and sustain, but also harm and violate. Conditions are not the property of individuals or monolithic structures: they are the existential climates by which localised subjects and worlds are condensed into being’.

Conditions of everyday life have a profound impact on how individuals and communities thrive or struggle. Violent conditions (Laurie and Shaw, 2018) are those geographies of being which impact potential in negative ways, limiting opportunities to thrive and flourish. Violent conditions are not only direct acts of violence but also are indirect and immaterial depending on the atmospheres through which they are experienced. As indicated in Laurie and Shaw’s use of language, such an understanding of conditions can be considered alongside the work around slow violence, which has been explored in Chapter 2 (4.2), and will be explored empirically throughout Chapter 5. Notions of the restrictive impact of racialised and exclusionary

conditions and atmospheres are explored during the course of this thesis through a historical lens. In exploring the presence and influence restrictive conditions had on the everyday lives of BAME communities, it becomes possible to understand moments of contestation more thoroughly and develop an account which is perhaps indicative of the actuality of everyday life.

Violent conditions such as popular racism in society and unequal access to socioeconomic resources such as housing and employment constrained the 'fabric of being' (Laurie and Shaw, 2018, p.9) for many BAME communities living and working in interwar Britain. Such conditions are unevenly dependant on the individuals' socioeconomic and political position in society (Madden, 2017). To quote Brown (2005, p.21), 'place is an axis of power in its own right'; it is the medium through which representations of difference, inter-ethnic encounter, racialised hierarchies and notions of identity intersect. It is therefore where the everyday experience unfolds. This section contributes to a place-based account of inter-ethnic relations in interwar Britain that stresses the spatiality of distinct conditions on the everyday experiences of marginalised groups. In order to do so, literatures on embodied encounters, exclusionary conditions and the geographies of everyday life are brought into conversation with each other. In addition, this theoretical framing builds upon the available work on early twentieth century Tyneside, such as Jenkinson (2009, 2017), Lee (1998), Tabili (1994a, 2011) and Lawless (1995), to further the argument that the politics of place experienced in inter-war port towns, and the wider regions in which they were situated, provided unequal and exclusionary conditions which shaped everyday experiences and inter-ethnic encounters.

Port towns in interwar Britain were socioeconomically and politically distinct from many other working class communities in this period due to their ethnic diversity,

single industry reliance and the precarious nature of employment (Jenkinson, 2017; Lee, 1998; Tabili, 2011). These settlements, and the wider landscapes in which they were situated, were arenas where ‘violent conditions’ (Laurie and Shaw, 2018) shaped everyday life. As Laurie and Shaw (2018, p.8) have noted, ‘to exist is to be affected by conditions’. Such conditions are resources that can both sustain and harm, unify and antagonise communities whilst ‘violent conditions’ (Laurie and Shaw, 2018) are those which limit the possibility for life to thrive and actualise. Madden (2017, n.p.) has further argued that there exist spatially contingent conditions which can be ‘conductive to disaster’ in working class and poor communities and that such conditions shaped everyday life for the working class in interwar Britain. A plethora of racially charged exclusionary socioeconomic and political conditions shaped the everyday experiences of BAME communities in interwar Britain. The examples of racialised exclusion from the workplace, challenging living conditions and popular racism will be explored in detail in Chapter 5.

Bhavnani et al. (2005), argue that there is a need to understand locally specific conditions which lead to the eruption of protest, rioting and racism and to pay attention to the complexities of everyday life, thus taking into account ‘both ideas of stereotyping and prejudice as well as the local context in which these attitudes and behaviours are expressed’ (Bhavnani et al., 2005, p.56). As this thesis argues, a contribution can be made in exploring everyday exclusionary conditions, encounters, representations and experiences of othering in dialogue with each other to further the development of an inclusive history of place-based experiences in interwar Britain. This section has briefly outlined my understanding of conditions which the next subsection will unpack further, in conversation with works on racialisation and disorder.

The contestation of such violent and constraining conditions will be discussed later in this chapter.

#### **2.4.2 – Exceptional episodes of racialised disorder**

In the first half of 1919 notable episodes of racialised rioting took place across at least nine British port towns between BAME seafarers and members of the white community. In the context of this thesis, I understand racialisation as a ‘representational process whereby social significance is attached to certain biological (usually phenotypical) human features’ (Taylor, 1997, p.160). The violence of 1919 was situated in a web of socioeconomic and political conditions encompassing popular racism and tensions arising from the transition from the trauma and geopolitical upheaval of wartime to peacetime (Evans, 1980; Jenkinson, 2009; Rowe, 2000). There has been significant emphasis, both in contemporary sources and wider scholarship (Evans, 1980; Jenkinson, 2009; Lawless, 1995), upon such ‘exceptional’ episodes of racialised violence. Arguably, such episodes overplay the particularity of an event, and can detract from the recognition of smaller, less visible, and everyday acts of exclusion and counter narratives as constitutive of the longer trajectories of racialisation (Griffin and Martin, 2021).

Historicising riots is a challenging process, especially when they have a racialised component. The riots in South Shields in 1919 and 1930 were moments where the routines of everyday life were ruptured with violence (Taylor, 2014). This thesis employs the language of ‘riot’ in reference to these specific events, and others, because it is the term employed by the press, government institutions, police and the working

class communities at the time.<sup>7</sup> In addition, they were violent disturbances of the peace made by crowds which is akin with the Oxford Dictionary definition of a ‘riot’.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, the riot has been used extensively in the wider scholarship surrounding 1919 (Fryer, 1984; Jenkinson, 2009; Lawless, 1995). As more recent work has shown (for example see, Jenkinson, 2009, 2017), although the term riot is helpful in framing the events of 1919, there is substantial justification to avoid the use of ‘race riot’. Indeed, whilst racism was central to these events, this underplays the acknowledgement of wider socioeconomic, political and spatiotemporal conditions which contributed to violence. This thesis argues that riots, or exceptional episodes of racialised disorder, need to be understood alongside everyday acts of contestation and solidarity. In this regard, attention needs to be paid to how ‘race’ shapes class experiences, but also understand the spatiotemporal contexts (Hall, 1996a) and the atmospheres surrounding any exceptional event and everyday experience (Closs Stephens, 2016).

Exceptional episodes of racialised disorder were clearly moments where the routines and experiences of everyday life were ruptured with violence (Taylor, 2014). However, they still formed a component of the everyday experiences. This thesis develops a contextualised and relational accounts of racialised violence and situates such events within an understanding of the everyday experience as, to quote Scott (2009, p.1), ‘none of these larger scale events could occur without there being individual people, doing little things, in local places’. Chapter 6 (3) explores the

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<sup>7</sup> For examples see: *Shields Daily News*, 05 February 1919, ‘Arab Riot’; *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 04 March 1919, ‘The Arab Riot’; *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 14 May 1930, ‘Colour Riots at North Shields’; *Daily Herald*, 04 August 1930, ‘Arab Seamen in Dock Riot’; *Western Mail*, 16 September 1930, ‘Colour Riot Sequel’.

<sup>8</sup> Oxford dictionary definition of ‘riot’:

[https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/riot\\_1](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/riot_1) [date accessed: 05 September 2020]

benefit of thinking within and beyond exceptional episodes of racialised disorder across the North East of England throughout the interwar period and contributes to further conceptualising the significance of these moments as embedded into the everyday.

Before attending to literatures specifically concerning the racialisation of disorder, I wish to bring attention to the temporalities and atmospheres of violence and fear. Exploring violence and disorder through an affect oriented approach allows, as Pavoni and Tulumello (2020, p.50) suggest, ‘us not only to stress how the production of narratives [of violence and fear] is conditioned by wider sociospatial circumstances (but also how these very narratives are produced by, and in turn (re)produce, the sociospatial materiality of the urban’. This foregrounds the contribution that can be made by critically bringing conditions of exclusion, processes of othering, representation and encounter into dialogue to further an understanding of racialised disorders in everyday ethnically diverse working class communities. This also connects to a dynamic understanding of the temporalities of violence in everyday life.

As will be articulated throughout the three empirical chapters, BAME individuals living across the North East experienced various forms of violence in their everyday lives. The wider, and often conflicting temporalities of structural violence, violent conditions (Laurie and Shaw, 2018), slow violence (Pain, 2019) and the more physical violence present in everyday encounters cannot be thought of as distinct or disparate experiences. Kelliher (2020, p.3) demonstrates this wider realm of violence in his work on the picket-line in 1970s Britain:

‘The “slow violence” of deindustrialisation cannot be separated from the beatings that working-class people took from the police on picket lines and elsewhere in the 1970s and 1980s. These are mutually constituted temporalities of violence. State violence

against pickets, this paper argues, was constructed in broader arenas than the immediate encounter between strikers and police.’

An understanding of the temporalities of violence as mutually constituted, aligns with the aggregational nature of representations, conditions and agency in the everyday lives of BAME communities which has already been outlined. Essentially, the ‘slow violence’ (Pain, 2019) of institutional racism in interwar Britain cannot be separated from the physical violence BAME seafarers experienced in their everyday lives.

This thesis largely draws from Pain’s (2019) conceptualisation of slow violence to characterise some of the violent acts found within the archive. Understanding slow violence as a dynamic process, shaped by both historical events and current day processes (Pain, 2019), is especially relevant when exploring how various temporalities of violence intersected in the everyday lives of BAME communities in interwar Britain. Nevertheless, there is a substantial wider body of literature connected to slow violence. The significant work of Nixon (2011, p.2) argues that slow violence ‘occurs gradually and out of sight, [it is] a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, ... typically not viewed as violence at all’. Nixon’s central focus is on environmental destruction and pollution under capitalism. Although this framing is significant for much work on slow violence, this thesis draws more upon Pain’s (2019) articulation of trauma within everyday life and its inherent connection to multiple violences to understand the marginalised experiences of BAME communities in the interwar period. Reading Pain’s understanding of slow violence in conversation with work on the temporalities and contested dynamics of violence (Kelliher, 2020; Pavoni and Tulumello, 2020) allows an understanding to develop of how violences – structural, racist, material, invisible – intersected with atmospheres of fear and shaped everyday life.

Foregrounding the temporality of violence through an atmospheric approach stresses the need to understand representations and embodied encounters as co-constitutive. Hall et al. (2013), in their work on the construction of a racialised panic around mugging in 1970s Britain, demonstrate how representations of minority groups as violent can become an axis around which the public signify the perceived crisis. Hall, et al. (2013) further argue that once a society becomes fixated by the association of specific groups with violence, they reduce all moments of contestation, dissent and disorder to that singular violence and further entrench the notion of minority groups as a collective and identifiable threat to social and political order. As Kelliher (2020) notes, this understanding resonates with Pavoni and Tulumello's (2020) work on 'atmospheres of fear' which explores how 'representations and narratives of violence are embedded and sedimented into the materiality of the urban' (Pavoni and Tulumello, 2020, p.60). The significance of the effect of representations of BAME individuals as inherently violent and a threat to the moral and social order of white Britain on everyday encounters will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4 (4), along with the racialisation of disorder.

Temporally, this thesis begins in 1919, which as aforementioned was a year which witnessed some of the worst episodes of racialised rioting in twentieth century Britain. Yet, this thesis is centred on developing an inclusive place-based history of the North East of England. It therefore demonstrates how sensationalised and exceptional moments of racialised disorder are co-constitutive of and relational to everyday complexities, longer trajectories, historical processes, social structures and wider political and economic conditions. The next section will unpack some of the extensive literature which is concerned with the racialisation of disorder.



### **2.4.3 – The racialisation of disorder**

‘Race’ is socially constructed, albeit having very material consequences in everyday life. Racialisation is not an innate behaviour, it has to be constructed, and opinions and attitudes conditioned dependant on exposure to racialised ideas, representations, encounters and processes of othering. The same mediums used to disseminate representations of BAME otherness, as discussed above, are often employed in disseminating knowledges of racialised identities which then can entrench ideas, practices and behaviours (Virdee, 2014).

In some instances, episodes of inter-ethnic disorder are racialised in the way that they are presented by the dominant structures of power and the media, in order to detract from the underlying socioeconomic contexts in which they are situated (Amin, 2005; Rowe, 1998). For example, Rowe (1998) highlights how the Broadwater Farm Estate riot of 1985, in Tottenham, North London, was publicly portrayed by racializing the personal characteristics of those involved, the anti-social behaviour of black youths, in order to detract from the more fundamental roots of the disorder such as, institutional racism and the role of policing. A similar experience has been noted concerning the 2001 riots in Northern England. Amin (2003) notes that the violence experienced in the economically depressed textile mill towns of Northern England was racialised by the media, through the use of language of culpability and biased reporting, to defer focus from local racism, police intrusion and neglect by the public sector. Media racialisation and the allocation of blame to a marginalised group, to distract from negative socioeconomic realities, has proliferated the reporting of inter-ethnic conflict throughout episodes of racialised conflict throughout the nineteenth

and twentieth century, and in some cases still prevalent today (Brown, 2009; Jenkinson, 2017; Rowe, 1998).

The process of racialisation is also connected to how victims of racialised disorders are publicly allocated blame and how their national loyalties come to be questioned. The racialised groups become vilified in public opinion and defined as a ‘problem’ or ‘threat’ that needs to be dealt with (Ahmed, 2014; Amin, 2003; Rowe, 2000). Racialised stereotypes are reproduced in the media which demonises the marginalised groups as:

‘Drug dealers, petty criminals, school dropouts, perpetrators of attacks on elderly whites, beyond the control of their community, disloyal subjects and Islamic militants’ (Amin, 2003, p.461).

This contributes to increasing racist violence targeted towards the minority group. In addition, racism becomes prevalent within everyday representations and blame allocated to the marginalised community rather than those perpetrating racist nationalism (Rowe, 2000). Being conscious of this paradigm, which is not always immediately apparent, allows for a more developed and sustained analysis of the racialisation of disorder and how it continues to shape public perceptions, everyday experiences and have longer-term implications.

The politicisation of space is another medium through which episodes of racialised disorder are presented. The site of both exceptional episodes of racialised disorder and everyday interactions profoundly shapes how the episode is reported, responded to and situated within the national polity (Ruddick, 1996). Ruddick (1996) suggests that some spaces are ‘more public’ than others and inscribed with historical, geopolitical and economic contexts causing their significance to fluctuate over time. For example, a protest in a public park on a Sunday afternoon might receive a

considerably different reception than if violence was to erupt in a central public square where government buildings are located within in a large city (Ruddick, 1996). Similarly, as will be discussed in Chapter 6, a disturbance outside of an employment office between white and BAME seafarers, as was the case regarding the 1919 and 1930 riots in South Shields, received much more press and historiographical attention than a disturbance of a similar nature and size in residential spaces in the same period. The reason for such difference in attention was due to the racialisation of employment competition and allocation of blame to BAME communities for ‘stealing British jobs’. Such an example sustains the theory that geographic space can be used to legitimise or undermine an event and greatly shapes how it is racialised and presented to the public through media reportage. The impact of the politicisation of space, racially coded spaces, sites of conflict and contestation and everyday inter-ethnic interactions will be pursued throughout this thesis.

The racialisation of certain groups within a national population can, in some cases, lead to the implementation of ‘racial projects’ which can either be institutionally organised or informally integrated into culture and can act at varying geographic scales (Yuval-Davis, 2011). Omi and Winant (2014) define racial projects as those which simultaneously interpret, represent or explain racial identities and meanings with the intention of organising and distributing resources along socially constructed racial lines. Racial projects connect socialised meanings of race with ideological practices thus shaping social structures and everyday experiences (Omi and Winant, 2014). Racial projects are reflections of the wider patterns of racialisation within society, such as racially profiled stop and search campaigns, restrictive legislation and in a historical perspective, racially restrictive voting laws (Omi and Winant, 2014). For example, the 1925 Alien Seamen Order restricted the employment of foreign nationals and was

enacted in various ways, from the local bureaucratic level to the working class community. This Order has been labelled as the earliest example of state sanctioned racial discrimination in Britain (Tabili, 1994b). It was introduced in the period of economic decline following the First World War and can be seen as an administrative racial project with a racist dimension. Chapter 5 (5.1) considers the significance of nationally organised 'racial projects' on the everyday lives of BAME individuals, for example the employment of the 1925 Coloured Alien Seamen Order in 1931, shortly following the 1930 riot, to support the local poor law commission with the deportation of thirty-eight Arab seafarers who were unable to explicitly prove their British nationality.

This also reflects how a racial project created institutionally at a national level can be mobilised in response to localised episodes of racialised disorder (McClelland and Rose, 2006). It is therefore difficult to think of racial projects in singular terms, because at 'any given historical moment, racial projects compete and overlap, evincing a varying capacity either to maintain or to challenge the prevailing racial system' (Omi and Winant, 2014, p.126). Racial projects, the racialisation of disorder, othering processes, exclusionary conditions, representations and encounters all have a co-constitutive, culminative and material effect on the experience of everyday life.

In order to produce an inclusive account of working class experience, the impact of such constructed and relational imaginaries on the everyday experience, and vice versa, the racialisation of everyday life must be considered in explicitly spatialized terms. Exceptional events and racialised disorder are part of the everyday experience. However, significant efforts must be employed to avoid over emphasising their historical centrality. Instead, efforts must be made to centre analysis on the more mundane and banal representations and negotiations of difference. This approach

stresses the multiple forms of racialised presence and processes within the region considered. Employing a historical geography lens to these spaces, dynamics and moments allows an attentiveness to be placed on wider temporalities and legacies whilst ensuring the significance of space. This is central to developing a more inclusive history of the everyday experience of BAME individuals and communities.

Experiences of othering, marginalisation, racialisation, exclusion and racism were not simply accepted and endured by minority communities but contested in multiple ways, through diverse platforms and in various actions at the everyday level. This thesis seeks to contribute to the literature of everyday multiculturalism (for example see: Clayton, 2009; Wise and Velayutham, 2009) by furthering the limited attention that this scholarship has paid to agency and activism. This chapter will now explore how everyday agency, solidarity and contestation developed from within a multi-ethnic working class.

## **2.5 – Conceptualising everyday agency in an ethnically diverse working class**

Thus far, this chapter has brought literatures of encounter, othering, representation and racialisation into conversation with each other to support the analysis of everyday experiences within a multi-ethnic working class living in interwar Britain. In order to further demonstrate the multiplicity of everyday life, analysis will now be expanded between the above literatures and works centred on geographies of agency and contestation. ‘Race’ permeated all arenas of life for BAME working class communities in the early twentieth century. This chapter will now explore conceptualisations and experiences of agency at the intersection of race and class,

within and beyond the workplace. This dialogue supports one of the key objectives of this thesis, that of understanding the extent to which everyday forms of agency, solidarity and activism shaped inter-ethnic relations across the North East of England in the early twentieth century.

Industrial relations can often be racially fractured and produce exclusionary and uneven relations between workers within landscapes of production (Ince et al., 2015). Hall (1996a) argues that 'race' can be a medium through which class relations are experienced, especially within ethnically diverse communities. Class relations and racialised tensions intersected in specific ways in interwar Britain. For example, circulating representations of BAME individuals as a violent threat to social order were connected with how the behaviour and presence of BAME individuals in spaces of work was racialised and politicised. This was especially the case in moments of contestation.

Experiences of encounter, racialisation and processes of othering can influence tensions within a racially fractured working class and shape how agency develops. Stovall (2012) argues for the de-containerising of race histories and labour histories to instead foreground the intersectional and co-constitutive nature of these histories, which is similarly a primary aim of this thesis. Too often, histories of the working class in Britain, and especially the North East, are centred on the white male worker. This distorts contemporary local understandings of the diversity of this working class. In addition, these white male-centred histories detract from the significant actions of minority communities, and women, that shaped everyday conditions of life of the local working class, and the British nation as a whole.

BAME working people should not be seen as passive victims of exclusionary conditions (Kelliher, 2020; Tabili, 1994a) and as Ashe et al. (2016, p.35) note, there is a 'long history of racialised minorities collectively fighting back against violence and harassment through physical resistance, political mobilisation and cultural action'. Racialised representations, processes of othering and exclusion were not simply placed upon, and accepted by, an unresponsive, passive group of the population. They were actively challenged, contested and integrated into the identities of those who were experiencing marginalisation (Ashe et al., 2016; Featherstone, 2012; Jensen, 2011; Virdee, 2014). This section frames the empirical discussions of Chapter 6 by articulating the need to detract from narratives which present racialised minorities as passive victims of exclusionary conditions and reinforce the contributions that can be made by developing an inclusive historical geography of the working class in the North East of England in the early twentieth century.

Although a challenging concept to define, here I understand agency as a relational and dynamic process which is comprised of many, visible and invisible, collective and individual, acts and behaviours. In the context of this thesis, agency is considered as emergent as well as confrontational, sometimes enacted without success and largely positioned as acts that challenge constraining social, economic and political conditions (Coe and Lier, 2011; Featherstone, 2012; Herod, 1997; Hughes, 2020; Peck, 2018).

This section contributes to research into less-visible agency through employing the lens of the everyday to contribute to evolving debates on agency at the intersection of labour and historical geography (Emery, 2018; Hastings and Cumbers, 2019; Martin, 2021; McFarland, 2017; Newbery, 2013; Peck, 2018). I argue that everyday actions should not go unnoticed or be diminished in the historical record as they are

indicative of the ‘the real, banal, messy, faltering ways in which activism happens’ (Horton and Kraftl, 2009, p.17) in everyday life.

### **2.5.1 – Exploring agency through the lens of the everyday**

Critically employing the lens of the everyday is a central thread utilised throughout this thesis to support an inclusive understanding of place-based experiences in the North East of England throughout the interwar period. Acknowledging the development of agency and contestation in everyday moments demonstrates the benefits of taking mundane acts seriously and pays attention to the wider spectrum of experiences which make up everyday life (Back, 2015). This enables researchers to draw attention to the acts and experiences associated with race and racism in early twentieth century North East England.

Experiences in everyday life are not linear but can rather be viewed through a web of small acts, organised action, community resilience and individual contestations which acted at various temporalities and within wider atmospheres of exclusion (Horton and Kraftl, 2009). The benefits of adopting an atmospheric and affectual approach to everyday experiences, encounters and representations has already been outlined. I will now further this line of thought to include agency. Closs Stephens (2016) discusses the affective atmosphere of nationalism that circulates and permeates everyday life. Employing this atmospheric awareness regarding BAME agency allows the impact of the longer temporalities, and material consequences, of atmospheres of violence and exclusion to be uncovered.



It is the messier, contradictory, banal, diverse, emergent and unpredictable expressions of contestation (Horton and Kraftl, 2009) that this thesis seeks to foreground, thereby contributing to further conceptualisations of everyday agency. The process of unpacking and understanding everyday acts is fraught with challenges, especially when undertaking historical research of marginalised groups. Issues of visibility, motivations and actions are not always immediately apparent but rather disparate (Featherstone, 2012; Hodder, 2017; Kelliher, 2018). They are methodologically challenging to uncover, as will be demonstrated in Chapter 3. Despite these challenges, actions such as individual petitions and letter writing, contesting boarding house license refusals, confronting everyday racism in the workplace and union are still reflective of agency within the conditions considered.

This thesis, especially Chapter 6, draws upon the influential work of Katz (2004) which focuses on agency, resistance and persistence in the sphere of the everyday. This thesis argues that through this theoretical lens it becomes possible to develop a deepened understanding of BAME agency in interwar port settlements. As previously outlined, an attentiveness to the everyday, in this case everyday agency, allows attention to be paid to the ‘complex interplay between actors, materials and space, in which new social relations may emerge’ (Askins, 2016, p.516). Katz’s (2004) approach to understanding everyday and less visible acts allows an analysis to be expanded beyond the worker, the workplace and the working day to uncover various behaviours, actions and routines which can, and should, be conceptualised as agency. Bringing such work into conversation with the theoretical reflections considered above offers a conceptual development central to the thesis aims.

Katz (2004) frames less visible and everyday acts by focusing in on what she calls the three R’s: ‘Resilience’, ‘Reworking’ and ‘Resistance’. These concepts are

used as tools to unpick the complexities of unorganised, non-traditional and seemingly disparate acts. In doing so, she provides a more variegated and nuanced sense of the variety of agency meanings. This is important given concerns regarding agency being a potential ‘catch-all’ term with regards to resistance, and more specifically working class and labour organising (Coe and Jordhus-Lier, 2011). Following Katz, agency understood as resilience is centred around the idea of the acts which enable individuals or communities to get by, whether that be financially, domestically or socially. Furthermore, Katz (2004, pp.245-246) argues that acts of resilience, such as everyday neighbouring, community self-help organisations or religious groups, not only enable material survival but can also preserve dignity and self-worth.

Exploring acts of resilience through the lens of the everyday broadens our understanding of the means through which BAME individuals are able to negotiate workplace, domestic or wider challenging conditions in order to ‘get-by’ and sustain themselves, their businesses and their communities. DeVerteuil and Golubchikov (2016, p.150) contest the passive construction of resilience and ‘argue that resilience can be integral to social and spatial struggle’. They (DeVerteuil and Golubchikov, 2016) also demonstrate the contradictory nature of certain acts of resilience which can devolve responsibility from those in positions of authority and leave minority communities with access to fewer resources due to the belief that they can maintain themselves without the need for state involvement. This duality will be explored in detail in Chapter 6 (4.1) to re-think wider historiographical perceptions of the nature of financial resilience within the kinship networks of the South Shields Arab Community (Lawless, 1995; Tabili, 1994a, 2011).

The second form of agency that Katz (2004) discusses are acts of reworking. Reworking centres around practices which seek to alter and improve conditions of

daily life through the creation of enabling spaces. Katz (2004, p.247) importantly notes that 'projects of reworking tend to be driven by explicit recognition of problematic conditions and to offer focused, often pragmatic, responses to them'. As Coe and Lier (2010, p.216) highlight, 'it is not that participants agree with the hegemonic system, but rather reworking is about challenging the system on its own terms to try to reduce some of its inequalities'. In Chapter 6 (4.2), I demonstrate that this is the form of agency that permeated the actions taken by prospective Arab Boarding House Keepers in interwar South Shields when navigating the bureaucracies of boarding house license applications. As Katz (2004) argues, those who were engaged in reworking did not accept the conditions which were imposed on them. Their interests were not focussed on overtly challenging the structures of power which imposed the conditions. Instead, they took the more pragmatic approach of creating spaces which undermined and reworked these inequalities.

The final form of agency that Katz (2004) outlines is that of resistance. Expressions of resistance are arguably much less prevalent at the everyday level than acts of resilience or reworking. Acts of resistance require a 'critical consciousness to confront and redress historically and geographically specific conditions of oppression at various scales' (Katz, 2004, p.251). Despite superficially appearing less abundant in everyday life, Hughes (2020) makes a clear call for geographers to make a conscious effort to engage with more elusive forms of resistance. So often it is the more mundane, quiet and emergent forms of resistance that are embedded into everyday life. Everyday acts, such as contesting exclusionary conditions in the workplace for example, will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6. These types of acts will be understood as emergent resistance (Hughes, 2020). Tracing such resistance as it evolves within everyday life broadens the conceptualisation of resistance and allows

the everyday experiences of marginalised groups to be central to, rather than on the periphery of, analysis.

Conceptualising agency and contestation in the everyday lives of BAME communities in the North East of England in the interwar period, requires an acknowledgement of the lived nature of agency, within and beyond grand and collective moments of proletarian struggle within industrial relations. Horton and Kraftl (2009) bring attention to ‘implicit activism’ in everyday life. I suggest that this line of thought is extremely beneficial when developing an understanding of the intersection of encounter, racialisation, representation and contestation. Indeed, small, implicit and everyday acts are, as Horton and Kraftl (2009, p.15) note, agentic, they are ‘a sort expressed in non-traditional, multiple styles that are quite different from the ostensibly more spectacular practices’ that have commonly been associated with agency and activism.

This relaxes the boundaries between agency and everyday life thereby uncovering the co-constitutive nature of the distinct socioeconomic and political conditions faced by BAME communities. It offers a more fluid sense of the three Rs considered above and is suggestive of connections between the differentiations suggested by Katz. Throughout Chapter 6 I argue that acts of petitioning, letter writing, financial resilience and resistance to racialised employment practices should not go unnoticed or be diminished in the historical record and rather be understood as indicative of the ‘the real, banal, messy, faltering ways in which activism happens’ (Horton and Kraftl, 2009, p.17) in everyday life.

Uncovering everyday agency, and indeed everyday marginalised experiences in general, in the archive is a challenging process, and the methodology employed in

this thesis will be discussed in the following chapter. Rather than searching for grand moments of successful collective action, this thesis engages with more mundane and ‘quiet’ everyday actions in order to contribute to evolving debates on agency at the intersection of labour and historical geographies (Emery, 2018; Hastings and Cumbers, 2019; Martin, 2021; McFarland, 2017; Newbery, 2013; Peck, 2018). The interwar years saw race and class intersect in very specific way in the port settlements of the North East, due to the overlapping of racial ideologies and assumed white superiority among members of the local government, judicial and NSFU. The significance of acknowledging the racially fractured nature of the working class in this period will now be outlined.

### **2.5.2 – Whiteness and the racial fracturing of the working class**

The importance of exclusionary conditions and the racialisation of space/spatialisation of race has been outlined previously in this chapter. This section builds on this analysis by foregrounding and exploring in more detail the divisive power of ‘race’ within working class communities. Even though the working class in Britain’s port towns in the early twentieth century was ethnically diverse (Lee, 1998), there was a distinct association within the working class, particularly through key institutions and organising practices, that aligned it with whiteness; nationally and globally. This dominant collective identity of whiteness among the working classes developed in the early twentieth century when many working people assumed a collective white identity from their interaction with imperial knowledges and developed a sense of

racial and cultural superiority in relation to BAME people (Bonnett, 1998; Tabili, 1994a).

The racialisation of working class identity in interwar Britain defined who was included, and excluded, from participating in working class society. This permeated various social and political intra-class relations (Fryer, 1985; Jenkinson, 2009; Omi and Winant, 2014). Although his central focus is on the American class system, Roediger (1999) argues that the racial hierarchies within the working class allowed whiteness to function as a public, social and psychological wage that, in some ways, compensated for low economic remuneration. Lake and Reynolds (2008, pp.3-4) argue that during the early twentieth century, events, such as the 1919 riots in the case of this thesis, should be contextualised within an international formulation of a 'global colour line' that 'spread 'whiteness' as a transnational form of racial identification. They suggest that it was the circulation of 'emotions and ideas, people and publications, racial knowledge and technologies that animated white men's countries and their strategies of exclusion, deportation and segregation' (Lake and Reynolds, 2008, p.4). Chapters 5 and 6 will discuss the complexities and relationship between local, national and international racial hierarchies, as well as the experiences they shaped in spaces of work.

The racialised hierarchy among the working classes in the early twentieth century, although experienced within British society, as Hyslop (1999, p.399) argues, 'were not composed of 'nationally' discrete entities, but were bound together into an imperial working class, by flows of population which traversed the world'. An imperial working class, linked by their whiteness and perception of white superiority, led to the formation of trans-imperial loyalties. White labourism (Hyslop, 1999) was created from below, generated through circulations of ideas, movements, workers and

organising practices and led to a distinct common ideology to form between white workers across the British Empire.

Hyslop (1999) draws connections between strikes in 1913 and 1914 in South Africa, which protested the employment of Black and Asian workers and the British Trade Unionist demonstration in London Hyde Park in 1914. The first sought to restrict their participation in skilled employment and the second which demonstrated solidarity with white South African workers. The demonstration in London brought the racialised protest in Johannesburg back to the metropole, and those demonstrating openly declared their support for the unions and white workers in South Africa (Hyslop, 1999). The discourse was centred on the notion that they were unified in attempts to protect their wage and welfare gains, thus participating in political practices and ideologies that transcended nationally bound contexts (Featherstone, 2012). Through moments such as this, the image of the solidarity of whiteness permeated British industry and led to racial projects concerning conditions and eligibility of work thus shaping British industrial inter-ethnic discourse for the rest of the early twentieth century. In interwar port towns, issues of perceived white preferential access to employment were encountered and contested in multiple ways in everyday life. They drew upon global and imperial hierarchies and ideologies in localised moments of tension. Exploring the local-global connections present in port towns in the North East, which will be done empirically throughout this thesis, stresses the connectivity of these spaces and provides a more relational approach to existing regional labour histories.

The presence of white labourism and racial hierarchies that were dominant in British society in the early twentieth century led to the racial fracturing of the working class in a variety of industries and communities across the country. It is inaccurate to

conceive that there was a universal, racially inclusive international proletariat in the early twentieth century. It was not possible for class structures to overarch those of ethnicity, especially in times of economic depression and high levels of unemployment (Lunn, 1985). By tracing the complex histories of selective and racialised inclusions and exclusions, and acknowledging the limitations of race, gender and nation as tools in working class organisation, it becomes possible to uncover how 'race' shaped labour organising and solidarity (Featherstone, 2012).

Analysing the influence of wider contexts, historical, political, social and economic, are critical at this point (Jenkinson, 2009; Virdee, 2014), since 'working-class attitudes towards 'outsiders' were incredibly complex, comprising both positive and negative stereotypes and exhibiting a variety of expressions, racism being only one' (Lunn, 1985, p.15). The racial fracturing of the working class was central to the articulation of demands by white workers and trade union members, but also used as a means of supporting wider social and political racial projects developed by local councils, employers and local and national government officials. The racial fracturing of the working class had a substantial impact on longer trajectories of class struggle, collective action, worker solidarity and the everyday experience.

A racially fractured working class greatly hindered its collective bargaining power. This was capitalised on by companies seeking to reduce labour costs and secure profit (Lebowitz, 2003; Massey, 1983; Virdee, 2014). By inhibiting the formation of a unified working class and supporting strategies of racialisation, employers were able to restrict their unionising power and thus the effectiveness of collective action (Virdee, 2014). These economic underpinnings of capitalist commerce undermined working class solidarity and developed competitive racialized industrial relations between BAME and white workers which contributed to their positioning against each



other thus often reducing their ability to unionise and present their demands as a homogeneous group challenging the same conditions and employers (Griffin, 2015).

Capital power largely relies upon the ability to divide the workforce in times of high unemployment, putting labourers in direct competition with one another. In other words, turning difference into internalised antagonisms (Lebowitz, 2003) undermining solidarity within a 'class' or a community. This was certainly the case in the seaport communities of Tyneside in the early twentieth century (Lawless, 1995). By employing strategies of racialization and racist projects in the workplace, such as the 1925 Coloured Alien Seamen Order and the 1930 Rota System (discussed in Chapter 6), it was possible to exclude and present BAME seafarers as causal to the rising levels of unemployment and increased competition for work and accommodation (Jenkinson, 2009; Tabili, 1994b; Virdee, 2014; Wright and Ellis, 2000).

The racial fracturing of the working class is a heavily racialised and intricate practice which is motivated by the complex structures of power in which it is situated. Nevertheless, its application is still relevant, and can still be seen, in contemporary examples of class struggles (Valentine, 2008). An example is the way in which Eastern European migrant workers are racialised in the media and depicted to be contributing to rising levels of unemployment (Ryan et al, 2008). Yet such experiences are far from simple, they are created, maintained and contested in the everyday.

Labour markets and employment practices were, and still are, often constituted in ways that support a racially fractured working class. The racialisation and process of othering of migrant workers by the media and in popular culture produces representations that they are undermining workplace solidarity by working for lower

wages and in less favourable conditions than that of the previous workforce (Lawless, 1995; Rowe, 2000; Tabili, 1994a). It is important to consider the extent to which labour market processes were mediated, in their operation and everyday application, by concepts of race and ethnicity (Ellis et al., 2004) within the wider socioeconomic, political and historical contexts. Throughout historical incidences of racialised intra-class disputes, migrant workers have habitually been situated as factions which seek to undermine or even threaten labour solidarity (Hyslop, 1999; Jenkinson, 2009; Lawless, 1995; Rowe, 2000; Wright and Ellis, 2000). Such perspective has profoundly shaped the way in which minority groups have expressed their own industrial, social and wider political grievances.

Chapter 6 explores the way in which BAME communities and individuals living and working in the North East of England contested exclusionary practices, both in the workplace and in domestic and social spaces. Such contestations tended to be undertaken through small acts embedded in the everyday rather than through the vast campaigns of collective action common in white trade unions. These everyday acts and solidarity, which have been outlined in the preceding section of this chapter, were accessible, inclusive and in some cases effective mediums through which BAME grievances could be aired to the predominantly white communities in which they resided. Understanding everyday acts as agency allows for the inclusion of more marginalised perspectives, behaviours and actions which contributes to the development of an inclusive historical geography of the experiences of a multi-ethnic working class. Furthermore, there is something significant to be gained in thinking through agency, racialisation, encounters and conditions of everyday life in conversation with each other. Highlighting hostile and violent conditions, exclusions developed from below, and the acts of resistance from the minority communities, is a

central consideration when developing an inclusive place-based account of everyday experiences of a multi-ethnic working class.

## **2.6 – Conclusion: Towards an inclusive account of everyday working class experiences**

This chapter has brought seemingly disparate bodies of literature into conversation with one another to provide the theoretical framing of the thesis. Outlining two of the overarching concepts of the thesis – geographies of everyday life and intersectionality – from the outset of this chapter has demonstrated the multiplicity of these concepts in facilitating the wider dialogues that have been developed. Employing the lens of intersectionality provides a frame for the analysis and understanding of how BAME individuals and communities experienced exclusion, marginalisation and racialisation. This framing considers the influence that time, space and social actors in interwar Britain had on such experiences. This intersectional understanding is then enhanced further through an awareness of the multiplicity of everyday life.

Building on geographies of everyday life and intersectionality, this chapter has foregrounded an aggregational understanding of representations, encounters and conditions in everyday life which will be explored empirically later in this thesis. Experiences with representations of racialised bodies and culture should be understood as an encounter. Processes of othering and marginalisation were not experienced in abstraction but through a variety of atmospheric and embodied encounters in everyday life.

Although I take the view that ‘race’ is a social construct that can be experienced atmospherically, the chapter has suggested the material and lived consequences of this construct. Employing the lens of the everyday with an understanding of encounters, conditions and racialisation supports this thesis in looking beyond conflictual or spectacular multi-ethnic histories (Nayak, 2003; Tabili, 2011) to foreground histories at the intersection of race and class. This chapter has brought literatures on embodied encounters, exclusionary conditions and the geographies of everyday life into conversation. The result is a contribution towards a place-based account of inter-ethnic relations in interwar Britain, which stresses the spatiality of distinct conditions on the everyday experiences of marginalised groups within an ethnically diverse working class.

Many of the traditional narratives concerning the formation of the working class equated the working class individual with the white, male labourer (Thompson, 1968). The absence of the contribution of migrant workers, women and children as active agents in the formation of the working class consciousness has been noted by many (Bressey, 2015; Hannam and Hunt, 2012; Navickas, 2011; Virdee, 2014). The depiction of the working class as a racially homogeneous group of men does not reflect the multicultural nature and shifting gender roles within working class communities in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Britain. This chapter has brought together diverse works from across the social sciences to be discussed in conversation with one another in order to support the development of a more inclusive historical geography of the everyday experiences of a multi-ethnic working class in interwar Britain. Inclusivity is not deployed here as an aim for quantitative balance but instead utilised as a call to foreground actors and experiences, particularly those reflecting the ethnic diversity of early twentieth century Britain, which have previously been

marginalised in regional histories. Here, the chapter reflects on the significance of this inclusivity and develops an agenda for constructing such approaches within historical geography.

Working class communities in the port towns of Britain in the early twentieth century were centres of global exchange, interacting with international and colonial networks and the exchange of goods, ideas and people and thus were sites of multiculturalism (Featherstone, 2015; Linebaugh and Rediker, 2013). By revisiting traditional historical narratives with a critical gaze and focussing on the intersecting geographies of class and race, the significance of the contribution that BAME labourers had on the foundations of the working class and the everyday experience can be uncovered (Bressey, 2015; Stovall, 2012). By acknowledging the agency of BAME communities and their ability to shape and determine their own physical, cultural and political environments (Mitchell, 1996), it becomes clear that the experiences of BAME groups shaped the formation of the British working class (Bressey, 2015; Virdee, 2014). The mobility of migrant members of the working class were often constituted in subordinate ways, framed in racial hierarchical theories and rooted in colonialist practices (Davies, 2013). However, as Featherstone (2012, p.43) argues, ‘they were active in the formation of the working class consciousness as they contested and challenged the socio-economic and political conditions that were imposed on them’. Asserting the presence of such acts and experiences is crucial to the development of a more inclusive historical geography of the North East.

Despite traditional narratives of working class formation being limited in their consideration of the significance of race and gender, the impact of works such as Thompson (1968), have had on subsequent dialogues of class formation cannot be understated. These traditional narratives of class formation have instigated and

influenced later engagement with wider areas of difference thus supporting the creation of multicultural labour histories and labour geographies (Bressey, 2015; Featherstone, 2012; Featherstone and Griffin, 2016; Herod, 2001; Linebaugh and Rediker, 2013). The Thompsonian (1968) definition of class formation conceives of class as a social process, forged through experiences. This definition has enabled key developments in labour history and geography, which encompass the activities of every part of the community – including women and minority ethnic individuals – in the long term trajectories of class formation, the articulation of demands and inclusion in a working class experience (Featherstone and Griffin, 2016). While ensuring that class formation narratives are inclusive and representative is clearly significant, there has been a shift in labour history from the late 1990s away from seeing class as the be-all and end-all of labour studies and acknowledges that the working class consisted of, shared and interacted with multiple identities dependant on social, economic, political and temporal contexts (Navickas, 2011). This thesis is sensitive to class dimensions, gender, age and politics. However, its focus is to centre the perspectives and experiences of BAME communities, to develop an original and inclusive historical geography of the everyday experiences of the multi-ethnic working class of the North East of England in the interwar period.

The longer trajectories of everyday working class inter-ethnic relations have received relatively little attention among scholars, especially in a historical context. Traditional labour histories focus on exceptional events and grand narratives as the most significant aspects of racialised intra-class relations (Jenkinson, 2009; Lunn, 1985). Critical efforts within the field of labour geography have proposed worker agency as central to class-consciousness and the way in which identities are articulated in times of struggles, collective action and solidarity (Featherstone, 2012; Griffin,

2015; Herod, 2001). There is much insight that can be gained when mundane and everyday inter-ethnic relations and interactions are considered alongside the exceptional episodes – thinking within and beyond sensationalised moments. This chapter suggests that critically revisiting racialised histories with a longer trajectory and a theoretical framing, the significance of wider and ongoing social, spatial, temporal and political contexts can be included into the historical narrative.

In conclusion, a diverse range of literature from across the humanities and social sciences has been brought into conversation with one another to further our understandings of the impact of ethnic diversity within the working class. By revisiting narrative histories through a historical geography lens, and demonstrating attentiveness to the intersections of race, class and politics, this thesis will demonstrate that it is possible to develop an inclusive history of the working class experience in the North East of England in the early twentieth century. Employing the everyday as a tool and mechanism of inclusion, will allow for the sustained and rounded analysis of working class experience. Such an approach is followed to reinforce the plurality of the working class experience and ensure that the experiences of those who have been historically marginalised are central to, rather than on the periphery of, the history of the British working class. This chapter has outlined the conceptual framework which will be employed and built upon through the empirical chapters of this thesis. The following chapter reflects on the methodological approach I have taken to develop an inclusive historical geography and seeks to act as a bridge between theorising and conceptualising the key objectives of this thesis, and the actuality of ‘turning up the volume’ of marginalised voices, experiences and perceptions through extensive archival research.

## **Chapter 3 – ‘Turning up the volume’ of marginalised experiences in the archival record**

### **3.1 – Introduction**

This chapter reflects on the extensive use of archival materials throughout this thesis and the methodology that has been employed in order to uncover everyday BAME experiences in the North East of England in the interwar period. The previous chapter outlined a theoretical position that emerged from a dialogue between various bodies of literature relating to encounters, conditions and agency which has advanced an approach towards understanding BAME everyday experiences in the North East. Here, I outline how this translates into practice, demonstrating a methodological approach situated in the theoretical positions highlighted in the literature review and an attentiveness to the current methodological debates in historical geography concerning absences and partiality.

The chapter will begin with a discussion regarding current methodological approaches in historical geography which are attentive to archival absences, partiality and power. There is a growing body of scholarship in historical geography which acknowledges the challenges faced by researchers who are reliant on fragmentary archival collections. Archival absences, or initially perceived absences, have been a significant focus throughout this thesis and I have actively sought out material which brings attention to marginalised voices and ‘turns up the volume’ of their testimony. That said, the absences and power relations of the archive are in many ways a finding in itself, reflecting longer histories of exclusion within the official archival record.



Following this overview, the merits of employing a methodological framework situated in intersectional theory when attempting to trace BAME experiences in the archival record will be discussed. The intersectional nature of the identities of BAME individuals distinctly shaped their experience in interwar Britain, not because of a sum of their identities, but because of the intersectional and situated nature of their identities. I argue that by employing a methodology informed by intersectional theory allows for a deepened understanding of how BAME experiences are present, absent and/or marginalised in the archival record. Such attentiveness allows for a novel approach to researching marginalised testimony in the archives where subdued or constrained voices can become central to, rather than on the periphery of analysis.

The chapter concludes with a reflection on the research practice I have employed during my time spent in various archives. A range of material has been used in this thesis from Colonial Office and Home Office files at The National Archives (TNA), to local civil files, photographs and National Sailors' and Firemen's Union (NSFU) documents. The fragmentary nature of the material I have utilised in this research has been shaped essentially by what is available. This has led to the triangulation of several archives and collections to recover a connected set of archival materials which have been considered in conversation with one another. At times some of these connections have required a degree of speculation, yet their inclusion here connects with the discussion of atmosphere and circulating influences as noted in the previous chapter. In this regard, newspapers have been a substantial source of knowledge and employed significantly in this thesis and so the methods and challenges that I encountered when working with press material will be discussed in section 3 (5).

### **3.2 – Uncovering marginalised and everyday experiences in the archival record – current approaches in historical geography**

The archival record will never be complete; we will always have to work with fragmentation, partiality and absences. Much of history has gone unrecorded and even then, only a small portion of documented histories end up in the archive for permanent preservation. This is especially pertinent regarding the voices and experiences of marginalised groups such as the working class, children, women and minority ethnic communities. The overwhelming power that encapsulates the filter of the archive ensures that the voices and experiences of the marginalised are not often central to, but rather on the periphery of, the archival record (Bressey, 2006; Derrida, 1996; Stoler, 2010).

Baker (1997) brought attention to the constrained conditions and challenges experienced in historical geography which are not shared by contemporary human geographers. Questionnaires, ethnographic surveys and observations are research methodologies that are not available to the historical geographer who is researching a more distant past where oral histories are no longer viable (Baker, 1997). Nonetheless, historical geography is fundamentally a geographical enquiry, asking geographical questions and developing a geographical perspective regarding the past (Baker, 1997). The fragmentary nature of the archival record has been noted by many (for example see: Awcock, 2020; Griffin, 2008; Hodder, 2017; Mills, 2013; Moore, 2010) and it is clear that research in historical geography can work with and combine partial evidence into something more meaningful.

This section of the chapter will outline current approaches to archival research in historical geography, with significant focus placed upon working with partiality and

absences. It will be made evident throughout this chapter that although there is a growing body of scholarship regarding archival practice in the field, there is a need for researchers to pay acute attention to such methodologies and build upon them in order to create more inclusive histories when undertaking research on marginalised groups. There is a need to shift focus from the archive as a site of research to the actualities of practicing historical geography and the way in which methodologies and archival strategies can be significant in their own right.

Understanding archives and the archival record is a challenge fraught with difficulties. Brown and Davis-Brown (1998, p.17) suggest that ‘an archive is a repository... a place or space in which materials of historic or social significance are stored and ordered’, while Mills (2013) argues that an archive is an ensemble or collection of materials that documents the past. Archives and their collections are not independently created but rather situated in complex power structures which shapes how the past is accessed, researched and reproduced (Brown and Davis-Brown, 1998). The archive is an institution, which allows a modern-day representation of events to be reconstituted from the material, which was deemed important enough by a particular authority, to be preserved at the time (Derrida, 1996). Furthermore, those documents which are preserved are not always truly representative of the actualities of history, but rather demonstrative of the dominant and powerful views in society (Foucault, 1972). Nevertheless, there are significant differences between the form that an archive takes. As aforementioned they can be institutional or state administered, union or company specific but there are more localised, informal and community-led archives, such as the Yemeni Project and The Word, at South Shields, which have provided significant glimpses into BAME experiences.

It can be argued that, for the most part, the archival record was created by the ‘winners’ in society (Bastian, 2006), those who held the power to make records of specific events while overlooking certain perspectives which would remain absent from their collections (Schwartz and Cook, 2002). Archives are socially constructed and the knowledges that they contain are a product of its temporal, social and political contexts (Bailey et al., 2009; Schwartz and Cook, 2002). The nature of the power of the archive has received attention by many and there are multiple approaches in historical geography which attempt to acknowledge the constructed nature of the archive and engage with its absences and bias (Awcock, 2020; Gagen, 2001; Griffin, 2008; Hodder, 2017; Hoskins, 2015; Mills, 2013).

This thesis traces the everyday experiences of BAME communities in the North East of England in the interwar period and many of the challenges I have faced when researching marginalised groups has prompted similar methodological enquiries elsewhere within historical geography. Mills (2013, p.707) highlights that although ‘archives can contain hidden voices of both the powerful and powerless’, usually one or the other remains absent due to the nature the archive, its collection process and its overarching power structures. While there has been an increasing body of scholarship on archival absences, as Legg (2016) notes there has been significantly less work which addresses marginalisation, otherness and difference from within the archival record (although see Bressey, 2011; Duncan, 1999; Moore, 2010; Ogborn, 2019). This perhaps demonstrates the challenging nature of uncovering marginalised voices from collections which when created, sought to exclude them from the archival narrative. For example, this was certainly the challenge I faced when attempting to locate the experiences and direct testimony of BAME individuals in the Colonial Office and Home Office collections. There is a need to acknowledge the bias towards the elite in

archival collections (Awcock, 2020), while attending to the incompleteness of the record in order to frame and justify how archival material is used (Hodder, 2017) when researching marginalised groups.

When undertaking historical research which precedes the limits of oral history, it is significant to acknowledge that most archival collections are finite (Cresswell, 2012). Historical geographers cannot observe the past directly (Baker, 1997) and therefore must be attentive to the limits that are imposed on them. Metaphors of archival absences and partiality have frequented the recent literature of methodological practices in historical geography (Edensor, 2005; Hodder, 2017; McGeachan, 2018; Mills, 2012, 2013; Ogborn, 2003). This work has demonstrated the dynamic nature of the archival record and brought attention to the multiple approaches taken by those working with partiality. It is the role of historical geographers to not simply find documents but situate them within the wider contexts and competing interests of the archive (Hodder, 2017).

Directly engaging with the politics of the archival material itself has been one way in which researchers have acknowledged the partiality of the archive and developed methodological strategies to address this (Moore, 2010). Reading archives along the grain (Stoler, 2010) while directly engaging with the political nature of the archive can offer opportunities to understand how the construction of a particular archive and its documents, bears directly on the material available (Cresswell, 2012). Hanlon (2001), in his work on the Memorial Coliseum in Kentucky, demonstrates the way in which an attentiveness to the uneven nature of the historical record can allow a reconstruction of the muted voices and perspectives embedded within its collection. He argues that both the 'cultural landscape and historical record are constituted by spatial practices and representations that reflect, refract, and reproduce social relations

in specific ways' (Hanlon, 2001, p.24). Such an understanding has influenced the research conducted for this thesis as it became apparent that the presence, or more often lack thereof, of BAME perspectives and experiences was significantly conditioned by the power politics of the archive, and that some collections, such as the Colonial Office records, were organised in a way that reflected the historic status of minority groups, placing their experiences on the periphery and centring the needs of white local and national political and bureaucratic institutions.

Developing an awareness of the power relations of the archive, Duncan (1999) argues, from a colonial archive perspective, that in addressing the muted voices of the archive, meaningful perspectives and standpoints can be uncovered from documents which were produced and retained to serve a much different function. The subdued nature of these narratives does not mean that such perspectives are absolutely absent from the archival record, but rather that the document or collection that they are situated in was not created to centre these experiences but rather to serve the objectives of the powerful (Bastian, 2006; Bressey, 2006). The silencing of voices or perspectives of those who were marginalised when the documents were created, was a conscious tool from which power and control could later be exerted.

An example of this from my own research was found within the Colonial Office collection at The National Archives. In these archives of the British state, there were a significant number of folios labelled 'Adenese Seamen, Miscellaneous Correspondence' which contained a wealth of documents detailing the BAME, and not just 'Adenese', presence in port town communities. These documents contain detailed statistics in reference to BAME populations, their employment condition and letters from local authority figures such as police chiefs and mayors. This material was most likely collected and preserved to provide the necessary evidence to support the

development and implementation of exclusionary policies such as the 1925 Coloured Alien Seamen Order and the 1930 Rota System, as well as individual deportations and repatriations. However, hidden within these files, and with no mention on the archive catalogue, were hand written letters and petitions from BAME seafarers, boarding house masters and their wives living in the port towns of the North East which provides a personal insight into their everyday experiences of exclusion, (un)employment and their wider social and cultural lives. This then allowed me to trace further emerging acts of resistance (Hughes, 2020), which were found in an unexpected place in the archival record, and develop an understanding of how such acts unfolded in the everyday lives of BAME communities in interwar Britain. Searching for marginalised voices in archival collections which were created to exclude and control such groups, has been a central aspect of my methodology and one which has enabled me to centre BAME experiences and ‘turn up’ the volume of their testimony and archival presence.

While some scholars have taken a direct approach, engaging with the politics of the archive, others have taken a more deconstructive approach to the nature of available sources and the limitations this poses (Moore, 2010). In acknowledging that what is created and what has survived within an archive is a socially, temporally and politically dynamic process sheds light on the conditions that were present in the past when the material was produced (Ogborn, 2003, 2019). It is then possible to deconstruct the archiving process to bring attention to the power, influence and practice that has shaped the available material that we are able to access (Kurtz, 2001). Moore (2010) acknowledges the benefit of these deconstructive approaches during her research on abortions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in County Record Offices. Within the archives she encountered censorship, both as a form of

resistance and as a protective action in the catalogue, as content related to abortion was often, as she states:

‘Veiled under headings such as ‘Herbalism’, ‘Wisewomen’ and ‘Women’s History’ so that they could actually remain in the archive. To ‘veil’ such material behind these headings may have been a conscious and shrewd decision taken by an astute archivist, well aware of local sensitivities surrounding the topic of abortion, and fearful that such materials may be at risk of removal, even disposal, or simply withheld from the public.’ (Moore, 2010, p.265)

In this regard, archive maintenance, cataloguing and preservation is not an uninfluenceable and impartial process but involves complex decision making by the institution and the archivist(s) themselves. Griffin (2018b) has paid attention to the significance of labour within the archive, the need for collaboration between archivists, communities and participatory research and how these efforts are integral to the process of making usable pasts. This collaborative approach to history making does not necessarily address partiality and absence and may indeed add to it, nonetheless this subjective and interactive method is significant in rethinking the object nature of history production and can be used as a platform from which increased work on archival absences can later be established and collaboratively developed. Since October 2020, I have been in conversation with The Discovery Museum in Newcastle, which is the home of Tyne and Wear Archives, to share my insight on researching BAME regional histories from a user and academic perspective. The museum is working not only to diversify its exhibitions, but ensure its catalogue is more accessible to those researching minority histories and I look forward to collaborating with them on this further.

There are increasingly more creative methodologies developing within archival research by historical geographers which draws strength and ingenuity from archival absences. DeLyser (2014) demonstrates the merits of a participatory historical



geography, which she employed in her work on early women pilots, and that researchers can make an intervention, or contribution, to an archive during their research. Whether that be using their own resources to obtain additional archival materials (DeLyser, 2014) or providing administrative support to an activist-led community archive (Griffin, 2018b), it is clear that historical geographers are increasingly bringing creative and participatory approaches into archival research.

Contributing to an archive, albeit not on the same scale as DeLyser (2014) or Griffin (2018b), has been something I have sought to do during my research. The South Tyneside Photo Archive,<sup>9</sup> which is available online, has been a significant collection of material that I have employed throughout the thesis. When I was searching for images of the arrests made during the 1930 riot in South Shields, I noted that they had been catalogued as ‘Arab Riot’. It is clear from the work that has been done by the Yemeni Project, that ascribing blame in this way can cause tension with how BAME histories are portrayed in the region and so I contacted the owners of the archive to highlight this. I brought to their attention the contentious nature of the language used and how it, albeit inadvertently, allocated blame to the minority group and I suggested the use ‘Mill Dam Riot’ in its place. I received a reply within the day from the local history collections manager who apologised for this oversight and explained that volunteers were instructed to label the photographs with the writing on the reverse of the image and much of the collection was collated in the 1960s. The collections manager immediately altered the titles on the images and informed me that they will be looking into their wider collections to ensure that the cataloguing does not reflect anachronistic terms or perspectives. This provided me further insight into how outdated cataloguing can marginalise the presence of BAME communities in the

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<sup>9</sup> <https://southtynesidehistory.co.uk/archive> [date accessed: 03 January 2021]

archival record and it is through an awareness to the historical specificity of such marginalisation that I could further search the wider archival record for a BAME presence. In this regard, understanding the socioeconomic and political positions of those whom you are researching in the period when the archival documents were created, can help to shed light on how, and why, they may be present, or absent, in the archival record. For instance, Legg (2016) has engaged with subaltern theories to navigate archival absences to uncover the experiences of women in ashrams, brothels and trafficking in colonial Delhi. Through understanding the marginalised and abject position of subaltern groups in their everyday historical lives (Legg, 2016), it becomes possible to trace how such marginalised experiences, narratives and testimony are positioned in the historical record and place focus on these narratives thus centring and uncovering their archival presence.

Similarly, the use of photography has also been employed in attempts to work with archival absences of BAME groups (Bressey, 2011; Rose, 2000). In her work on the Black presence in Victorian Britain, Caroline Bressey (2006, p.52) stresses that although she was unable to use more traditional methods of archival research, due to the absence of ‘colour’ in official documents— census returns, prison and workhouse documents, for example – and the anglicised names of many individuals of African descent, photographs became a means of overcoming this archival absence as ‘if only the written archives had been searched the men would not have been identifiable as “Black”; it is only through using the photographic albums that the colour of their skin can be “seen”’(Bressey, 2006, p.52). This suggests that a material presence in itself is meaningful and must be foregrounded. In a sense it is about employing innovative and relevant strategies to ensure that you are looking in the right place, for even fragmentary sources which allow minority perspectives to be centred. Interpreting a

fragmented and partial presence is challenging, and requires some speculation, but the very presence itself is significant and contributes to the development of more inclusive histories of marginalised individuals and communities. These creative and original approaches to overcoming archival absences, or rather initially perceived absences in my case, influenced me greatly and as I developed my methodology, I sought to incorporate theoretical approaches to enable a better understanding of the BAME presence in the British interwar archive, this will be discussed in more detail in the following section of this chapter.

The methodology of this thesis has strong links to feminist perspectives in historical geography research (Domosh and Morin, 2003) and acknowledges how everyday experiences have been racialised, gendered and marginalised in the archival record (McDonagh, 2018). This approach has not only uncovered the experiences of marginalised others in the archival record, but links with our understanding of riots as events, and an attentiveness to atmospheres (Closs Stephens, 2016), through longer temporalities.

In order to pursue a more inclusive account of the everyday experiences of BAME communities, this thesis employs contemporary understandings of atmospheres (Closs Stephens, 2016) through a historical lens in order to access and explore material and immaterial experiences which made up everyday life. Historical geographers often speak of traces, ghosts and glimpses that can be gleaned from even the most fragmentary of archives (Awcock, 2020; Baker, 1997; Legg, 2016; McGeachan, 2014, 2018). In this regard, reading notions of atmosphere as a ‘set of feelings circulating in the air’ (Closs Stephens, 2016, p.182) alongside everyday historical experiences in the archive, allows alternative perspectives to be gained within this study. Atmospheres demonstrate the plurality, and sometimes transitory

nature, of everyday life as well as the material and immaterial experiences which emerge through it. Employing the language of atmospheres does not reduce historical events to ever expanding relational entities but rather allows the significance of a moment, event or experience to be highlighted without needing to explain the immediate causality. Essentially, for the purpose of this thesis, the notion of atmosphere is used as a means of working with archival material in a more dynamic and sensitive way to uncover glimpses which are indicative of the actualities of everyday life for the ethnically diverse working class communities living across the North East of England in the interwar period.

In the summer of 2018, I attended the International Conference of Historical Geographers in Warsaw where the session ‘Mobility and the archive’ brought together eight historical geographers working on various projects to discuss how mobility, migration and transnational histories shaped their practice in the archive.<sup>10</sup> Throughout the session it became apparent that working with fragmentary collections, mobile populations, in often state administered archives, ensured that uncovering the everyday experiences was fraught with challenges. Marginalised subjects often only appear in the archival record in moments of exceptionality – imprisonment, death, marriage, poor law provision – and then their presence is conditioned by their relative immobility in the spaces in which they live (Bressey, 2006). Similarly, historical geographers of riots have noted that moments of violence are only ever as violent as they were perceived to be at the time (Griffin, 2008) and even then, there is an inherent bias towards the experiences of the rich and powerful (Awcock, 2020).

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<sup>10</sup> The ‘Mobility in the archive’ session was held on the 17 July 2018 at the International Conference of Historical Geographers. The session was chaired by Associate Professor David Beckingham and sponsored by the RGS Historical Geography Research Group. The speakers were David Beckingham, Catherine Sumnall, James Kneale, Nicola Thomas, Benjamin Thorpe, Caroline Bressey, Phillip Howell and Cheryl McGeachan.

Moments of exceptionality, documented in court records and council meeting minutes, can provide a glimpse into the everyday experience and document the direct testimony of marginalised groups. It is this approach, combined with a theoretical lens of the everyday discussed in the preceding chapter, that has significantly shaped my own research practice as to quote Highmore (2002, p.3), ‘the non-everyday (the exceptional) is there to be found in the heart of the everyday’ and indeed vice versa in both the archival record and in everyday life. The quotidian details recorded within exceptional moments present in the archival record, such as the riots highlighted in the literature review and considered in latter chapters, can provide an insight into alternate social, political and spatial experiences which cannot be gained from viewing records as complete recollections of the past (Hoskins, 2015).

Uncovering everyday life in the archival record is fraught with challenges as often the ‘unremarkable’ nature of daily routines, encounters, experiences and relationships were not deemed significant enough to be preserved in documentary evidence. Nonetheless, Gagen (2001) in her work on children’s geographies has utilised official accounts of playground reform to uncover the agency and experience of children in their everyday lives. While Griffin and Evans (2008) have uncovered more intangible aspects of everyday life, such as embodied experiences in nature, from the dominant archival record. Even when the voices of the powerful can be heard clearly in the archives (Hodder, 2017), in engaging with the absences and fragmented voices of the marginalised, it becomes possible to centre subdued narratives and develop a more inclusive account of the everyday presence. When working with partiality and fragmentation in the archival record, instances of everyday experience are far from concretely representative. Informed assumptions must be made, and an account produced which rather than being an absolute narrative of everyday life, is

indicative of wider experiences and can therefore challenge those narratives which reproduce histories from dominant accounts and exclude or generalise minority perspectives.

This method has both political significance and contemporary relevance. There is a need to not separate class histories and race histories (Stovall, 2012) but rather produce history at this intersection to support evolving public histories and useable pasts which celebrate the diversity of British working class history. This is especially pertinent in the representation of the history of the North East of England where labour histories are mainly centred on the white working class man, and minority perspectives are mostly included in moments of exceptional racialised disorder such as the 1919 and 1930 riots. I am not discovering a BAME presence in a sense of finding new documents, the nature of the archives I engage with means that these narratives have always been ‘present’ within the dominant power structures and records but have been either overlooked or not the primary focus of research. I am seeking to uncover everyday experiences, centre the BAME presence and essentially ‘turn up the volume’ of these marginalised voices. I am not doing this by reading against the archival grain, I am using primarily ‘white’ socially constructed archives to legitimately draw out BAME voices, perspectives, histories and everyday experiences. In doing so, this thesis directly engages with the politics of the archive and deconstructs the socioeconomic, temporal and political processes that encapsulates it while situating my methodological practice in intersectional theory.

### **3.3 – Employing theoretical approaches in archival research**

As has been demonstrated thus far in this chapter, methods and practice in historical geography has received increasing attention over the last decade, especially in research which encompasses absence, partiality and fragmentation (Awcock, 2020; Griffin, 2008; Hodder, 2017; Mills, 2013; Moore, 2010). Much of history has gone unrecorded, only a small portion of documented histories end up in the archive for permanent preservation, and even then, the process is far from a straightforward translation of events as they actually occurred. This is especially pertinent regarding the voices and experiences of marginalised groups such as the working class, children, women and minority ethnic communities. The overwhelming power that encapsulates the archive ensures that the voices and experiences of the marginalised are not often central to but rather on the periphery of the archival record (Derrida, 1996).

The complex nature of the intersections between race, class, gender and nationality and the need to develop inclusive and contextualised histories has been noted by many (Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 1996a; Stovall, 2012; Virdee, 2014). These engagements bring attention to the need to avoid additive approaches, rather emphasising the importance of a relational understanding that draws upon mutual constitution, situatedness and intersectionality (Yuval-Davis, 2015).

#### **3.3.1 – The ‘double marginalisation’ of BAME testimony in the archival record**

Throughout my research I have been attentive to the ways in which BAME voices are marginalised in the archival record and have developed an understanding of how they can appear to be ‘doubly marginalised’ (Mills, 2012, 2013). From the start

of my data collection, I noticed the multiple ways that marginalised voices were peripheral in the archival record and sought to situate my understanding within current methodological theory in historical geography. In her work focussing on children's geographies, Sarah Mills (2012, 2013) develops an awareness that her research subjects were 'doubly marginalised'. First, as 'out-of-sight' research subjects housed in filing cabinets and on microfiche and, second, as young people hidden amongst adult accounts. While undertaking my own archival research I felt that such a framework could be, in part, useful when attempting to understand and locate BAME everyday experiences in the archival record in the early twentieth century.

Firstly, the BAME presence in the physical archival record means that they appear as, to quote Mills, 'out of sight research subjects' housed in unorganised, undigitised and underfunded local collections. The most insightful and personal testimony concerning the everyday experiences of BAME individuals living in the North East of England I have found is in the letters to the editor of the *Shields Gazette*. This material is only available at a local library, The Word, on microfilm. These letters are already filtered and framed by the editors of the newspapers and are particularly partial in their reflections. Furthermore, the marginalised everyday experience is largely uncatalogued and unsearchable, and this technicality makes it increasingly challenging and time consuming for researchers to pursue an inquiry of this nature.

Secondly, the BAME experience and testimony is often hidden amongst collections that were created under conditions which sought to marginalise them and focus on the white experience, for example Home Office and Colonial Office records and the National Union of Seamen (NUS) collection at Warwick Modern Record Centre. As will be demonstrated throughout this thesis, the NUS was, despite technically being a racially inclusive union, imbued with ideas of imperial racial



hierarchy especially in the post-war depression of the 1920s and early 1930s. Although there were multiple references to BAME seafarers in branch meeting minute books and the Union newspaper, *The Seaman*, there was only one instance of the direct testimony of a BAME individual.

In January 1930, Arab Boarding House Keeper and retired seafarer Ali Said, wrote a letter directly to the President of the Union to criticise and rebuke an article about the Arab community published in an earlier edition. This letter was torn apart by the editor of the newspaper, in an article titled ‘An Arab “seaman” protests against our allegations to the board of trade. “the cap fits”.’ (*The Seaman*, 15 January 1930). Said was slandered, his political knowledge, personal circumstances, employment history and even his name was mocked by the white editor. His testimony was dismissed for attempting to defend his community and challenge the racialised portrayal of BAME seafarers in the merchant shipping industry by the National Sailors’ and Firemen’s Union (NSFU). This direct testimony of the everyday experience of a BAME individual living and working in the North East of England was inaudible amongst the racist views of a white union newspaper.

In this regard, although BAME experiences and narratives can be understood as doubly marginalised – physically located in small local collections and often hidden in white accounts – such an additive approach, although clearly significant in explaining the physical location of marginalised voices in the archival record, does little to demonstrate the multiple and intersecting nature of the BAME presence and absence in the records themselves. Developing a methodological framework situated in intersectional theory allows attention to be drawn to the temporal and spatial fluidity and the dynamic nature of identity, marginalised voices and their subsequent place in the archival record.

### **3.3.2 – Intersectionality in the archive**

There are very few theories that have generated the kind of interdisciplinary and international engagement that marks the intellectual past, present and future than that of intersectionality. A detailed engagement with intersectional theory has already been established in section 2 (2.2) of this thesis, but here it is returned to as a means to consider the methodological implications of such an approach.

Despite the origins of intersectionality being grounded in American feminist legal scholarship (Crenshaw, 1989), the last three decades has seen intersectional analysis taking place across numerous disciplines, spanning temporal and spatial boundaries thus demonstrating its vast theoretical capacity. A work-in-progress understanding of intersectional theory, as outlined by Carbado, Crenshaw et al. (2013), suggests that we should endeavour to move intersectionality to unexplored places. Intersectionality is not a contained entity, and just because it has not been employed in a certain way before does not mean that it cannot and should not attempt to engage with experiences outside of its traditional applications (Cho, 2013). As argued in section 2 (2.2) of this thesis, intersectionality is rarely explicitly utilised as a conceptual tool in historical geography (although see Brown and Yaffe 2017; Kelliher, 2017). Yet as Kelliher (2017) demonstrates the employment of an intersectionally sensitive approach allows for the relationships between race, class and the dynamics of power to become apparent in the archival record. This chapter will now go on to explore how a methodological approach situated in intersectional theory can be used to understand the partiality and absences of BAME everyday experiences in the archival record.

Reference to BAME individuals in the North East of England in the interwar period appear in national, regional and local archives sporadically, inconsistently and seemingly at random. However, their presence in the archival record is more than coincidental; it is dependent on intersecting socioeconomic and geopolitical contexts and varies immensely over temporal and spatial boundaries. Through using a lens of intersectional theory, it becomes possible to highlight the different ways that BAME individuals and communities come to be visible, or absent, in the archival record. It becomes apparent that issues of race, class, gender, literacy, occupation, citizenship and subjecthood, intersect with one another to either inhibit or guarantee a BAME presence in the archival record. These socially constructed forms of oppression, relational and independent at different times, in diverse spaces and in various ways, has clearly shaped the archival record.

The interwar period in Britain saw a shift in popular opinion, both at the national and local level, regarding BAME seafarers. Through the commodification of imperial labour, increasing white labourism and racialised hierarchies of empire the BAME everyday experience, and its subsequent preservation in the archival record, became increasingly racialised and marginalised. The intersectional experience of BAME individuals must be situated against the socioeconomic and political backdrop of inter-war Britain. In situating intersectional analysis against social, temporal, political and spatial conditions, the ways in which particular categories of social divisions have different meaning dependant on wider conditions can be brought to the forefront of analysis (Yuval-Davis, 2015).

By deconstructing the bipolar categories that are often ascribed to marginalised groups – Black or white; Britisher or Foreigner; National or Subject– a structural background begins to be exposed and the interlocking systems of oppression, and the

impact on BAME everyday experiences, comes to be of a central focus. Throughout the empirical chapters of this thesis the intersectional nature of the identities of BAME individuals and the impact this has on the everyday experience will be uncovered. For example, as will be discussed in Chapter 5 (4.1), in South Shields in 1934, a small group of Indian pedlars experienced racialised treatment by local institutions who enacted national law in specific and selective ways to ensure that the Indian pedlars were positioned as alien seamen to guarantee they would come under increasing levels of police control and thus restrict their settlement in the town. Acknowledging such historically specific racisms (Hall, 1996a) through an intersectional awareness of BAME communities' identities in this period, allows further attention to be paid to the relationship between everyday marginalisation in the interwar period and the marginalised positions of BAME community perspectives in the wider historical record today. The intersectional identity of BAME British colonial seafarers meant that their everyday experiences were shaped differently at different times because of their identities as Black, working class, male, British Colonial Subjects, working in the merchant shipping industry, in interwar Britain. These identities were fluid, uncertain and relational, yet also particular in their meaning in material terms.

They were largely transient workers, reliant on religious and kinship connections and experienced specific forms of marginalisation and discrimination not simply because of a sum of their identities but rather because of the situated nature of their intersectional identities in interwar Britain (Yuval-Davis, 2015). The socioeconomic and political climate of interwar Britain, defined by economic depression and high levels of unemployment, provided a backdrop from which such co-constitutive and distinct forms of oppression and discrimination occurred. As will be detailed in Chapter 5, the exclusionary actions of employers, union, local and

national government and the media intersected to create the violent conditions of everyday life. It is in an awareness of the impact of these conditions on the everyday lives of marginalised communities that the presence, absence and marginalisation of the BAME voice in the archival record can further be understood.

The intersectional nature of the identities of these men ensured that, in both contemporary society and later in the archival record, they were marginalised and faced multiple platforms of oppression which greatly shaped their everyday experiences in both the local spaces in which they lived and from within wider national and institutional discourses concerning colonial labour. Essentially, their narratives are marginalised in the archival record because they were Black, working class, male, British Colonial Subjects, who worked in the merchant shipping industry, living in inter-war Britain. Throughout the interwar period, although their collective intersectional identity was significant and a source of distinct contestation, specific components of their identity would be racialised further dependant on dynamic localised tensions relating to levels of unemployment, rising miscegenation fears and specific attempts to culturally other BAME communities in Britain.

Archival presence and experience cannot be thought of in either singular or additive terms but rather as an expression of the intersectional nature of identities. Situating BAME intersectional identities allows attention to be drawn to the constitutive nature of their presence in the archival record. Through the contextualisation of experiences and identities it becomes clear that they have significant bearing on the contents of the archive. The contents of the archive and the conditions under which the material was created and conserved has led to the silencing, marginalisation and muting of minority voices. The BAME archival

presence in the early twentieth century can only be understood against the backdrop of the issues prevalent in inter-war Britain and on a micro level, inter-war Tyneside.

This theoretical analysis has sought to open discussion for how we can consider integrating specific theoretical approaches when undertaking archival research of marginalised groups; changing the way we perceive, address and experience the limitations of the archive and its absences, partiality and fragmentation; developing practices where we can centre subdued or constrained voices and ‘turn up the volume’ of their testimony.

### **3.4 – Constraints, compromises and challenges**

As Baker (1997) discusses, much research in historical geography is based upon certain compromises dependent on the nature of historical inquiry being pursued and it is best to acknowledge these explicitly. As previously discussed, material available regarding the everyday experience of BAME individuals in the North East in the interwar period is inconsistent and fragmentary and throughout this thesis it is argued that the research undertaken, although limited by various factors outside of my control, has actively sought to make the most of what material is available. A significant challenge I encountered when working with such fragmentary and partial material was the need to ensure that data was used in a way which demonstrated that although it is indicative of the everyday experience, it is not all-encompassing and complete. As such there was a recognition that informed assumptions have had to be made at certain points due wider limitations. Alongside practical challenges faced with newspaper collections, which will be discussed in section 5.4, there were many other

constraints, compromises and challenges encountered throughout this thesis and these will now be discussed in more detail.

### **3.4.1 – Researching an ethnically diverse working class**

There is a small yet significant body of historical research which pays attention to BAME communities in the North East in the interwar period (Byrne, 1977, 1994; Carr, 2005; Jenkinson, 2009, 2017; Lawless, 1995; Tabili, 1994a, 2011). For the most part though, such narrative histories are centred upon the Arab community in South Shields as it was the largest and most stable BAME community in the region.<sup>11</sup> This thesis contributes to this body of work while stressing the relational nature of the experiences of BAME individuals. This thesis has consciously attempted to extend research to encompass the four significant port towns in the North East – North Shields, South Shields, Sunderland and Hartlepool (Middlesbrough) – as well as the wider regional and cultural landscape in which these communities are situated. The research also extends the inquiry beyond the Arab community in South Shields to include West Indian and West African individuals and communities living across the region. The seafaring experience of Indian Colonial Subjects has not been considered in this thesis as these men were prohibited from being discharged and residing in Britain in the interwar period due to the contractual nature of their labour (Gordon and Reilly, 1986). Nonetheless, a small number of Indian seafarers did abscond from their ships and for a short period resided in South Shields and their experiences will be discussed.

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<sup>11</sup> See Appendix 1: Number of BAME Seafarers registered in North East port towns, 1930-1938.

This thesis has challenged the possible assumption that South Shields was the only hub of ethnic diversity in the region during the interwar period. However, due to the nature of the archival record, and the settlement patterns of BAME communities in the region, it has not been possible to expand analysis evenly. The South Shields Arab community was significantly larger than any other BAME community in the North East and this has been demonstrated by the relative abundance of archival material concerning the community in comparison to the West Indian community in North Shields for example. Although a sustained attempt has been made to ensure that this thesis is a regional study, there remains an imbalance in analysis due to the archival material available and this is acknowledged throughout.

Furthermore, an associated practicality encountered when attempting to uncover BAME experiences in the archival record relates to names, ethnicity and nationality. Race and ethnicity are not always apparent in archival records for multiple reasons (Bressey, 2006). Census returns and institutional records did not have a consistent requirement to record ethnicity and so it is often a side note or unofficial observation. Here a tension became apparent between attempting to identify racialised experiences through archival signs of non-whiteness yet simultaneously being attentive to the fact that 'race' is socially constructed, its meaning fluctuating under contingent historical and spatial conditions (Carby, 2019; Hall, 1996b).

In much of the research on BAME communities in the North East in the twentieth century, significant attention has been paid to the Arab community in South Shields due to the relative ease of tracing them in the archival record as the majority of them have Arabic names (Jenkinson, 2009; Lawless, 1995; Tabili, 1994a, 2011). Tabili (2011) employs this methodology in her work, although she is aware of the assumptions made and inadequacies posed by employing such a method. The legacies



of slavery and imperialism means that many men and women from the African diaspora often have British names which can ‘whiten’ their presence in the archival record and make uncovering their experiences evermore challenging (Bressey, 2010; Tabili, 2011). Such ‘whitening’ can be seen on the petition made to the Mayor of South Shields in July 1921 by West African and West Indian seamen.<sup>12</sup> In this petition all forty-four of the men have anglicised names – for example: John Brown, A Bryant, J Peters, A Williams, J Benson. Although the petition lists their place of birth under the subtitle ‘native of’, their ethnicity is not explicitly referenced in the petition.

The nature of the British Empire in the interwar period, suggests that it is fair to assume that these men were BAME British Colonial Subjects, yet due to the vast networks spanning the empire it is not always satisfactory to assume ethnicity from such information (Bressey, 2006). Nonetheless, when the petition was forwarded from the Mayor of South Shields to the Colonial Office, the Mayor explicitly refers to the ethnicity of the men in the petition thus securing their visibility in the archival record.<sup>13</sup> This challenge can in part explain the limited research that has been undertaken on West Indian’s and West African’s living in the North East in the interwar period. It also speaks to the earlier reflections around intersectionality, particularity and socio-economic conditions.

Another challenge posed when researching BAME individuals in the North East is the mobile nature of their work. The vast majority of these men were seafarers and thus the BAME population in the port towns was largely transient and ever-fluctuating depending on employment opportunities and market demand. Although

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<sup>12</sup> TNA CO 323/800/35 – Petition from West African and West Indian Seafarers to the Mayor of South Shields – 23 July 1921 – Forwarded to The Colonial Office.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

among the Arab community in South Shields there was a permanent community of Boarding House Keepers, café and refreshment proprietors and those who had settled in the town and married local women, this spatially immobile community was relatively small in comparison to the larger transient seafaring population.<sup>14</sup>

It is especially challenging to uncover the everyday experience of a largely transitory population as they tend to only appear in the archival records in moments of exceptionality – institutionalisation, hospitalisation, death, applying for poor law provision, arrest, for example. Another way that the experiences of a largely transitory population become present in the archival record is when the decision is made by an individual to spatially immobilise themselves and settle in the town, through marriage, applying for licenses for boarding houses and opening businesses. In this regard, newspapers are often the most significant and accessible source for tracing the everyday experiences of BAME communities in the North East in the interwar period as the racialised nature of the press ensured that mundane, banal and everyday behaviours of BAME individuals made it into the news and explicit reference was often made to ethnicity, for example the use of Arabic language being assumed subversive, threatening and mischievous or arguments between BAME men concerning white women. This racialisation of everyday behaviours and experiences ensured that mundane moments were recorded in the archive and this enables an account to be developed which is indicative of the wider everyday experiences of a multi-ethnic working class.

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<sup>14</sup> In January 1930, it was estimated in the local press that there was between forty and fifty members of the Arab community that resided permanently in the town while the transient, ‘floating’ population numbered around five hundred (*Shields Gazette*, 22 January 1930).

### **3.4.2 – Ensuring representative, inclusive and mindful language**

From the outset of this thesis the challenge of determining descriptors for the communities I am researching was a constant contemplation and challenge. It was clear that the historic terms used to describe these men were unacceptable, anachronistic, insufficient and unrepresentative to the communities I engage with in my research. In interwar Britain, the most commonly used descriptor was ‘Coloured Alien Seamen’, and this was applied to any BAME seafarer that could not produce explicit proof of British citizenship or subjecthood.

My research is largely attentive to the experiences of Adenese, Yemeni, Somali, West Indian and West African seafarers, or those connected to the shipping industry, whom were, for the most part, British Colonial Subjects or Protected Persons. I required a term where I could collectively refer to this group whilst also drawing attention to the intersectional nature of their identity, including their ethnicity, nationality, imperial status and occupation. As has already been discussed, the intersectional nature of their identities led to them experiencing distinct conditions which shaped their presence in the archival record.

In order to develop a term which was appropriate, inclusive and reflecting of the intersectional nature of the identities of these men, I looked to the historiography of those who had undertaken similar studies in the region. Tabili (1994a) uses the term “Black”, as does Jenkinson (2009), to describe non-white seafarers living in Britain. Tabili (1994a, 2011) suggests that she employed this terminology as it is used by scholars in the discipline and that terms from the interwar period are offensive and anachronistic. Nonetheless, she stresses that there is a complex struggle regarding

terminology used to describe racial categories, as such language cannot be attentive to difference and can suggest a superficial uniformity of experience. Frost (2000, pp.208-209), in her work on the Kru community in nineteenth and early twentieth century Liverpool, further discusses the complexity of using 'Black' as it:

'was constructed out of a process of external labelling by whites, who lumped West Africans, West Indians, black British, Somalians and Afro-Americans all together as a way of defining and excluding the 'other'... But 'Black' was also a category that was positively embraced by these various communities as a political identity in the face of prevailing racism, white hostility and their shared history of colonial oppression.'

The works of Tabili (1994a, 2011), Jenkinson (2009) and Frost (2000) were written over a decade ago and as I was undertaking this research, and encountering a multitude of experiences and everyday encounters, I felt that there needed to be a renewed reflection regarding the language I was going to use in my thesis.

In January 2018 the multi-interdisciplinary research group, Port Towns and Urban Cultures, at the University of Portsmouth developed a project to explore the contribution of 'non-white' mariners in Britain during the First World War. This project sought to locate the experiences of Black and Minority Ethnic personnel serving at sea. On their website they utilised the term BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) as a means of highlighting the racial identity of those men. Nevertheless, they stress that 'much work has to be undertaken to fully explore and highlight the issues of racial identity' and acknowledge that utilising the label BAME is not without its challenges and it is not deemed accurate by some.<sup>15</sup> Nayak (2012) states that although BAME is contested, it is more inclusive than its predecessor

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<sup>15</sup> BAME Seafarers in the First World War. Port Towns and Urban Cultures Research Group, University of Portsmouth. <http://porttowns.port.ac.uk/source-information/bame-seafarers-first-world-war/> [date accessed: 07 November 2020].

‘Black’ and stresses that there is a need to acknowledge that racial terminology is always subject to contestation and there will always be challenges in ensuring representative language.

After much thought, research and deliberation I decided to transfer the relatively contemporary term ‘BAME’ into the histories presented here. I do so as an attempt to capture the intersectional nature of the identities of these men, while still being attentive to the heterogeneity present within such a description. Furthermore, when I am explicitly referring to those working, or connected to, the merchant shipping industry I use the term BAME British Colonial Seafarers in order to bring attention to their occupation and imperial citizenship status which was central to their everyday experiences in interwar Britain.

I acknowledge my position as a white researcher undertaking work on minority ethnic groups in history. I am conscious that I should not ascribe identity to these subjects but attempt to be methodical and consistent with the language used. Nonetheless, I acknowledge that the term BAME may not be deemed sufficient by all, or entirely representative of those who I am researching, but I hope that the utilisation of such a term is reflective of the thought and awareness that I have employed throughout my thesis.

Alongside using BAME individuals, communities and seafarers as collective descriptions, when I am discussing individual groups or communities, I use more specific language such as West Indian, West African or Adenese. BAME identities are complex, as Frost (2000), p.208 notes:

‘One individual could hold a multitude of identities simultaneously. For example, a black seaman might identify himself as 'black', West

African, Nigerian and Yoruba, with each identity reflecting different social and political contexts.'

This was often the case regarding the 'Arab Community' in South Shields as although they were largely Adenese, there was a significant number of Somali, Egyptian and Yemeni seafarers who were also part of this community due to them sharing the faith of Islam as well as wider ethnic and cultural shared characteristics (Lawless, 1995). The term 'Arab community' is used by the local press, government institutions, from the interwar period and also in the current historiography (Byrne, 1977; Carr, 2005; Jenkinson, 2009; Lawless, 1995; Tabili, 1994a, 2011) to describe the collective community of Adenese, Somali, Egyptian and Yemeni seafarers living in South Shields. Although this terminology is not representative of the ethnic diversity of the community, the significance of Islam as a uniting religion among these men (Lawless, 1995) means that they often self-identified in the historical record as an 'Arab community' and therefore this language is employed in this thesis when explicit reference is being made to the South Shields community.

Working with absences and partiality has become a defining feature of historical geography research which has led me to conceptualise my research practice to include theoretical approaches when undertaking archival research of marginalised groups. This has the potential to change how we perceive, address and experience the limitations of the archive and its absences, partiality and fragmentation and develop practices where subdued or constrained voices can be central to rather than on the periphery of analysis.

### **3.5 – Research Practice**

This thesis engages with a variety of local, regional, national and political collections and draws heavily from newspaper reports, government and union records whilst acknowledging that the power politics of the archive differs depending on the type of records being used. For example, newspapers and Colonial Office files are produced, stored and archived under different conditions and for different motivations and intentions for future use.

In order to overcome fragmentation, partiality and perceived absences in the archival record a diverse range of available material is used to complement this study. This chapter will now outline the practice I have employed throughout my archival research and demonstrate that, although it is heavily informed by existing methodological approaches, it has responded to the nature of the enquiry and challenges posed by archival absences. It also builds upon current practices to make an original contribution in developing an inclusive history of ethnically diverse working class communities in the North East during the interwar period.

#### **3.5.1 – Foregrounding the BAME presence in the local, national and political archival record**

When attempting to uncover historical BAME everyday experiences in the North East of England it immediately became clear that there would not be one large local collection that would be central to my thesis. From my previous experience and research on coal mining communities in Durham and Northumberland in the nineteenth century, I initially believed that the most logical point to begin my research

would be in the County Record Offices (CRO) of Durham and Tyne and Wear, assuming that they would have significant collections of material that would be useful for my project, as had been the case in my previous research. From preliminary searches through their online catalogues, I expected fairly organised, accessible and complete runs of bureaucratic records, incident occurrence books, complaints registers, minutes of convictions and police commitment books from 1900-1950. I thought that these collections would enable me to approach sources that might hold glimpses into the racialised nature of BAME everyday experiences across the North East in the interwar period and shed light on to the experiences of racialised crime as part of the wider encounters which took place within a multi-ethnic working class.

The reality of what I encountered in the CRO were fragmented collections, unknown even to the archivist, missing boxes, inconsistent access restrictions due to incomplete re-cataloguing and fleeting references to BAME communities in the region. As Moore (2010) notes, the primary activity by many of those using CRO are genealogical, with many users tracing their family history through microfilm civil registers and ecclesiastical records. It soon became apparent that the traces I was searching for would not be found in the CRO. The few institutional and bureaucratic records that were available in such archives ensured that the BAME presence was inconsistent, impersonal and their only relative presence was at times of exceptionality, marriage, death, imprisonment and thus not indicative of the wider everyday experience. Resultingly, an alternative approach was needed to uncover and appreciate the more seemingly mundane and banal routines and experiences that make up everyday life (Back, 2015; Neal and Murji, 2015), and especially experiences of the daily negotiation of ethnic difference (Amin, 2002).



Census returns were also of limited use and although the 1911 census and 1939 register are digitised and available online, there were no consistent records of ethnicity made and it is not possible to trace BAME presence without making assumptions based on name and place of birth. As previously argued in this chapter, making assumptions of ethnicity based on individual names is problematic as it does not allow BAME individuals with anglicised names to be visible in the written archival record (Bressey, 2010). Furthermore, the 1921 census has not yet been digitised and is closed under access restrictions.

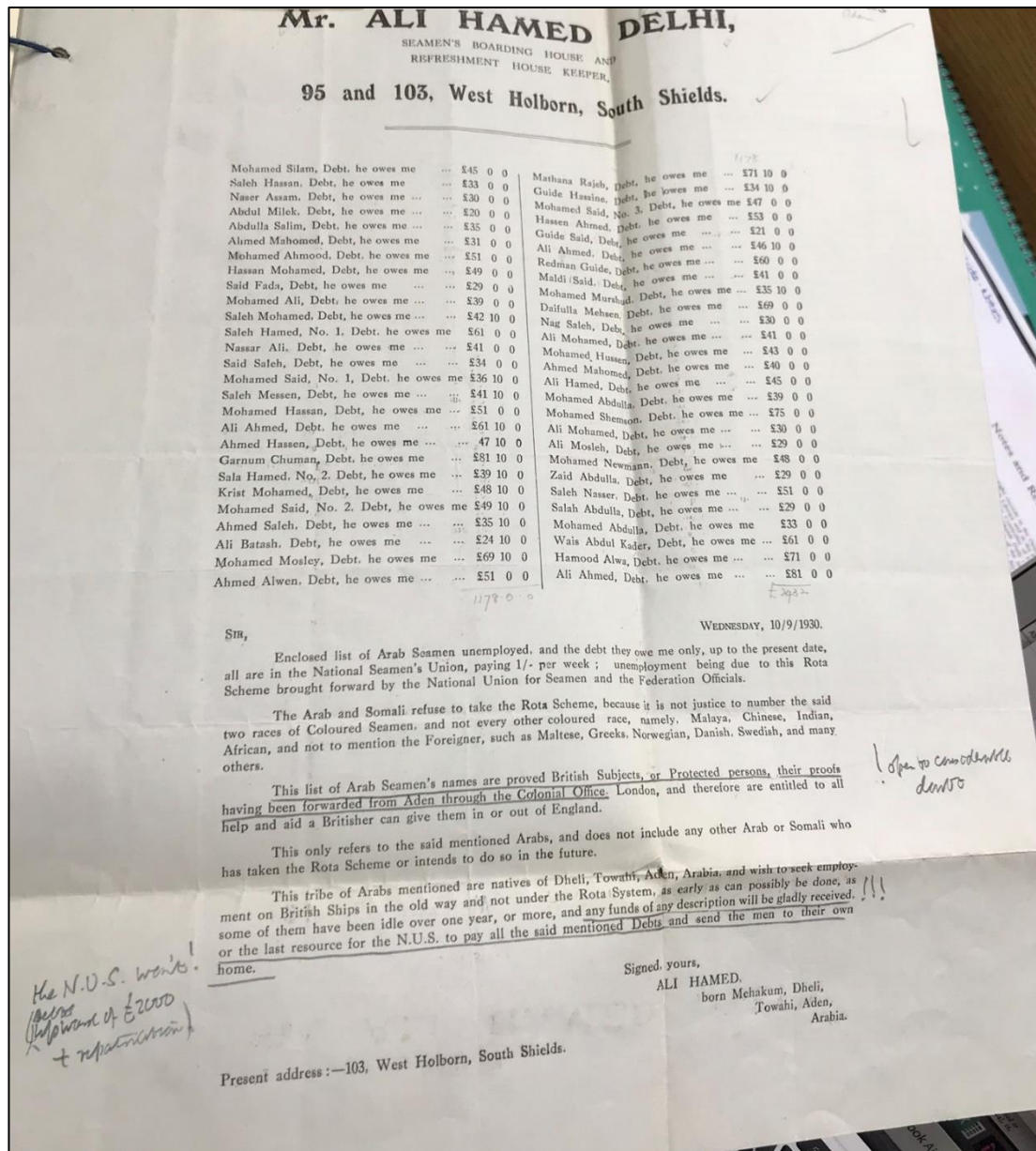
From the available historiography (Jenkinson, 2009; Lawless, 1995; Tabili, 1994a, 2011) I was aware that there was a small body of material in the Colonial Office and Home Office Records at the National Archives that could prove useful in articulating how everyday BAME local experiences from the North East were discussed at a national level. Engaging with these collections to draw out more mundane, yet still significant, experiences contributed to furthering a key objective in this thesis which develops an unbounded and dynamic understanding of ‘the everyday’ and ‘the exceptional’ as interlinked (Highmore, 2002; Neal and Murji, 2015; Robinson, 2015).

Within vast files and folios, many of which only had the description ‘Aden Seamen Miscellaneous Correspondence’, were letters from the Colonial Office, Home Office and Aliens Department Officials as well as Chief Inspectors, Board of Trade Officials, MPs, Mayors and Immigration Officials from the North East. Attached to these documents were letters and petitions from Arab Boarding House Masters, their wives and BAME seafarers from across the North East. Not only do such letters highlight the voices of the marginalised and situate them within a national discourse, but they also demonstrate that BAME individuals and communities were far from

hesitant at taking their everyday disputes to the national level. These personal letters often have telling comments handwritten in their margins, presumably by government officials, which ridicule the competence of the author's English or controversially question some of the issues being raised.

Figure 3.1 is a photograph of a petition sent to the Colonial Office from a South Shields Arab Boarding House Keeper, Mr Ali Hamed Delhi, in September 1930, where he petitions for financial unemployment relief for those residing in his house as they are British Subjects and entitled to support. The Colonial Office Official has written 'open to considerable debate!' in the right-hand margin next to the statement which suggests that all the men listed in the petition are British Subjects or Protected Persons. While the comment in the left-hand margin states that the NUS will not offer these men support and so suggests repatriation. These comments begin to highlight the contested nature of the nationality of BAME Seafarers in interwar Britain and how it shaped everyday life in South Shields. Although such comments do not form part of the official collection – they are not catalogued, recorded or acknowledged in the catalogue – these annotations serve as a sharp reminder of the power and nature of the archive in which these narratives are situated (Bailey et al., 2009; Bastian, 2006; Schwartz and Cook, 2002).

**Figure 3.1 – Petition from Mr Ali Hamed Delhi to the Colonial Office, 10 September 1930. (TNA CO 725/21/8)**



Following an initial visit to the National Archives in November 2018, which proved to be insightful, I came across frequent correspondence between Colonial Office and Home Office Officials and the National Union of Seamen, the archives of which are held at the Warwick Modern Records Centre (WMRC), University of Warwick. This opened another ‘type’ of archive in which I could search for a BAME presence within the situated records of a locally significant trade union. Their

collection holds material which is indicative of the exclusionary policies experienced by BAME members of the union. Tellingly, although there were abundant references to BAME seafarers in branch meeting minute books, annual general meeting minutes and the union newspaper, *The Seaman*, there was only one instance of the direct testimony of a BAME British colonial seafarer (*The Seaman*, 15 January 1930). Nonetheless, the material held at WMRC was significant in shaping an understanding of local white perceptions towards BAME seafarers and the influence of the union and their racialised policies on the everyday life of a multi-ethnic working class.

The collections of these institutional archives, such as the Colonial Office Records, are situated in complex power structures which has greatly shaped how the material was collected, organised and catalogued. This in turn influenced my own engagement with these records as they are not always the most accessible place to trace everyday experiences. These archival conditions ensured that BAME experiences were at the periphery of the narratives, selectively collected and yet still indicative of the actualities of everyday life.

In order to overcome such constraining and disconnected collections, I searched for archival material at the micro-local level. The Word Library,<sup>16</sup> at South Shields has a significant local history collection holding complete runs of the *Shields Gazette* on microfilm and bound copies of the South Shields Corporation Town Council meeting minutes. The significance of the *Shields Gazette* for my research and the challenges of working with non-digitised newspapers will be discussed in section 5.3 of this chapter. The bound and indexed copies of the Shields Corporation meeting

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<sup>16</sup> The Word, South Shields, holds a small yet insightful collection of local ephemeral items such as Town Council Meeting Minutes and microfilm copies of *The Shields Gazette*. <https://theworduk.org/explore/archives/> [date accessed: 12 January 2021].

minutes contain contributions from the Town Council, the South Shields Watch Committee, the Medical Health Officer along with various other local institutional bodies. This collection was especially useful for tracing partial insights into everyday experiences of the South Shields Arab community as they contained detailed and consistent records of applications made for Arab Boarding Houses; their location, occupancy, information regarding the applicant and outcome of application. These local administrative records have allowed questions to be addressed about the spatiality of the everyday lives of BAME individuals and communities that would be unascertainable on a regional or national scale. However, parallel records concerning the other port towns in the region – North Shields, Sunderland and Hartlepool – were not available.

Working with such disparate and fragmentary archives can be exceptionally challenging, even more so when attempting to trace marginalised experiences. To navigate absences and partiality in the institutional archival record, this thesis also draws heavily upon newspaper articles as a means of developing a knowledge which is indicative of the everyday experience and the intricacies and challenges of this will now be discussed.

### **3.5.2 – Digitised newspapers and The British Newspaper Archive**

Newspapers have been a significant source of material throughout this thesis in order to produce a historical geography that is indicative of everyday experiences. Newspapers are one of the few ways that a marginalised presence can become visible (Bressey, 2010) and can uncover moments which are indicative of the everyday

experience. I have made use of local, regional and national newspapers as well as the press publications of the NSFU. Some of these titles were digitised, some preserved on microfilm and some were bound paper copies. This chapter will now consider the methodology I have employed when working with this print material in order to demonstrate reflective practice and acknowledgement of their contribution towards producing an inclusive account of the everyday experiences of a multi-ethnic working class.

The digitisation of newspapers in online databases has become a significant tool for those utilising them in research as it removes many barriers that had previously been faced by researchers, although there are still notable challenges with working with such material. As Bingham (2010) argues, the ability to digitally search newspapers has increased the rigour and thoroughness of research as newspaper content can be analysed more extensively than if the researcher was going through print copies. Despite the extensive access to nineteenth century newspaper collections, the resources that are available for the twentieth century, although still rich, are more fragmented and inconsistently digitised especially at the provincial level (Bingham, 2010; Nicholson, 2013). Despite such limitations, which will be discussed forthwith, digitised newspapers have profoundly shaped the ways in which historical data regarding BAME communities in Britain can be accessed (Bressey, 2010). This thesis has drawn substantially from the British Newspaper Archive (BNA)<sup>17</sup> and the advanced search options have enabled me to conduct consistent, targeted and in-depth searches to locate BAME everyday experiences both within the communities in which

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<sup>17</sup> The British Newspaper Archive (BNA) is a result of a partnership between the British Library and online genealogy service, Findmypast, which over the last decade has digitised over 37 million pages from over 700 newspaper titles from across the United Kingdom with new pages being added daily. The database contains digitised pages from provincial, regional and national newspapers from the eighteenth to mid-twentieth century.

they lived and also their treatment at a national level by both the press and other institutions.

Digital searching is by no means infallible, there are many associated challenges, but I have ensured that I have been as rigorous and methodical as possible. I began my search at the local level, selecting the nine regional newspapers available on the BNA from the North East: *The Berwick Advertiser*, *Berwickshire News and General Advertiser*, *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, *Jarrow Express*, *Morpeth Herald*, *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, *Shields Daily News*, *Sunday Sun (Newcastle)*, and *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*. These were the newspapers that had been digitised and were available for at least part of the period of inquiry, 1919-1939. As will be apparent throughout the empirical chapters, some provincial papers were of more use than others and the digitised provincial and regional newspapers which I have utilised extensively are: *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail* and *Shields Daily News*. Newspapers are not neutral tools for the dissemination of knowledge but rather influenced by their ownership, editorial board and the views of the readership (Hall, 2013). The above titles, their ownership and publication details are contextualised in Appendix 2.

Alongside the provincial newspapers on the BNA, I also sought to situate BAME experiences in regional and national newspapers that were available such as the *Daily Herald*, *The Era*, *Nottingham Evening Post*, *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, *Western Daily Press*, *Yorkshire Evening Post* and the *Yorkshire and Leeds Intelligencer* among others. I also drew from articles available in the *Illustrated Police News* which was a weekly paper founded in 1864 and circulated nationally throughout the interwar period. The paper specialised in the production of cheap ‘true stories’ of

crime, accidents and disorder from across Britain and the world.<sup>18</sup> The most ‘sensational’ stories were often accompanied by sketches. As Maunder and Moore (2004) note, many articles were published in the early twentieth century that were jingoistic, imperialistic and often promoted xenophobic attitudes among its largely working class readership. Examples of such articles on the everyday experience of BAME British Colonial subjects will be discussed in Chapter 4 (4) of this thesis.

I centred my search of the BNA digital collections on keywords and used temporal and spatial tools to refine the results to a manageable level while still ensuring rigour and thoroughness. The details and challenges of this will be discussed later in this chapter. I began my ‘keyword’ searches initially by limiting results from 1918-1940 and methodically searched a combination of descriptive identity markers and place-based words. For example, combining, Arab, Somali, West Indian, West African, Coloured seamen, with North Shields, South Shields, Sunderland, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Newcastle, Mill Dam, New Quay, etc. Expectedly there were a substantial number of results so as I continued to work through them, I made notes of specific events or incidents which could be indicative of the everyday experience. I then triangulated this with wider archival material and secondary literature to undertake more detailed and targeted searches on the BNA and in other archives. Nonetheless, despite the BNA providing a wealth of data, some of the newspapers I consulted were non-digitised and working with such collections brought many different challenges.

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/titles/illustrated-police-news> [date accessed: 25 January 2021]



### 3.5.3 – Non-digitised newspapers – *The Shields Gazette* and *The Seaman*

The digitisation of early twentieth century newspapers is not representative of their significance or popularity but rather a complex process defined by availability, copyright and reproduction quality. Consequentially, it is important not to assume that digitised newspapers are representative of all public opinion as this can distort analysis based on what is available online, and what is held in physical archives, either in bound copies or on microfilm (Bingham, 2010).

Through the deep engagement with literature relating to BAME communities in South Shields (Jenkinson, 2009; Lawless, 1995; Tabili, 1994a, 2011) it became apparent that the *Shields Gazette* would prove to be a significant source when tracing the everyday experiences of BAME communities in the North East. Although the process of digitising this collection has been started by the BNA, they have no copies of the newspaper post 1916 available on their database. In contrast, The Word, South Tyneside Libraries in South Shields, has a complete run of microfilm copies of the *Shields Gazette* which proved to be invaluable for this thesis.

The *Shields Gazette* was first established in South Shields in 1849 and by 1855 it was circulated daily making it the first provincial evening newspaper in Britain.<sup>19</sup> The founder was James Stevenson and his son took over the business in 1855. James Stevenson Jnr was elected as Liberal MP for South Shields in 1868 and remained in the seat until 1895, he was also the Mayor of South Shields and campaigned for civic improvements and a Tyne Port Commission. The Stevenson family maintained its links with the *Shields Gazette* until the late 1980s.

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/titles/shields-daily-gazette> [date accessed: 25 January 2021]

Navigating a large microfilm collection of daily newspapers spanning two decades was challenging and I made extensive use of the detailed survey that Richard Lawless (1995) had undertaken for his narrative account of the Arab community in South Shields. Furthermore, once I had developed a database of events using digital newspapers and other archival collections, I followed up references in the microfilm collection to see how such events were perceived and reported at the micro-local level. The *Shields Gazette* has a consistent and active ‘letter to the editor’ section which I utilised as a means of ascertaining an indication of local popular opinion regarding current events concerning BAME communities, whilst still being attentive to the selection process that these letters went through to be published. Such letters are not an absolute and all-encompassing account of local opinion but rather an indicative account, which through triangulating with records such as local NUS branch meeting minutes, informed assumptions can be drawn. This method is by no means wholly comprehensive, due to the fragmentary and partial nature of archival research, but it has enabled me to uncover accounts that are indicative of wider, working class everyday experiences.

Another non-digitised newspaper that has proved to be a significant source of knowledge in this thesis is the official publication of the NSFU, *The Seaman*. A bound and indexed copy is available at WMRC and I meticulously worked through each edition from 1919-1939. In order to maximise my time in the archive I photographed each article that referred to BAME seafarers as well as wider union policies such as the 1930 Rota System. Following the visit, I uploaded all images to an archive photo-management software, Tropy, which enabled me to organise, analyse and code the articles. I added labels to photographs of the documents, such as the nature of the event, minority community involved, outcome, racialised language, orientalist

representations etc., which enabled me to code material for use when writing the empirical chapters of this thesis to ensure a consistent and methodical approach. Working with vast and sometimes fragmentary newspaper collections can be challenging and it is important to note the nature of these challenges and limitations and the influence they have on the research being undertaken.

#### **3.5.4 – Challenges and limitations of working with newspaper collections**

As has been previously referred to, there are many challenges and limitations that are faced when working with extensive newspaper material. Ensuring consistency and meticulous working practices are of central importance in order to ensure that the material is utilised in a way that is representative and indicative of everyday working class experiences. This is further complicated when attempting to locate marginalised voices in the archival record.

Digitised newspaper archives, such as the BNA, allow for detailed and consistent searches to be made yet keyword searching is far from wholly accurate. The nature of keyword searching relies on optical character recognition software which is not always accurate due to the quality of the image being digitised (Nicholson, 2013). Throughout my research I encountered common digitisation errors in the language present in the print. For example, ‘Arab’ is commonly mis-recognised by the software as ‘Aran’, ‘Abar’, ‘Anab’ while ‘Somali’ often appear as ‘Small’, ‘Smali,’ ‘Someall’. Although there is little that can be done to pre-empt how words may have been erroneously digitised, having an awareness of this limitation can shape how future key word searches are conducted. Similarly, just because a word that has been searched

for is absent from the article, does not mean that the subject is not discussed but rather the terminology that you are searching for was not used (Bingham, 2010). This is especially pertinent when searching historical newspapers as more racialised and anachronistic language is often employed by the writers (Bressey, 2010).

When using digitised newspaper databases there is also the risk of limiting an understanding of wider social, political and temporal contexts, as articles are often viewed in isolation. There is a need to widen research to ensure an awareness of the surrounding articles, advertisements and headlines as these would have shaped the way in which the article, which is the object of analysis, was understood and contextualised by those reading the newspaper at the time (Bingham, 2010). This is especially pertinent in twentieth century newspapers when imagery and photography became increasingly present. One method that I used to overcome this was to read around the article, both in the same edition and the editions preceding and following the article. This enabled links to be made with wider contexts, events and ideas present in newspapers that were shaping the readerships perceptions of BAME communities and situate their presence in the archival record. For example, this approach was particularly insightful when thinking within and beyond the riot in February 1919. Alongside coverage of the ‘Street Riot’ in January, the Mill Dam riot in February, and further clashes between Arabs and soldiers and the public and the police were racialised adverts for colonial products, such as ‘Turban Puddings’ which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4. This demonstrates the inter-textual nature of representations of BAME individuals, especially in newspapers, where meaning and knowledge is accumulated when different texts or images are ‘read’ in conversation with one another to produce circulating representations of differences which are drawn upon at different times and in different ways, in moments of encounter between white

and BAME communities (Hall, 2013). This further brings attention to the significance of ‘reading around’ one isolated article which appears to be of immediate value.

Non-digitised collections are often vast and largely unsearchable, however as previously mentioned taking a methodical approach has allowed for material to be used in a representative and consistent way. Navigating non-digitised newspaper collections takes time and the events which they shed light on are truly indicative of an everyday experience. When working with the *Shields Gazette* I made use of the references made by Richard Lawless (1995) who took an in-depth survey of the newspaper and compiled an extensive list of articles in the *Shields Gazette* which referenced the South Shields Arab Community. I then built upon this by researching events that I had become aware of through digitised newspapers, town council meeting minutes, government and union records to develop an understanding of how such events were reported and experienced at the local level. *The Seaman* newspapers were organised in bound books and each edition contained an exceptionally detailed index which helped me to navigate the collections and trace references made to BAME seafarers.

Although newspapers have been a substantial feature of my research, I have consciously sought to situate the experiences present within the newspaper in relation to other archival material to develop as an inclusive and complete understanding as possible. As Bingham (2010) notes, the significance of a newspaper article is not enough on its own to understand how ideas were received by readers but also there is a need to move beyond the text itself and consider the wider social, cultural, temporal, spatial and political contexts which specific newspapers were operating in. For example, in October 1930 members of the Arab community in South Shields entered the Harton Institute for indoor relief. This event was met with outrage and many of the

local and national newspapers, as well as the NSFU publication, reported the event in great detail.<sup>20</sup> The tensions prevalent in the town over the men receiving relief led to detailed discussions between the Chief Constable of South Shields and the Under Secretary of State and also with the Aliens Department as he sought national advice on how to deal with the issue.<sup>21</sup> In widening the analysis of one event that had initially come to attention in the local press, I was able to situate the localised tensions within national discourses of nationality, repatriation and citizenship, thus providing a spatial and inclusive account of the everyday treatment of BAME seafarers in interwar Britain.

### 3.6 – Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has sought to bridge the conceptual framework that has emerged in the literature review with the empirical chapters that will follow. The chapter has demonstrated the extensive use of archival materials which will be developed throughout this thesis in order to facilitate a more inclusive understanding of everyday BAME experiences in the North East of England in the interwar period.

It has engaged with current methodological debates in historical geography regarding archival practice and especially in negotiating absence, partiality and fragmentation in the archive. It is also clear that this body of scholarship is

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<sup>20</sup>*Shields Gazette*, 30 September 1930; *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 01 October 1930; *Daily Herald*, 01 October 1930; *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 03 October 1930; *The Seaman*, 22 October 1930; *Western Mail*, 18 December 1930; *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 28 January 1931; *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 29 January 1930.

<sup>21</sup> TNA HO 45/14299; TNA CO 725/21/9.

complementary to, and has shaped, my own research practice whilst enabling me to develop ideas and provide an original contribution.

Throughout my research I have encountered many challenges regarding the availability of material, working with collections situated in complex power structures and in seeking to uncover marginalised voices. This chapter has outlined the practice I have employed in my research to demonstrate that this research has been rigorous, methodical and made the most of the available collections. Nonetheless, I have acknowledged the challenges, limitations and compromises that I have had to make during this thesis due to aspects which are outside of my control. That said, the absences and power relations of the archive are in many ways a finding in itself, reflecting longer histories of exclusion within the official archival record.

By including within this chapter a discussion on integrating intersectional theory into archival research has demonstrated how this thesis builds upon and is complementary to not only methodological enquiry in historical geography but the wider humanities and social sciences. Throughout this thesis I have sought to build upon and go beyond the remits of existing scholarship relating to BAME experiences in the region (Jenkinson, 2009; Lawless, 1995; Tabili, 1994a, 2011) and introduce intersectional approaches to thinking through the everyday experiences of marginalised groups in the national, regional and local archival record. I believe that this contribution will prompt further discussion for engaging archival research in theoretical processes and strengthen the research of marginalised communities regardless of the temporal, spatial or empirical nature of the scholarship.

This thesis will now go on to explore the everyday experiences of BAME communities living and working in the North East of England in the interwar period

and bring together the theoretical and methodological positions which have been developed in the first two chapters of this thesis. The following chapter will develop a deepened understanding of how BAME individuals and communities experienced circulating and multiple forms of othering which were embedded into everyday life thus contributing to an inclusive place-based historical geography of the working class in the North East of England in the interwar period.



## Chapter 4 – Representations of the ‘Imperial Other’ in the North East of England

### 4.1 – Introduction

‘Turning into the town by the Seamen’s Institute, I felt that I had just disembarked at some port “Beyond the Suez”. I found myself in the midst of a crowd of coloured men to the practical exclusion of whites. The exclusion would have been complete but for one white man who might have been an aimless sightseer in a land of mosques, minarets and moslems. Had it not been so cold it might have been Aden yet it was not like Aden since the picture of Aden which lingers in my mind is that of cleanliness by comparison.’ (*The Seaman*, 14 March 1919)

Representations of BAME communities as undeniably ‘other’ from white British society and culture featured centrally in the everyday lives of ethnically diverse working class communities living across the North East of England in the interwar period. The above vignette was published in the National Sailors’ and Firemen’s Union newspaper just over a month after the riot in South Shields in February 1919. The title of the article read ‘Nearer East Menace – Arabian Night Scenes at Ports Resented by Seamen’ (*The Seaman*, 14 March 1919). This article demonstrates the intersecting nature of racialised constructions of BAME culture, religion and behaviour and articulates the circulating and atmospheric nature of the experience of ‘race’ and racial difference in this period.

In order to develop a thesis which furthers the development of an inclusive historical geography of the working class in the North East of England in the early twentieth century, the atmospheric nature of racial difference will be outlined from the start of the empirical chapters. The justification for this draws upon Hall’s (1996a) framing of ‘race’ as the medium through which class relations are experienced. This chapter considers how a banal, and atmospherically circulating, imperialised

knowledge, permeated the everyday experiences of the working classes in Britain in the early twentieth century through a variety of immaterial and embodied encounters with racialised representations of difference. Throughout the interwar period, constructed racial difference – representing non-white culture, behaviour, religion and everyday practices – positioned BAME individuals and communities living across the North East of England as socially and culturally distinct from white British society, positioning them as ‘others’ who had the potential to disrupt the socio-political fabric of everyday life (Tabili, 1994a).

Chapter 2 of this thesis introduced my understandings of representations, encounters and processes of othering as atmospheric and circulating discourses. Processes of othering were not experienced in isolation but through a variety of atmospheric and embodied encounters in everyday life. As Massey (2005) has argued, space is produced through multiple encounters and is therefore always dynamic and emergent. Throughout this chapter, I employ this understanding in relation to embodied and immaterial encounters and representations of difference to explore the atmospheric nature of these experiences whilst being attentive to the material consequences embedded into everyday life. The racialised nature of perceived cultural and behavioural differences between white and BAME communities relates to how certain actions, traditions and character components, for example, ‘exotic’ clothing and assumptions of uncivilised or violent behaviour, were encountered in Britain through a variety of visual, textual and embodied means.

A core argument of this chapter, and indeed thesis, is that none of the representations of racialised difference were experienced in abstraction. Through employing an affective and atmospheric perspective, the temporality, spatiality and circulatory nature of representations and encounters with racial difference can be

developed. Hall (2013) brings attention to the inter-textuality of processes of othering and representation, where there is an accumulation of meaning across different texts, images and representations of ‘others’, ‘where one image refers to another, or has its meaning altered by being ‘read’ in the contexts of other images’ (Hall, 2013, p.222). Consequently, affirming representations and encounters as inter-textual (Hall, 2013), highlights the relationship between performative moments, circulating discourses and associative imagery that this chapter looks to foreground. It does so through a speculative exploration of the intersections between documented events and the perceived realities of everyday lives (Carby, 2019; Wemyss, 2016).

The chapter is organised thematically to develop an understanding of how BAME individuals experienced processes of othering across the North East in the interwar period. Although the North East port towns – North Shields, South Shields, Sunderland and Hartlepool – were the most ethnically diverse settlements in the region, they were not discrete and bounded entities, but the product of multiple encounters and processes (Massey, 2005). They were situated within the wider region, nation and empire and therefore this chapter will not confine analysis to the port towns themselves but the wider landscapes and regional geographies in which the working class engaged with, consumed and rearticulated ideas of othering through the development of a knowledge of empire and the colonial subject.

Empirically, this chapter draws upon multiple sources as the representations and imaginaries they evoked extend beyond the immediate region. Foregrounding an affect oriented approach to representations, which Pavoni and Tulumello (2020) have developed in relation to atmospheres of violence:

‘Permits us not only to stress how the production of narratives [or representations] is conditioned by wider sociospatial circumstances

but also how these very narratives are produced by, and in turn (re)produce, the sociospatial materiality of the urban.’ (Pavoni and Tulumello, 2020, p.50)

In this regard, this chapter offers a historical geography perspective to understanding both encounters and representations as an atmospheric experience which circulated within the everyday lives of those living in North East throughout the interwar period.

The chapter begins by exploring the time-space geographies of othering in the North East. Racialised place-based stigmas developed throughout the interwar period which represented the ‘Arab Colony’ in South Shields as a violent, dangerous and immoral space. This spatialised othering demonstrates how embodied inter-ethnic encounters, atmospheric encounters and representations of racial difference were interlocking in shaping the everyday experience. This connects with the work of Lipsitz (2007, p.12) who argues, ‘the lived experience of race has a spatial dimension, and the lived experience of space has a racial dimension’. The temporality of othering is also discussed in order to demonstrate the confluence of circulating representations in everyday moments which foregrounds the importance of simultaneously recognising processes of othering at specific historical moments without losing sight of historical legacies and atmospheres that they were embedded into (Wilson, 2017).

The chapter will then go on to discuss atmospheric and embodied encounters with racialised representations of cultural and behavioural difference. In centring analysis on the platforms through which representations of BAME individuals were created, maintained and articulated across the region, it becomes possible to argue that these representations were a form of encounter which atmospherically circulated in society and could be drawn upon in embodied encounters in everyday life. A variety

of examples will be used which build upon literary (Said, 1978) and media (Hall, 2013) representations, expanding analysis to colonial exhibitions and imperial product advertising for example, which is complementary to the multiplicity of everyday life. The inter-textual (Hall, 2013) and atmospheric (Closs Stephens, 2016) nature of representations of BAME individuals in interwar Britain furthers the acknowledgement of the interrelationship between representations, knowledge, feeling and action (Owen, 2012) in ethnically diverse working class communities.

Finally, building on cultural representations of BAME individuals, this chapter will conclude by bringing attention to how press representations of behavioural difference – the representation of BAME individuals, especially ‘Arabs’ as inherently violent both in Britain and across the empire – shaped circulating atmospheres of exclusion and hostility, which will be further explored through everyday embodied encounters in the following chapter.

This chapter establishes key themes and contexts for the subsequent empirical chapters by theoretically framing everyday encounters with racial difference, through representations and processes of othering. The detailed ways in which these representations influenced everyday embodied encounters, such as racialised confrontations in work and residential spaces, and how such representations were contested by those whom they sought to marginalise, through everyday acts, will be discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 retrospectively.

## 4.2 – Time-space geographies of othering in the North East

Of all the ports on the North East coast in the interwar period, South Shields was home to the largest community of BAME seafarers with the majority being Adenese and Somali.<sup>22</sup> This community had been present in South Shields since the early twentieth century and had increased in size during the First World War. From 1913 references to Holborn as an ‘Arab Colony’ appear in local newspapers (*Shields Gazette*, 16 April 1913), demonstrating how embodied inter-ethnic encounters and atmospheric encounters with representations of otherness were interlocking in shaping the spaces of everyday experience.

The ‘Arab Colony’ in South Shields was centred around the Holborn Ward of the town which was proximal to the Mill Dam and was the location where the first Arab Boarding Houses were established (See Figure 4.1, the Holborn Ward is highlighted in blue). This area was regularly represented as a violent, immoral and insanitary space which was being ‘over run’ with Arab seamen with their presence being racialised and problematised (*Shields Gazette*, 04 February 1925). The racialisation of the Arab community was less about the number of BAME individuals living there, which was extremely small in relation to white individuals,<sup>23</sup> but rather their collective positioning as ‘other’ and as a threat to the moral and political order of the town (Ahmed, 2001). Arab Boarding Houses had been established across the waterfront wards of South Shields with some of the largest Arab Boarding Houses being located outside of Holborn, in the St Hilda, Laygate and the Mill Dam Valley

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<sup>22</sup> See Appendix 1: Number of BAME Seafarers registered in North East port towns, 1930-1938.

<sup>23</sup> Estimates of the population of BAME individuals in South Shields is complicated due to the transient nature of the seafaring population. However, Byrne (1994, p.91), draws from available census data to suggest that in 1921 there were 577 ‘Aden Men’ living in South Shields which makes up approximately 0.4% of the total population of the township.

**Figure 4.1** – Map of Holborn Ward, South Shields, 1910 (Historic OS Maps)



Wards. This is indicative of the politics and power entwined in the spatialised experience of representations (Hall, 2013). As Anderson (1987, p.584) argues, in her work on the construction of Chinatown's, 'racial ideology has been materially

embedded in space ... and it is through “place” that it has been given a local referent, become a social fact, and aided its own reproduction’.

The terminology used to describe the area where the Arab community was established, and in which a significant proportion of the Arab community lived is noteworthy. Using the term ‘colony’, which appears to have been coined initially by the local press (*Shields Gazette*, 16 April 1913), rather than ‘town’, ‘bay’ or ‘slum’ which has been used in other ports, to mark the perceived boundaries of minority communities, such as Cardiff’s ‘Tiger Bay’ (Cameron, 1997) and London’s ‘Chinatown’ (Seed, 2006), suggests that attempts were made to spatially define the Arab community in South Shields explicitly because of their status as British Colonial subjects. This spatialised othering brought attention to their imperial status and was aligned with wider atmospheres of exclusion which were experienced by BAME communities in interwar Britain. For example, the same spatialised representations of otherness were not experienced by white European and Scandinavian seafarers who also lived in Holborn and across the township. The creation of the ‘Arab Colony’ was a dual process which although was largely centred upon the external organisation of space through white categories, practices and to serve white interests (Anderson, 1987), intersected with the BAME community’s sense of space and the agency and experiences of Arab inhabitants shaping their local area.

McClintock (1995, p.72) brings attention to how colonial subjects were represented as ‘abject people’, those whom imperial society rejects but simultaneously could not do without, and this furthers understandings of the BAME everyday experience in the North East of England in the interwar period. In interwar port towns, BAME people frequently resided, whether freely or out of necessity, in marginal spaces of the community – for example, in areas which were deemed ‘slum like’, due



to availability of housing, cost of property, but also their proximal location to places of employment. These were spaces which, due to negatively perceived socioeconomic conditions, were often subjected to increased racialised policing and bureaucratic measures that sought to control and manipulate them, further sharpening the sense of divide between the white working class residents and those being represented as abject (McClintock, 1995). Furthermore, the language of ‘colony’ implies coherence and homogeneity of experience which bears scant resemblance to the actuality of the everyday BAME experience. Encountering a relationally constructed imaginary of the ‘imperial other’ informed everyday experiences of marginalisation and conditions of exclusion, which will be discussed in Chapter 5, and at a local level, denied the plurality of difference within a minority community.

#### **4.2.1 – Representing the South Shields ‘Arab Colony’**

As will be discussed throughout this chapter, processes of othering in interwar Britain were largely centred around the cultural and behavioural construction of difference and the acquirement of an imperialised knowledge of empire and its subjects. Yet, as the ‘Arab Colony’ in South Shields demonstrates, representations and processes of othering were also spatialised in their construction and experience. Experiences of othering were multiple, as were the mediums through which they were created and maintained, and in examining the spatiality of such experiences it is possible to bring attention to how the construction of difference has different meanings and created different experiences in different spaces (Yuval-Davies, 2015). Spatialised representations of otherness were not confined to the perceived boundaries of the place

they were concerned with, for example the Holborn Ward, but circulated and were reproduced across society, in spaces of work, recreation and commercial facilities, and across not only the township, but as will later be discussed, the region. Orientalist and imperialised imaginaries have lived consequences which have immense power to shape spaces and everyday life (Anderson, 1987).

Colonial imaginative geographies were central to the construction of difference and representations of otherness in interwar South Shields. As Yu (2018) argues, in her work on imaginative geographies in Flushing, New York, the formation of a spatialised imaginative geography is not solely constructed from above, but the product of multiple lived processes from below. Although the ‘Arab Colony’ may have first received attention in the press, it was certainly experienced, and had meanings ascribed to it, in the everyday by those living across the borough. These ascribed meanings were markedly different, when comparing representations in the press, those reproduced by local and national institutions and the actuality of lived experience.

Arab Boarding Houses and Cafés were visible architectural markers of the community and were significant sites of contestation and platforms for agency, as will be discussed later in this thesis.<sup>24</sup> Throughout the interwar period, many imaginaries were perpetuated in the local and national press relating to Holborn and the ‘Arab Colony’ which were built on, and actively produced, as constructed differences and sought to sharpen the sense of divide between not only the Arab and white community in South Shields, but the divide between BAME seafarers and white working class communities across the port towns of Britain.

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<sup>24</sup> See Chapter 6 (4).

As will be discussed throughout this chapter, the representation of BAME seafarers as a violent, uncivilised and volatile group was presented through a variety of mediums, albeit most substantially in the press. This imaginary would also be spatialised and consequently the ‘Arab Colony’ in South Shields was similarly imagined and represented as a dangerous and violent space. Intra-community conflict was seen to contribute to the Holborn Ward being depicted as an excessively violent place. Newspapers suggested that ‘quarrels in the Arab colony in the Holborn riverside are frequent’ (*Yorkshire and Leeds Intelligencer*, 23 May 1919) and that ‘for some time past there have been serious quarrels between members of the Arab Colony in South Shields’ (*Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 05 February 1919).

This representation of Holborn as a place where intra-community conflict spilled out of the Boarding Houses and into the street was the chosen focus of the press which led to the area being a space which was imagined to be far more dangerous than it actually was. This fear, over perceived intra-community violence, was also drawn upon in arguments which were related to wider anxieties over the development of relationships between white women and BAME men. At a town council meeting in 1929, which was debating license applications for a new Arab Boarding House, the issue of the violent nature of Holborn as a direct result of the ‘Arab Colony’ was brought up. Comments from Councillor Cheeseman, a renowned racist and member of the South Shields Town Council (Byrne, 1994), suggested that ‘it is not safe for a woman to walk down Holborn. It is hardly safe for a white man to walk down Holborn there is that much freedom’ (*Shields Gazette*, 02 May 1929). In response to this a lawyer acting on behalf of the prospective Arab Boarding House Master replied:

‘If all the crimes could be attributed to the Arabs that Cheeseman has spoken about it is fair to assume that the sequel would be found in the Police Courts. But is that so? As an old magistrate I am

prepared to say that the Arabs in proportion to the number, are not in the court as often as Englishmen are.’ (*Shields Gazette*, 02 May 1929)

The ways in which crimes involving BAME individuals were sensationalised by the press distort an understanding of them and does not represent them proportionally to crimes committed by white individuals, this furthered an atmosphere of fear. As Hall et al. (2013) demonstrate in their work on the racialisation of mugging in 1970s Britain, the distorted representation of racialised crime by the media can cause an atmosphere of fear to form in the minds of the public where all violence involving BAME individuals becomes collectivised and perceived as a threat ‘to the very foundation of social order itself’ (Hall, et al., 2013, p.295). Representations, imaginaries and place-based stigmas can be linked to the geographies of fear (Webster, 2003). Fear of crime constrains how people navigate spaces in their everyday lives and significantly shapes social relationships (Hudson et al., 2009). Those who might feel unsafe in a particular area might alter their behaviour to avoid particular routes at particular times (Hudson et al., 2009) or as was the case with the ‘Arab Colony’ in South Shields, the perceived dangerousness might be used as evidence for increased policing and social control of the community that was represented to be the threat, as well as rejecting future community developments.

Similar representations of Holborn and the Arab Boarding houses as violent and dangerous spaces were common in local newspapers and were clearly drawn from an imperialised knowledge of empire and colonial subjects. In April 1936, a white *Shields Gazette* reporter visited an Arab Boarding House in Holborn and stated that he had a ‘harmless but hair raising’ experience (*Shields Gazette*, 20 April 1936). He openly demonstrates how the ideas he was exposed to as a child, in fiction literature, acted as a lens through which he understood what he was experiencing. As he entered

the Arab Boarding House, he was led into a room with the Boarding House Master and the door locked behind them, he stated that:

‘Vividly remembering Hali Baba and bits of Arabian Nights, I nervously concluded that this was the inevitable prelude to a little throat cutting in the best Baghdad tradition.’ (*Shields Gazette*, 20 April 1936)

The reporter later concludes that the practice of locking the door was to ensure that they were not disturbed during the interview and far from the dangerous threat he had initially perceived (*Shields Gazette*, 20 April 1936). This micro-encounter begins to demonstrate how literary fiction was a means of acquiring a knowledge of BAME individuals, in which the representation itself echoed much larger popular geographical imaginaries and associations, and that such imaginaries persisted in the memory to be drawn upon in certain unfamiliar situations.

As well as being imagined as a violent space, the ‘Arab Colony’ was consistently represented to be an insanitary area of the town. Holborn was an area of South Shields largely comprised of slum like housing, which was of poor quality, inadequately maintained and had limited sanitary provisions. Although it was acknowledged in Town Council meetings that conditions in Holborn had been unsatisfactory for some time, the Arab community was blamed in the local press for increasing population in ‘already overcrowded parts of the town’ and accused of ‘making conditions worse than they were before’ (*Shields Gazette*, 07 February 1929). Despite the Arab community making up only a small percentage of those living in the area, they were consistently accused of living in conditions which would be unacceptable to white people (*Shields Gazette*, 07 February 1929). Cohen (2013) brings attention to the historically constructed nature of racialised place-based stigmas and suggests that everyday behaviours, population demography and urban planning

have material consequences on the lived experience. Stigma is attached to these places and their association with particular residents, rather than the lack of maintenance and investment in these areas from local government and property owners. These imaginaries and representations were greatly contested and challenged by the Arab community who made significant investments in sanitary provisions and maintenance work in the buildings which they ran boarding houses from.<sup>25</sup>

The Arab community was also publicly blamed and positioned as a threat to the health of the people of South Shields. In April 1930 there was a severe outbreak of tuberculosis in South Shields and the highest death rate in the town was in the Holborn ward. Instead of acknowledging the conditions present in Holborn which accentuated the spread of tuberculosis, poor living conditions, overcrowding and limited sanitary facilities, Alderman Druey, the chairman of the South Shields Health Committee, associated the death rate with the Arab community stating that:

‘The death rate in Holborn is unduly heavy, owing to the excessive rate of mortality among Arab seamen resident in that quarter. Shields and Hilda Wards have also been affected by the Arab residents, but to a much lesser extent.’ (*Shields Gazette*, 03 April 1930)

This was not the first time that the Arab community had been attributed to the cause of tuberculosis. In May 1929, Councillor Cheeseman stated that a third of all Arabs in South Shields were tubercular (*Shields Gazette*, 25 May 1929). While these statements overtly associate the disease with the Arab community living in Holborn, they make no reference to the infection or death rate among white members of the township. Furthermore, it was not only tuberculosis that the Arab community was blamed for, but also venereal diseases. The Town Council reported that in 1927 there

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<sup>25</sup> See Chapter 6 (4.2) for further details of contestation.

were '45 cases of these natives treated at the VD clinic' and three receiving hospital treatment (*Shields Gazette*, 07 February 1929). This representation of the Arab community as a medical and sexual threat and as a disproportionate strain on the resources of the ratepayers further fuelled tension in the town and sought to marginalise them further.

Such over exaggerated accusations of the perceived danger to public health posed by the Arab community led to an imaginary to persist surrounding Holborn which would last until a slum clearance program in the 1930s. Although the Holborn Ward had been targeted for slum clearance for some time (Lawless, 1995), the increased place-based stigma the area developed throughout the 1920s, as a result of increased BAME population, was seen as further evidence to advance the program without haste. In a town council meeting in 1929 the conditions in Holborn were discussed in relation to the need to clear the area, both of its dwellings and of the Arab Community. Councillor Cheeseman stated, in regard to the conditions in Holborn:

'That was a serious matter when they remembered that the town was overcrowded, and that the slum areas which they were anxious to see cleared away were the very spots where these men were concentrating. How were they going to get rid of the slums if they allowed these natives to settle down in them, making them worse than they were before.' (*Shields Gazette*, 07 February 1929)

Aligning BAME individuals and communities with unhygienic living conditions was only one way that they were represented to be inherently different and a threat for the local white population. Representations of immorality was another common association with the 'Arab Colony'.

Throughout the interwar period, national anxieties over mixed-race relationships and miscegenation fuelled animosity towards BAME men in Britain (Jenkinson, 2017). The 'Arab Colony' in South Shields was represented and imagined

to be an overtly immoral space where the wider circulating imaginaries of BAME volatility and irrationality would be explicitly sexualised and BAME men presented as a threat to the moral and social order of the town (Tabili, 1994a). The sensationalised reporting of cases involving BAME men and white women proliferated the national and local press throughout the interwar period and sparked local uproar among the white residents of South Shields.<sup>26</sup> Holborn was consistently referred to as an overtly immoral space and concerns were raised in letters to the editor of the *Shields Gazette*. Writers suggested that because of the Arab community, ‘the place (Holborn) was not fit for white girls’ (*Shields Gazette*, 20 March 1923), while another writer stated that:

‘If our officials will periodically visit Holborn they will see a degrading state of affairs, not one of them would allow their daughters to walk through it. We have an evil in our midst.’ (*Shields Gazette*, 23 January 1930)

The morals of women who worked for and married members of the Arab community were brought into disrepute, yet these women would become significant members of the community and challenge many prejudices which had attempted to marginalise the community in the interwar period, the expression of agency among white women in the Arab community will be discussed in Chapter 6 (4.3) of this thesis.

Place-based stigmas and representations of otherness shaped everyday encounters between white and BAME communities in South Shields throughout the interwar period and contributed to, and intersected with, exclusionary conditions which will be discussed in detail in the following chapter. Demonstrating a sensitivity to dynamic space-time geographies (Schwanen and Kwan, 2012), allows a more relational approach to develop, bringing together multiple influences that shaped

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<sup>26</sup> See Chapter 5 (3.2)



generational understandings of race and class. Through the language of ‘colony’, constructed differences become a locatable phenomenon, collectively constructed through atmospheric and embodied representations. Consequently, as Tyler (2013) argues, representations of the other as ‘filthy’, whether that be morally or in a more embodied sense:

‘Corresponds with prevailing belief systems and involves community-wide complicity. In this regard, disgust reactions are always contingent and relational, revealing less about the disgusted individual, or the thing deemed disgusting, than about the culture in which disgust is experienced and performed.’ (Tyler, 2013, p.23)

Representations of the ‘Arab Colony’ as ‘filthy’ and ‘disgusting’, morally, medically and socially was reflected spatially and corresponded with wider atmospheres of racialisation and exclusion which was experienced and performed (Tyler, 2013) in everyday inter-ethnic encounters. With this in mind, it is important to understand that the South Shields ‘Arab Colony’ was not a ‘colony’ simply because that is where the majority of BAME seafarers in the town lived, whether by choice or structural constraints. Rather, as Anderson (1987, p.581) suggests, these racially bounded spaces were a ‘social construction with a cultural history and a tradition of imagery and institutional practice that has given it a cognitive and material reality’.

In order to develop an inclusive account of BAME everyday experiences in interwar Britain there is a need to relationally consider the temporalities of othering alongside the significance of space and grounded everyday experiences thus connecting circulating cultures with specific events. Whilst the comments above are centred on a particular settlement in the North East, the views and representations of the South Shields ‘Arab Colony’ are indicative of wider societal racisms that functioned across the region, and arguably across the ethnically diverse port settlements of Britain in the interwar period.

#### **4.2.2 – Temporalities of othering – circulating representations in everyday moments**

Othering and exclusion experienced by BAME communities in interwar Britain did not exist in a vacuum but were influenced by wider temporal and geopolitical contexts. BAME seafarers experienced specific forms of marginalisation and discrimination not simply because of the sum of their identities but rather because of the situated nature of their intersectional identities. A situated intersectional understanding (Yuval-Davis, 2015) allows an awareness to be developed which is sensitive to translocality, transclarity and transtemporality. The everyday experiences of othering and marginalisation of BAME individuals and communities was mediated by space, scale and time. The socioeconomic and political climate of interwar Britain and the conditions present in port towns intersected to provide a backdrop from which such co-constitutive and distinct forms of othering, oppression and discrimination occurred.

The interwar period was a time in British history where the transition from war to peace was marred with economic depression, political instability and rising social tensions among working class communities (Jenkinson, 2009). The othering of BAME communities in the North East took place in a web of local and national processes, imperial legacies, an economic depression and considerable social upheaval which followed a World War (Tabili, 1994a). Locally specific circumstances interacted with wider temporal conditions to influence how BAME seafarers were represented as other, not only by the predominantly white communities in which they lived, but by the state and institutions such as the Colonial Office and the NSFU. The exclusionary

conditions that were experienced by BAME seafarers will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5 (2).

The commodification of colonial labour during the First World War led to contentious attitudes regarding the status of BAME British Colonial seafarers. The same global networks that saw goods imported from across the empire facilitated the active recruitment of men in the colonies to move to Britain to overcome the severe labour deficit faced by the Mercantile marine shortly following the outbreak of the war (Jenkinson, 2017; Tabili, 2011; Virdee, 2014). The demand for these workers during the war was immediate as within two days following the declaration of war 8,000 merchant seamen had joined the armed forces and 9,000 ‘enemy’ seamen serving in the industry were removed (Evans, 1980; Gordon and Reilly, 1986; Jenkinson, 2017). However, the position of BAME seafarers in Britain would become exceptionally precarious in the interwar period where local and national campaigns sought to marginalise, exclude and even attempt to repatriate them (Tabili, 1994a).<sup>27</sup>

BAME labour during wartime was framed primarily as a commodity, a valuable resource to be drawn upon for the benefit of Britain (Constantine, 1999). The precarity of their status came into question following the signing of the armistice and would shape inter-ethnic encounters for much of the interwar period as attempts were made to exclude them from the industry as labour demands contracted (Tabili, 1994a). As Byrne (1977) argues, the Arab community in South Shields was both separated and embedded into the town, their nationality status as ‘aliens’ or colonial subjects othered them from the white community, yet their kinship networks and consistent claims on the rights they were entitled to as British subjects gave them a sense of permanence

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<sup>27</sup> See Appendix 1 for the number of BAME seafarers registered in the port towns of the North East in the 1930s.

and belonging. As Tyler (2013, p.48) argues, British citizenship was ‘designed to abject specific groups and populations, producing paralysed, dejected and ‘deportable’ populations of non-citizens within the internal borders of the nation’. Frequent references to deportations of BAME seafarers as a solution to social and economic challenges present in British port towns can be seen across society – from letters to the local press (*Shields Gazette*, 17 March 1923) and comments made in Town Council Meetings (*Shields Gazette*, 07 February 1929) to national institutions such as the NSFU and the Colonial Office, refusing any financial support for unemployed BAME seafarers other than repatriation.<sup>28</sup> This ‘deportability’ of BAME seafarers in interwar Britain, demonstrates the temporal precariousness of their position in society and the impact of the commodification of their labour.

Local conflict over the right of the South Shields Arab community to remain in the town in the interwar period can be seen among the letters to the editor of the *Shields Gazette*. Numerous calls are made to repatriate the Arabs<sup>29</sup> with one writer stating that ‘the only remedy I can suggest to counteract this evil is to deport them back to their native land to eat rice, sell oranges and the other things the lord put them on earth for’ (*Shields Gazette*, 17 March 1923). This writer brings attention to the local perception of BAME seafarers as a deportable commodity which, with the war over, was no longer required or wanted, whilst simultaneously drawing upon exoticized and orientalist representations of BAME individuals to reinforce difference and sharpen the sense of divide between the white and minority ethnic community.

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<sup>28</sup> WMRC MSS.175A/1. Proceedings of annual and special general meetings, 1911-1937. 22 September 1919. Annual General Meeting Part 1. Presidential address by J. Havelock Wilson; TNA CO 725/21/9 – Letter from The Under Secretary of State, Colonial Office to Mr A Mohsen, 31 October 1930.

<sup>29</sup> *Shields Gazette*: 02 June 1921; 20 March 1923; 07 February 1929; 11 February 1929; 12 December 1929.

Although connected to circulating national and international temporal conditions, processes of othering often existed within multiple and intersecting space-times. While historical specificity is significant, there is a need to recognise the temporal variability of attention to these issues within the interwar period. This not only connects past experiences to moments in the present everyday life (in the interwar period) but also documents a longer trajectory of multiple influences that inform situated intersectionality as noted above. Exceptional episodes of racialised disorder, emerging fears over immorality, imaginaries of violence, the opening of new boarding houses and local slum clearance programs all shaped the temporality of othering, marginalisation and exclusion of BAME which peaked and troughed throughout the interwar period.

For example, in March 1923 the murder of Jane Nagi, nee Brown, by Hassan Mohamed<sup>30</sup> sparked local uproar in South Shields. This event further influenced circulating atmospheres of animosity regarding marriages and relationships between white women and BAME men, and they became increasingly villainised and condemned. Letters to the editor of the *Shields Gazette*, demonstrate the public anger and resentment at the association of white women with members of the Arab community. Many writers called for actions such as to ‘ship them back to their own country’ and ‘ban the deplorable unions of Arabs and white girls’ (*Shields Gazette*, 20 March 1923). The discussion was in such abundance and escalating local tensions that on the 23 March 1923 the editor wrote that ‘no more letters on the discussion of white girls and Arabs’ would be published (*Shields Gazette*, 23 March 1923). These letters were not only racist towards mixed-race marriages and their children but invoked orientalist language to other the Arab community. These letters were written by

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<sup>30</sup> For the full details of the murder see Lawless (1995, pp.178-179).

individuals, sharing their own views, yet they furthered collective representations of the community and attributed behaviours of one individual to the entire group who were being constantly and multiply represented as other (Said, 1978, 1993).

When discussing relationships between white women and Arabs, two writers employ Rudyard Kipling's work, *The Ballad of East and West*, and selectively quote 'East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet' (*Shields Gazette*, 20 March 1923; 21 March 1923) in an attempt to academically legitimise their argument. Similarly, one author quotes Plato's ideas regarding eugenics to seemingly provide an academic reference to his overtly racist argument regarding miscegenation and the 'unescapable prison' which he believes would be the life of mixed-race children in the town (*Shields Gazette*, 23 March 1923). The employment of literary and philosophical works to affirm such racist arguments suggests that the white community in South Shields sought to utilise acquired knowledge as a lens through which they were understanding and articulating what they were experiencing, and this is reflective of the multifaceted nature of white working class voices. This suggests wider temporalities and atmospheres of animosity present, as rather than racism being solely reactionary, racist exchanges were influenced by circulating conditions which interacted with specific events and shaped everyday experiences.

Nonetheless, tensions were not always related to exceptional moments of violence but also a response to smaller and mundane 'perceived threats' to local social order. In May 1929, a rumour spread amongst the East End community in Sunderland that Arab Boarding House Keepers from South Shields and Cardiff were trying to establish businesses in the town (*Shields Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 07 May 1929). An angered local resident wrote to the editor of the *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette* to 'express bitter disapproval' of Arab Boarding House Keepers

attempting to purchase vacant dwellings in Sunderland and articulating concern that if should applications be granted, ‘we will soon have an Arab colony down here, which may turn out like Holborn’ (*Shields Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 07 May 1929). Minutes from Sunderland Town Council meetings were published in the *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette* regarding applications being made for Arab Boarding House licences in a bid to quell tension, with the Mayor stating that ‘I for one will strongly oppose it and do all I can to prevent it’ (*Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 08 May 1929, 09 May 1929).

The imaginary that surrounded the ‘Arab Colony’ in South Shields, one of violence, immorality and danger, was clearly present in the minds of those living in Sunderland and it was a perceived threat which many wanted to avoid. This demonstrates the significance of spatialised othering in South Shields where negative place-based associations spread beyond the confines of the town to shape wider regional attitudes and experiences between white and BAME communities. This demonstrates the range of ideas in circulation, some of which had a broader geographical resonance while others were more localised versions of these imaginaries. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, imaginaries of BAME individuals, their behaviours, actions and the places in which they lived had material consequences which shaped the everyday experiences of a multi-ethnic working class.

The temporality and spatiality of processes of othering shaped how BAME individuals living in the North East of England in the interwar period interacted with the communities in which they lived. Representations and social divisions often had different meanings and influences on processes of othering dependant on the spaces in which they took place and the historically specific conditions in the period (Yuval Davis, 2015). There was a confluence of wider colonialist and racist discourses with

locally lived experiences through the exposure to a range of representations and assumed knowledges. The foregrounding of the spatial and temporal nature of processes of othering has sought to outline the significance of revisiting place-based histories, particularly with emphasis on the social and political construction of race. This chapter will now build upon these ideas of the multiplicity and dynamism of processes of othering to outline how constructions of cultural difference were racialised, attempting to represent BAME individuals as inherently distinct from the predominantly white communities in which they lived and worked.

### **4.3 – Atmospheric and embodied encounters: representations and the racialisation of BAME individuals**

The everyday experience of BAME individuals and communities living in the North East of England in the interwar period was shaped by racialised processes of representation where they were socially and politically positioned as ‘other’. As introduced in the literature review, processes of othering are centred around the construction of difference, where society employs various mediums to divide the population (Said, 1978). The racialised ‘other’ is constructed as a homogeneous and identifiable group which is represented to be innately different and often as a threat to the social and political order of the rest of society (Said, 1978).

This section is centred around how representations of difference were created, maintained and articulated across the North East of England in the interwar period and argues that representations are a form of encounter which atmospherically circulated in society and can be drawn upon in embodied encounters in everyday life.



Understanding representations as a type of encounter is relatively underdeveloped in the literatures of encounter, which tend to focus on more grounded, embodied and interactional forms of encounter (For example: Askins, 2016; Amin, 2002; Clayton, 2009; Nayak, 2012; Wise and Velayutham, 2009). Engaging with representation as a form of encounter is therefore one way of identifying and exploring the BAME presence in North East history.

As outlined in Chapter 2 (3), processes of othering and racialisation are centred on evoking emotional responses from society and provide the impetus for people to imagine the presence of the ‘other’ as different, dangerous or threatening (Ahmed, 2001). The emotions that these discursive processes evoke, such as hate for example, can be thought of as organic as they circulate between signifiers, moments and populations (Ahmed, 2001). In her work on affective atmospheres of nationalism during the 2012 Olympics, Closs Stephens (2016) suggests how affective atmospheres circulate in the air and are felt and experienced across a variety of platforms, such as the media and advertising. As previously outlined in Chapter 3 (2), employing a more atmospheric approach, which is sensitive to traces, ghosts and glimpses into historical lives (Awcock, 2020; Baker, 1997; Legg, 2016; McGeachan, 2014, 2018), can allow for less material moments and marginalised experiences to become understood as significant in their own right. In this regard, I argue that in the interwar period, representational encounters atmospherically circulated and influenced embodied encounters in everyday life in port towns across the region. Demonstrating an awareness to atmospheric and less tangible experiences allows the significance of a moment, for example, to be highlighted without implying direct causality between circulating feelings, or representations, and specific actions. This understanding builds upon the inter-textual nature of representations developed by Stuart Hall (2013),

whereby representations accumulate meaning by being read in the context of other representations.

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century, visual stereotypes, in advertising and exhibitions for example, reproduced orientalist ideas, justified imperial expansion and constructed non-Western culture as ‘uncivilised’, ‘exotic’ and ‘backward’ (Said, 1978). The visual nature of such systems of representation forged a link between the British Empire and the domestic imagination (Hall, 2013). Representations of cultural difference were founded upon stereotypes of natural difference, which were generally centred upon ‘the few simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognised characteristics about a person, reducing everything about the person to those traits, exaggerating and simplifying them’ (Hall, 2013, p.247). Representations are imbued with immense power: the power to create the representation and represent someone or something in a certain way; the power to create racialised hierarchies and the power to control and dominate those being represented (Hall, 2013).

This section demonstrates that through various mediums of representation – newspapers, colonial product advertising, imperial exhibitions, for example – a racialised knowledge of the empire and its subjects developed in the North East during the interwar period which was built upon power and domination (Hall, 2013). It has been acknowledged that there is an interrelationship between knowledge, feeling and action in relation to working class audiences generating a knowledge of empire and its people (Owen, 2012). Understanding the power and domination and wider atmospheres circulating in creating and experiencing affective representations and embodied encounters of BAME individuals (Hall, 2013; Said, 1978, 1993) allows us to critically reconsider and connect circulating cultures and specific moments to

consider how these representations have shaped the everyday experiences of a multi-ethnic working class.

#### **4.3.1 – Encountering representations of ‘foreign culture’ in the North East of England**

Culture is a complex and difficult phenomenon to define. In regard to this thesis, I understand culture in line with Crang (2013, p.1) who defines culture(s) as ‘sets of beliefs or values that give meaning to ways of life and produced (and are reproduced through) material and symbolic forms’. This understanding is reflected in the account of cultural representations below, whereby a plurality of signs, symbols and events are drawn upon to revisit representations with a sensitivity to the partial, fluid and relational concept of culture. In historical terms, this revisiting of culture is dependent upon the availability of archival material and an effort has to be made to assemble connected materials and representations. This requires careful reproduction but does also necessitate speculation.

Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, imperial exhibitions and travelling circuses were a platform where a knowledge of empire and cultural representations of colonial subjects were experienced by the working classes. Due to their limited temporality, these events are not always perceived to be part of the everyday routine of working class life and thus often considered as distinct from the everyday experience (Hughes, 2014). This chapter challenges such a bounded understanding, suggesting that the experiences at exhibitions and circuses influenced wider reproducing atmospheres of racial difference through embodied everyday inter-ethnic encounters. These events were engaged with widely and the representations of

colonial subjects they projected were not confined to the event itself (Closs Stephens, 2016), but such spectacles and representations engaged inter-textually (Hall, 2013) with wider representations of BAME people to shape everyday encounters in multi-ethnic communities for much of the twentieth century.

Travelling circuses and imperial exhibitions had a long history of displaying BAME individuals both alongside attractions and as a form of entertainment in their own right (Crang, 2013). Caroline Bressey (2010, p.172) has worked extensively on the employment of BAME men and women in the circus and entertainment industry and brings attention to the ‘demand for men and women to fulfil racialised and sexualised roles’ such as animal trainers and ‘stage novelties’. In the late nineteenth century, advertisements were placed in national newspapers such as *The Era* seeking BAME men and women to work as animal trainers in the entertainment industry and the North East was no exception to entertainment companies seeking BAME workers.<sup>31</sup> As Bressey (2010) argues these advertisements and the inclusion of BAME workers in circuses ‘clearly locate black men and women within the realms of exotic or freak’ (Bressey, 2010, p.174) and demonstrate the connection between racialised employment opportunities and the encountering of racial difference in everyday life.

Travelling circuses frequented the communities of the North East throughout the nineteenth century and remained a popular attraction in the interwar period. One of the most popular traveling circuses in the North East was Bostock and Wombwell’s which made frequent visits to Newcastle, Hartlepool, South Shields and Sunderland

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<sup>31</sup> *The Era*, 27 June 1896 – ‘Wanted. Coloured Man to wear Costume and take charge of Magnificent Group of Animals. North Shields.’; *The Era*, 03 April 1897 – ‘Wanted. Lion Tamer. Coloured Man preferred. West Hartlepool.’

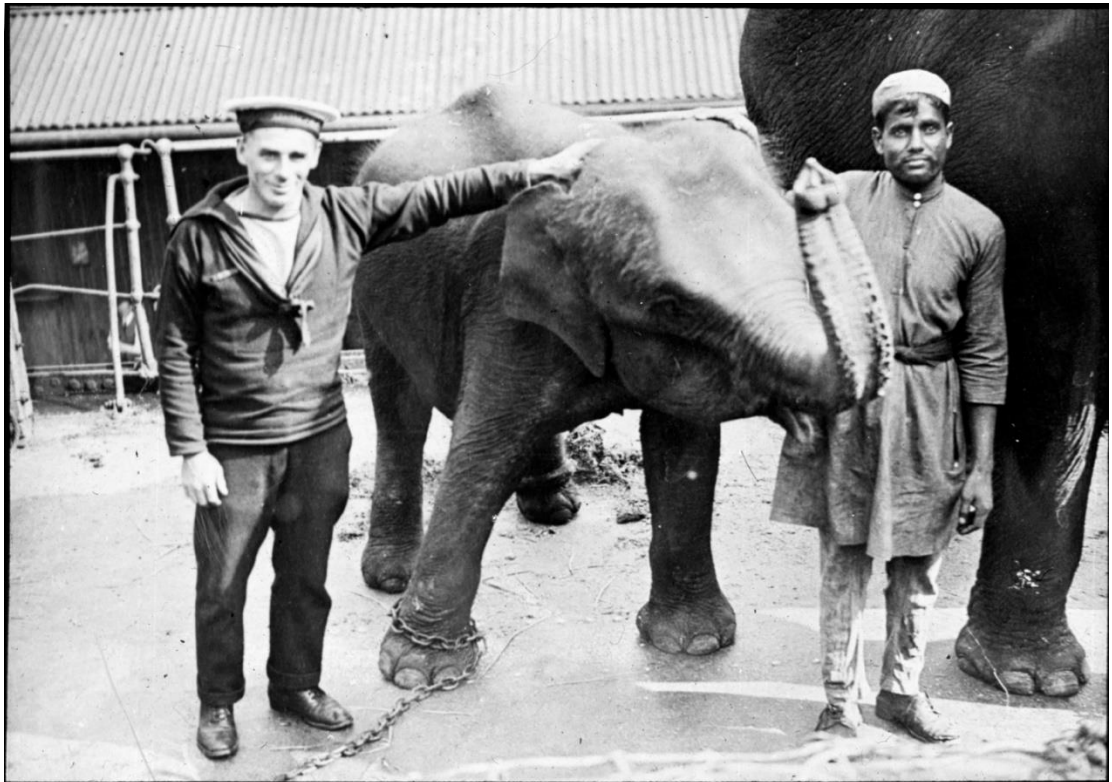
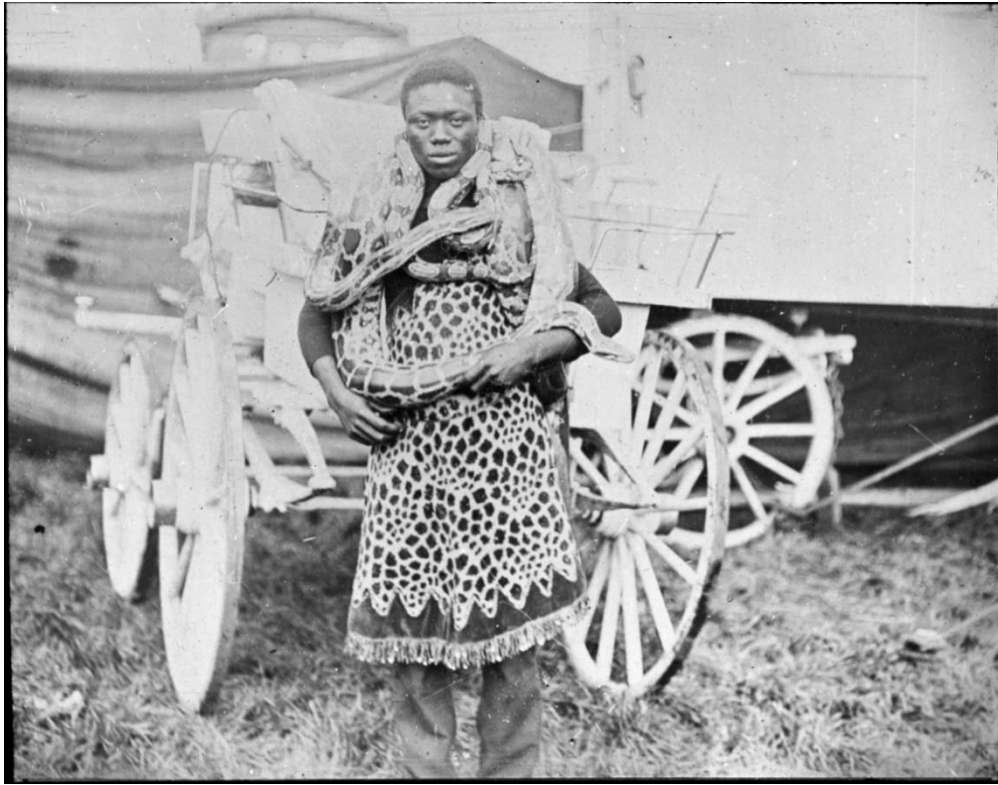
during the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>32</sup> Although it is difficult to trace the BAME presence in these specific circuses, photographs taken from a Bostock and Wombwell's show at Newcastle Town Moor in the early 1930s (Figure 4.2) show BAME workers dressed in exotic and traditional costume and performing with animals.<sup>33</sup> Employing BAME circus workers as an exotic addition to entertainment, reinforced colonial narratives of western superiority, heightened a superficial awareness of racial and cultural difference and contributed to a developing imperial knowledge. The understanding of such representations, developed in conversation with wider representations in newspapers and advertising for example (Hall, 2013), had the potential to influence how white communities developed ideas regarding BAME workers and sharpened the sense of divide between white and BAME communities living in the North East of England.

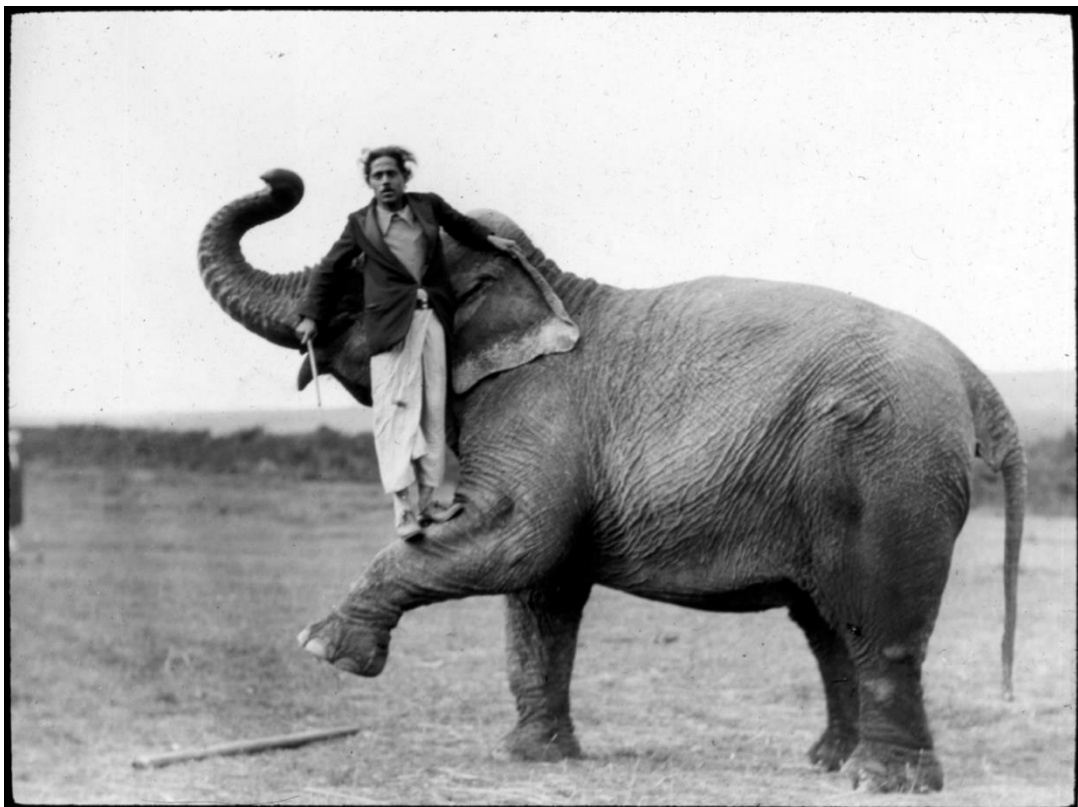
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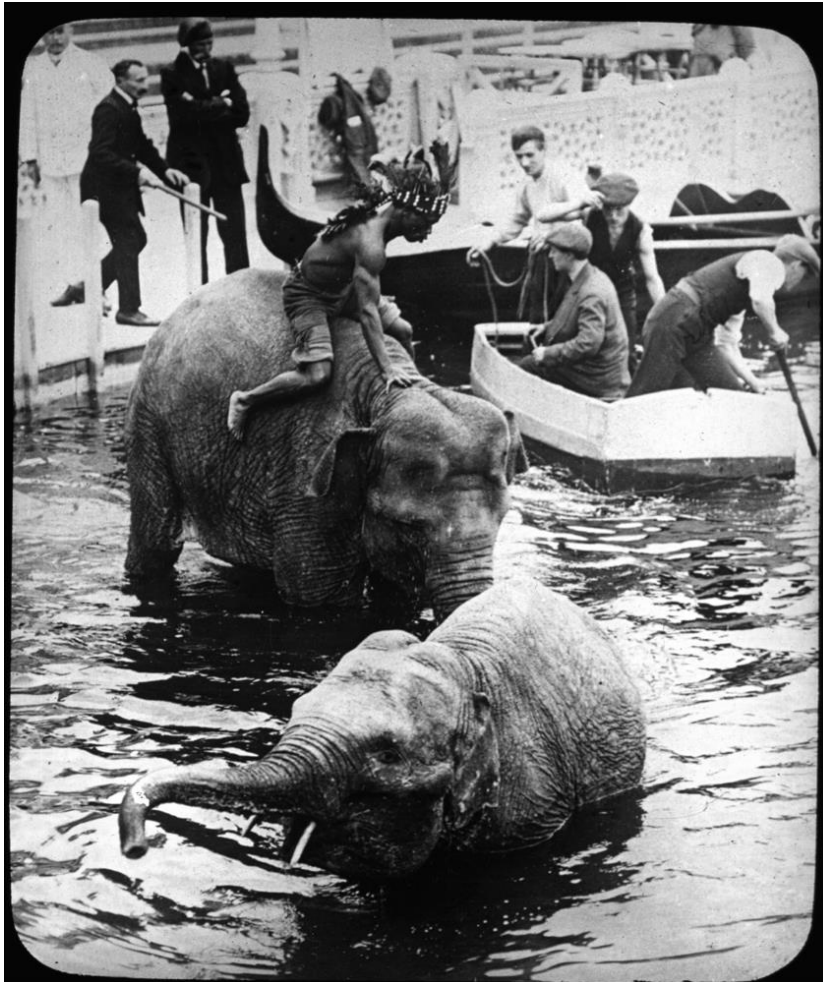
<sup>32</sup> Details of performance dates can be found in: *Sunderland Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 15 March 1921; *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 26 March 1921; *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 15 February 1924; *Shields Daily News*, 11 January 1927; *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 05 November 1931.

<sup>33</sup> TWAM – Online Flickr Archive – Fairground Scenes – [https://www.flickr.com/photos/twm\\_news/sets/72157627692102509/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/twm_news/sets/72157627692102509/) [Date accessed: 10 October 2020]

**Figure 4.2** – Photographs of unknown BAME Circus Workers at Newcastle, c1920.  
(TWA DX1305/1/1)







Travelling circuses were a relatively common spectacle in the North East and a medium through which racial difference was constructed within such communities, yet in 1929 the North East Coast Exhibition (NECE) would provide the opportunity for thousands of visitors from across the region and beyond to encounter representations of racial difference in an embodied and banal way as part of a celebration of Northern industry and empire.

Imperial exhibitions had been popular across Europe since the nineteenth century and were engaged with by the masses. Thompson (2005) stresses the significance of exhibitions in shaping the perceptions of the working classes regarding the empire and colonial subjects, as those who were unlikely to experience empire first-hand were given the opportunity, at exhibitions, to engage with and develop a



knowledge of imperial produce, technology and indigenous people and an embodied experience of the riches and wealth that came from imperial rule.

Assessing how members of the public reacted to such events in the archival record is challenging, although newspaper reports, pamphlets and attendance figures provide some insight to how the NECE was engaged with (Thompson, 2005). A more speculative and pluralistic approach is necessary to revisit events such as this. The NECE provides an insight, through the available archival fragments, into how representations and encounters of racialised difference intersected and circulated in an everyday atmosphere during a spectacular event.

The 1929 NECE was largely developed as a response to the decline in industry as a result of the interwar depression and sought to promote Northern industries to national and global markets (Barke, 2014; Colls and Lancaster, 2000; Green and Pollard, 2007). The exhibition ran from May to October 1929 and was situated on the Town Moor in Newcastle. Despite being a temporary event, over four million people from across the nation visited, making it still today the largest single event to ever have been held in Newcastle (Barke, 2014). Although this event was a short-term and temporary exhibition, it was experienced as part of the everyday lives of those visiting the exhibition. Closs Stephens (2016) demonstrates, in regard to the 2012 London Olympics, how a short-term event, and the affective atmospheres it evokes, can permeate various aspects of everyday life through reproducing imagery, souvenirs and ideas, beyond the immediacy of the event itself.

Understanding the experiences of those visiting the NECE through the lens of the everyday atmospheres furthers the notion that the exceptional and the everyday are interlinked (Highmore, 2002) and demonstrates how isolated experiences can be

rearticulated in everyday inter-ethnic encounters. As Neal and Murji (2015, p.812) argue, ‘everyday life can be thought of as providing the sites and moments of translation and adaptation. It is the landscape in which the social gets to be made – and unmade’ and this perhaps is where an attentiveness to both outward perceptions of the NECE and archival fragments of individual experiences can be examined to further an atmospheric construction of the everyday through foregrounding moments of racialised encounter.

Visitors did not unresponsively consume the representations and experiences of the exhibition, as Barke (2014) argues, the NECE had a significant impact on local culture as those who attended sought to situate and find meaning in their experiences and continued to do so, for some time after the event. Barke (2014) demonstrates the permanence of the event in local memory as when in 1975, as part of the Benwell Community Development Project, a respondent was asked to talk about the change he has witnessed in Newcastle over his lifetime he, without any prompting, shared his vivid memories of the ‘biggest thing ever in Newcassel (sic) – it were that Town Moor Exhibition afore the war’ (Barke, 2014, p.154). Understood in this manner, the NECE was an event of considerable significance in tracing the influence of culture on local imaginaries, both immediate and longer-term, as is considered further below.

Alongside the Palace of Engineering, Palace of Industries and Empire Marketing Board Pavilion, amusements and entertainments were provided for those attending which included a Boating Lake, Himalayan Railway, Water Chute, Monkeys’ Paradise Jungle and an ‘African Village’ (*Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 23 July 1929). The ‘African Village’ was one of the most well attended amusements and by the end of the exhibition over half a million people had paid to see North African natives go about their ‘daily life’ (*Hartlepool Northern Daily*

*Mail*, 26 October 1929). As with many other imperial exhibitions, such as the 1924-1925 British Empire Exhibition in Wembley, London, colonial subjects were often displayed alongside goods or exhibited as an amusement and curiosity (MacKenzie, 1999). Ethnic ‘peep shows’ and ‘human zoos’ portrayed colonial natives in heavily stereotyped and racialised ways furthering orientalist perceptions of the imperial other, sharpening the sense of difference and reinforcing white assumptions of cultural superiority through exploitatively exhibiting their ‘daily lives’ (Crang, 2013; Virdee, 2014). As Thompson (2005) notes, colonial subjects were often depicted as living in uncivilised ways and performing ‘exotic’ or ‘curious’ cultural activities and this was certainly the case regarding the ‘African Village’ at the NECE in 1929.

During the conception of the ‘African Village’ initial plans were made to include men, women and children from British colonies in West Africa including Sierra Leone, Nigeria and the Gold Coast<sup>34</sup>. Local press from February 1929 brought attention to the proposed amusement and excitedly reported on the opportunities visitors would have to see tribal Africans working with ‘primitive utensils’ (*Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 16 February 1929) and described the Africans as ‘practically savages’ and ‘virtually heathens’ (*The Newcastle Chronicle*, 16 February 1929). This proposal was brought to the attention of the London based West African Students Union (WASU) who were conscious of the ridicule and contempt such representations in the ‘African Village’ would bring upon the West African community. The WASU wrote letters to the local press and petitioned members of parliament and Overseas Trade Department to contest the inclusion of West Africans in the NECE (Cole, 1988; Hughes, 2014). The issue was debated in the

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<sup>34</sup> The *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 16 February 1929, states that the ‘African Village’ would ‘be “inhabited” by some 80 men, women and children, drawn from West Africa, between the rivers Senegal and the Niger’.

House of Commons where the Secretary to the Overseas Trade Department Mr Hacking, who had received letters of protestation from the WASU, stated that due to the fact that they were to be housed as they would be in their native countries and performing everyday tasks such as cooking and handicrafts, it was argued that ‘there would seem to be nothing in the proposed arrangements which should bring the natives into contempt or ridicule’.<sup>35</sup> This view was immediately contested by MP Shapurji Saklatvala<sup>36</sup>, who confronted Hacking’s comment, arguing that:

‘Though it may not be repugnant to the exhibition authorities here, or to the British visitors, it is very repugnant to the educated section of Africans, and does he not further realise that we are only making an exhibition of the wretched way in which citizens are reared up and kept in the British Empire?’<sup>37</sup>

The issues of including British Colonial Subjects in the NECE were debated further and the decision was made that those to be included in the ‘African Village’ would originate from French speaking North Africa (*Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 09 May 1929). This demonstrates how people from across Africa were often represented as one monocultural entity and collectively positioned as other to white British culture, thus refusing the acknowledgment of vast cultural and ethnic diversity. The contestation of such racialised representations by Saklatvala and the WASU is also indicative of voices of resistance emerging from beyond the immediate region in an attempt to shape how ‘race’ was experienced in everyday life.

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<sup>35</sup> House of Commons Parliamentary Papers – HC Deb 08 May 1929 vol. 227 cc2185-6. Comment from Mr Hacking, Secretary to the Overseas Trade Department.

<sup>36</sup> Shapurji Saklatvala was born in Bombay to a wealthy family and moved to London in 1907 to pursue a political career. He was a member of the Communist Party and sat in the House of Commons from 1922-1929. He ardently petitioned for Indian Independence and opposed to imperialism and capitalism. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/equiano-centre/drawing-over-colour-line-database/spotlight-sitters/shapurji-saklatvala> [Date accessed: 02 October 2020]

<sup>37</sup> House of Commons Parliamentary Papers – HC Deb 08 May 1929 vol. 227 cc2185-6. Comment from Mr Shapurji Saklatvala.

A documentary film titled ‘Five Minutes at the North East Coast Exhibition Newcastle 1929’ produced by British Pathé contains footage of spectators visiting the ‘African Village’ and provides a glimpse into the nature of the performance.<sup>38</sup> The film, framed as the experiences of an amusement, shows women and men in Bedouin dress dancing under a wooden hut around an open fire and musicians playing traditional instruments while crowds look on, cheer, point and pose for the camera (Figure 4.3).

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<sup>38</sup> <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/five-minutes-at-the-north-east-coast-exhibition-ne> [date accessed: 10 January 2021]

**Figure 4.3** – Stills from British Pathé Video, ‘Five Minutes at the North East Coast Exhibition’, 1929. ‘The African Village’





The construction of the ‘African Village’ as a form of amusement cannot be denied, but it was also a medium for the transmission of a knowledge of North African colonial subjects which reinforced wider circulating representations and enabled an imaginary to form in the minds of the visitors which then influenced embodied encounters with BAME communities living in the region. Newspapers reported on the village, using heavily orientalist language and reinforcing the construction of difference between white western culture and the behaviours portrayed in by those in the living exhibition. The Algerian Arabs, Bedouins and Dervishes were consistently described in the press as ‘natives’, ‘crouching around fires’, ‘using primitive utensils’ and ‘living their daily life as though on their native burning sands’.<sup>39</sup> The banal, and repetitive, use of such language in the press clearly represented the ‘African Village’

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<sup>39</sup> Some examples of orientalist language used when describing the ‘African Village’ can be found in: *Leeds Mercury*, 13 June 1929; *The Berwick Advertiser*, 13 June 1929; *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 09 May 1929; *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 23 July 1929.

as a source of amusement and one of the many attractions present at the NECE to entertain those visiting and as previously mentioned this ‘attraction’ proved extremely popular with visitors. Furthermore, the representation of the ‘everyday life’ of colonial populations as uncivilised was presented in complete antithesis to white western culture (represented by the arts and engineering elsewhere within the exhibition) which furthered the civilising mission of empire (MacKenzie, 1999). Paradoxically, this distancing of western and eastern culture was presented to the masses at the NECE through a close and embodied encounter – essentially bringing the empire closer to further represent differences between coloniser and colonised thus providing the opportunity to encounter racialised difference through proximity. This supports the argument that representation can be considered as a form of encounter which atmospherically circulates and informs embodied encounters in everyday life.

The perceived educational opportunity which was provided by the exhibition and its ‘African Village’ was engaged with by schools across the region and it was reported that over the course of the exhibition some 150,000 schoolchildren had visited in organised parties (*Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 26 October 1929). *The Berwick Advertiser* reports on some visits made by school children in the area and list the ‘African Village’ as one of the many attractions that were visited (*The Berwick Advertiser*, 13 June 1929; 25 July 1929). After the closing of the NECE in October 1929 essays from children at Millfield School, in Northumberland, were published in *The Berwick Advertiser* which details their experience and understanding of the exhibition and reproduces their awareness of cultural differences between them and those in the ‘African Village’.

Holloway and Valentine (2000) in their work on British and New Zealand children's imaginative geographies of the other, stress the significance of children as



competent social actors in constructing perceptions of ‘others’ in relation to themselves and such an understanding appears to have been present among the Millfield children. In his published letter, a boy aged thirteen comments on the mundane activities being undertaken by the Africans and the exotic nature of their dress stating that ‘the womenfolk were all decorated with gold and silver ornaments’ (*The Berwick Advertiser*, 24 October 1929). While a girl aged fourteen comments on how she thought the Africans ‘looked very queer in their quaint dresses’ and that ‘they were not very black, but dusky’ (*The Berwick Advertiser*, 24 October 1929). It is fair to suggest that these children were aware of the cultural and racial differences between themselves and those present in the attraction and the use of language such as ‘quaint’ and ‘decorated’ suggests a superficial orientalist awareness of African exoticness and primitiveness. Furthermore, the language employed objectifies those present in the ‘African Village’, as rather than describing them in human terms, the children employ language which might be used to describe an ornament, a vase or painting for example, thus implicitly positioning the exhibition as another commodity of empire through an affectual encounter of observation. This suggests the need to broaden understandings of encounter to include the multiplicity of representations as well as interactions.

Another reflection on a child’s perspective of the ‘African Village’ can be seen in Mary Wade’s autobiographical memoir. Reflecting on her childhood growing up in Bedlington Colliery, twelve miles north of Newcastle, Wade vividly recollects her school trip to the NECE as a moment where herself and fifty other pupils ‘learnt so much more about the great big world outside’ (Wade, 1984, p.57). Wade recalls:

‘We had heard of the many exhibits and attractions, but there is no doubt about which of these we were most keen to see. It was the African Village. The authenticity of this section was never questioned, and we were convinced that a whole village of Africans had been moved lock stock, and barrel to the town moor. Despite all

the poverty around us, perhaps this was our first injection of a superiority complex. With furniture in our homes and desks in our classrooms, surely we were very fortunate! Home cooking did not vary much, but leek puddings and tattie hash was certainly more appetising than anything the Africans were eating.’ (Wade, 1984, p.58)

This personal glimpse into a working class child’s encounter with racial difference, and the acknowledgement that the representations and knowledge’s experienced were never questioned as inauthentic, is indicative of the iteration and accumulation of colonised knowledges through both embodied and atmospheric encounters and their potential capacity to influence everyday behaviours and thoughts. Furthermore, the way in which Wade accepts that this moment marked the pupils first experiences of a ‘superiority complex’ suggests, as Nayak (2003, p.41) has brought attention to, a moment where ‘local pride could be translated into a nationalistic sense of white superiority’. This further demonstrates the contribution that can be made by thinking of representations and encounters as atmospheric circulations, as nationalism, or a racialised sense of cultural superiority, ‘cannot be traced back to a single sovereign source but rather emanate from multiple constituencies as part of a nebulous, diffuse atmosphere’ (Closs Stephens, 2016, p.182). The experiences of children, and other visitors, at the NECE, interacted with various representations that they encountered in everyday life – through fiction novels, in education, through the imagery on product advertising in their homes, for example – and this shaped not only their perception and knowledge of BAME communities, but how they would draw from this atmospherically circulating knowledge repository in future life.

The fact that those in the ‘African Village’ were from North Africa meant that they would have shared more embodied racial and cultural markers of difference with the Arab community in South Shields, than say the West Indian community. For example, the use of the language ‘dusky’ is significant as this descriptor is frequently

used towards members of the Arab community in South Shields and was similarly ascribed to the North African's at the NECE. For instance, as already noted, children commented that 'they were not very black, but dusky' (*The Berwick Advertiser*, 24 October 1929). In letters to the editor of the *Shields Gazette*, writers often refer to members of the Arab community as 'dusky gentlemen of Holborn' (17 March 1923), 'dusky gentlemen' (*Shields Gazette*, 21 March 1923) and 'dusky compatriot of ours' (*Shields Gazette*, 22 January 1930). In this regard, it can be suggested that cultural or racialised assumptions towards the South Shields Arab community could have been influenced by the experiences, representations and language present at the NECE 'African Village'. Again, this reinforces the significance, and danger, of homogenising 'African' culture as representations of BAME individuals were not developed in isolation from one another but gained a cumulative meaning across various texts, images and knowledges. Hall (2013) brings attention to the inter-textuality of processes of othering and representation, where there is an accumulation of meaning across different texts, images and representations of 'others'. The experience of the 'African Village' at the NECE may well have, in the minds of those consuming the representations, interacted with other knowledges of empire and colonial subjects, to be rearticulated in everyday life and not experienced and understood in isolation.

As has been previously mentioned, due to the nature of historical research, it is exceptionally challenging to determine how visitors to the exhibition reacted to and engaged with the 'African Village'. Similarly, it is also difficult to uncover the relationship between these representations and everyday encounters between white and BAME communities across the region. Tyne and Wear Archives hold a substantial collection of ephemera – pamphlets, catalogues, postcards, season tickets and leaflets

– which would have been available as souvenirs to those who visited the exhibition.<sup>40</sup> For the most part, these items contain images of the various pavilions, exhibition park and industrial stands present at the exhibition. However, there is one post card from a private collection which stands out. This postcard bears a photograph of the musicians of the ‘African Village’, dressed in traditional clothing, standing under a wooden hut and playing their instruments, (See Figure 4.4) and although details of its purchaser are unknown, it is another way that the visual representation of BAME individuals involved in the ‘African Village’ could have been engaged with after the exhibition by those whom bought it as a souvenir. This postcard produces a lasting image of the ‘African Village’ at the NECE, one which is imbued with power – the power to represent BAME musicians as a means of entertainment and reinforcing cultural assumptions of difference through photographing them in ethnic dress and playing traditional instruments for the amusement of those listening and watching.

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<sup>40</sup> For example see: TWAM DX212/32 Illustrated leaflet advertising North-East Coast Exhibition to be opened by H.R.H. Prince of Wales, 14 May 1929; DX212/33 Season ticket for North-East Coast Exhibition issued to Greta Wilson, Elmswood, Glebe Avenue, Benton; DX1319/9/3 Illustrated brochure prepared for the North-East Coast Exhibition; L/PA/1621 North East Coast Exhibition May - October 1929 daily programme.

**Figure 4.4** – Postcard of ‘African Village’ Musicians at the North East Coast Exhibition, 1929 ([humanzoos.net](http://humanzoos.net))

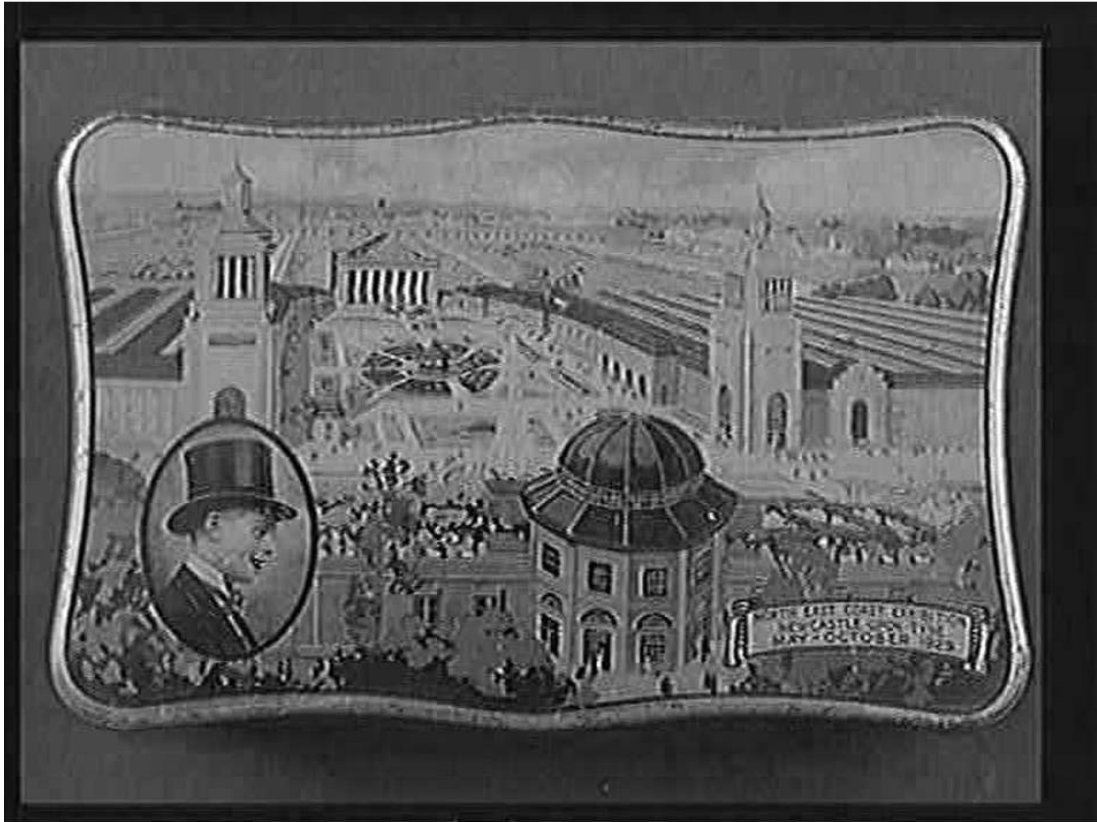


The Beamish Regional Resource Centre (BRRC) also contains a significant collection of ephemera and objects related to the NECE. The collections of the BRRC archive are not influenced by the state, it holds no official archive status, but is rather a collection built upon the donations of people from across the North East over several decades. From local newspaper advertisements it is clear that the NECE was engaged with by working class audiences from across the region. Special bus tours were organised to bring people from across the North East to Newcastle to visit the exhibition (*Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 13 May 1929). The BRRC archive contains a significant amount of material related to the 1929 NECE, similar to the ephemeral collections at TWAM, pamphlets, several illustrated catalogues, postcards<sup>41</sup> but also physical items such as two Cremona Toffee Tins from the NECE<sup>42</sup> (See Figure 4.5) depicting the pavilion in Exhibition Park.

<sup>41</sup> BRRC CAT887 Advertising brochure. North East Coast Exhibition stand no.591, 1929; LIB10053 Official illustrated catalogue of the North East Coast exhibition: Palace of Arts, Newcastle upon Tyne; LIB12045 Official guide to the North East Coast Exhibition; May - October 1929.

<sup>42</sup> BRRC NEG27672 Cremona Coffee Tin from the North East Coast Exhibition 1929.

**Figure 4.5** – Cremona Toffee Tin from the North East Coast Exhibition, 1929. Photograph is an early digital copy and does not reflect the quality of the original. (BRRC NEG27672)



The significance of a collection of this size in a small archive sustained with donations from local people could be indicative of the wide engagement with the event by working class communities across the region. Although it can never be wholly ascertained, the fact that such items have endured, kept in largely pristine condition, for close to a century, in everyday people's homes suggests that they were valued souvenirs and perhaps indicates the legacy and influence of the event on local working class communities across the North East. Resultingly, in order to develop a more inclusive history of working class communities in the region, the NECE needs to be remembered not only as an example of presence, spectacle and industrial promotion, but also as a moment where representations of racial difference were encountered by the masses.

Travelling circuses and the NECE were cultural experiences that were encountered by many people from across the region and were one of many platforms through which representations of BAME individuals circulated atmospherically (Closs Stephens, 2016). The representations did not exist in isolation but developed their meaning in conversation with wider representations in advertising, media and education (Hall, 2013). Representations of the ‘imperial other’ were experienced atmospherically through multiple sources and it is the combination of these and their reproduction in everyday encounters that are worthy of further attention. The nature of population settlement in the North East meant that port towns were the most ethnically diverse working class settlements in the region (Tabili, 1994a) and although processes of cultural othering were experienced across the national and regional level, there is a need to also focus on representations and the articulation of othering in the specific communities where there was the most ethnic diversity and thus everyday multicultural encounters.

#### **4.3.2 – Encountering representations of ‘imperial others’ in everyday life**

As previously discussed in Chapter 2 (3.2), throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the advertisement and consumption of imperial goods were a medium through which a knowledge of empire was acquired and developed by the masses in Britain. The visual nature of packaging and advertisement billboards allowed the working classes to banally consume visual representations of empire and colonial subjects who were often presented in an exotic, subservient and stereotyped orientalist manner, distinguished from white Western culture.

South Shields was the most ethnically diverse working class settlement in the North East due to its relatively large and established BAME community, many of whom worked in, or were connected to, the Merchant Shipping Industry (Lawless, 1995). Due to the nature of available material, this section is centred upon representations of BAME individuals which were accessible to those living in South Shields. This develops an insight into how representations of the ‘imperial other’ permeated everyday embodied encounters and the experiences of a multi-ethnic working class. Nevertheless, these more particular experiences are indicative of, and can be read alongside, the wider circulation and inter-textual nature of representations of BAME individuals and communities as discussed throughout this chapter.

Images of exoticized representations of imperial subjects were visually present within the port town settlement. As previously mentioned, the advertising of imperial goods, and representations of colonial subjects within them, was a medium through which the white working class constructed ideas of racial difference. A photograph taken in 1908 on Mile End Road, in South Shields, which ran adjacent to the streets where some of the largest Arab Boarding Houses outside of the Holborn ward were located, demonstrates the presence of colonial advertising, and representations of BAME individuals, in everyday spaces (Figure 4.6).



**Figure 4.6** – Black and white photograph of advertisements on wall in Mile End Road, South Shields, c1908. (South Tyneside Photo Archive)

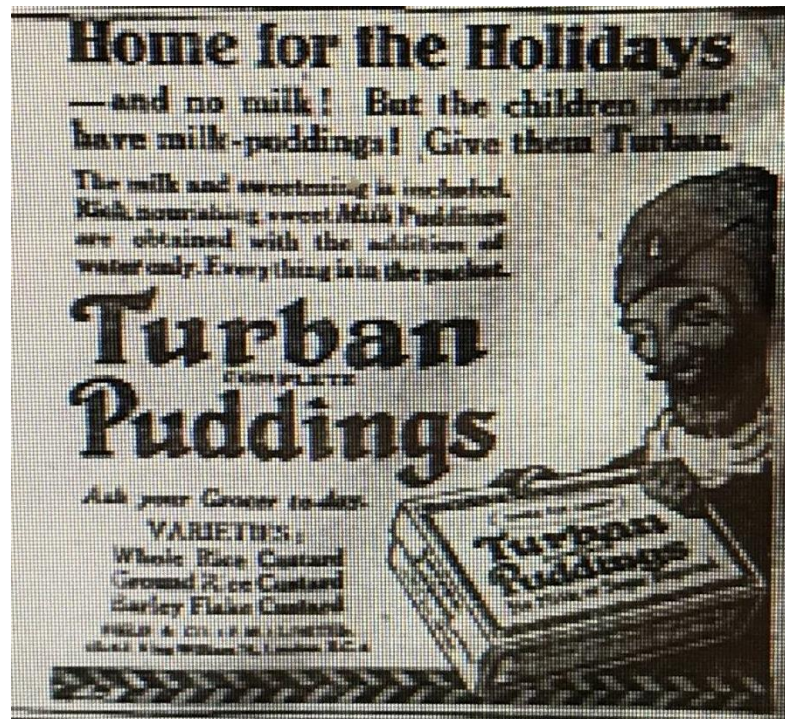


This photograph depicts a representation of colonial subjects in product advertising in the everyday, local spaces of the town. As men and boys queued outside of their workplace, the stereotypical image of a colonial subject was part of their daily environment. For example, the Lipton Tea advert, shown in the centre of the advertisement wall, depicts a racialised and exoticized image of a Ceylonese female, dressed in traditional clothing, appears alongside the imperial product which is being presented as exotic yet familiar, thus representing her as another commodity of empire. Although how BAME individuals are represented in advertising is significant, attention needs to be paid to the purpose and intended audience of such representations. The repetition and familiarity of such representations sharpened the sense of cultural divide between white western and native colonial populations, reinforcing imperial racial hierarchies and widening a sense of difference thus justifying colonial rule and the wealth of empire. This reveals an insight into the power

present in the production of racialised advertising images (Taylor, 1997) and the link between these atmospheric encounters and the re-articulation of racialised knowledges in everyday embodied inter-ethnic encounters. These visual representations were consumed alongside other representations of imperial knowledge to form part of a wider landscape of inter-textual representation (Hall, 2013) which white British people drew upon to make sense of their everyday encounters with BAME individuals and communities.

Similarly, an advertisement for ‘Turban Puddings’ was present in the *Shields Gazette* in December 1918 and January 1919 and contains a cartooned representation of an Indian man wearing traditional clothing holding the product (Figure 4.7).

**Figure 4.7** – Photograph of Turban Pudding Advert (*Shields Gazette*, 13 January 1919)



The language and choice to name the product ‘Turban Puddings’ is significant. Pryor (2013) discusses how ‘Indian Pale Ale’ became an icon of empire in the early twentieth century as ‘in a time of racial tension in Britain, this was seen as an example

of food being seen as a non-threatening sphere of cultural diversity’ (Pryor, 2013, p.2). Furthermore, O’Connor (2009) discusses how consumption and purchasing patterns were influenced by the Empire Marketing board, as recipes for the symbolic ‘Kings Christmas Pudding’ were imperialised to maximise the use of various ingredients from across the Empire. The symbolic nature of this globalised, or rather imperialised, dessert represented ‘significant beliefs and values, and that, on a social level, creates and communicates meanings, signifies identity, inspires sentiment, and mobilises action’ (O’Connor, 2009, p.128).

The branding of ‘Turban Puddings’ is illustrative of the contradictory nature of imperial product consumption and circulating representations of empire in Britain in the early twentieth century. ‘Turban Puddings’ were one of many products produced by the London based fruit merchants Field & Co. which brought exotic middle-eastern ingredients to the British market in a ‘sterilised’ manner. The advert for ‘Turban Fruits’ in the 1929 British Industries Fair Exhibitors Catalogue, stressed the fact that they were ‘British Packed’ and although the exotic ingredients originated from ‘the world’s finest crops’ they were ‘scrupulously cleaned, sterilised and packed here in England by English girls under modern hygienic conditions’ (See Figure 4.8).<sup>43</sup> Not only does this draw upon representations of British modernity and hygienic superiority which was perpetuated in the civilising mission of empire, but it also suggests the measured use of exotic marketing and access to global products produced in calculated ways to appeal to the white Western appetite for sanitised exoticness. As May (1996, p.58) argues, ‘consumption is not a single act of purchase but a process through which products become imbued with symbolic meanings, sometimes provided by their producers (via advertisements, for example) and sometimes by the consumer’. The

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<sup>43</sup> 1929 British Industries Fair Exhibitors Catalogue. Advert for Field and Co (Fruit Merchants).

physical consumption of the sterilised ‘Turban Puddings’ for example, enabled the wider consumption of visual representations of empire and the perceived willingness of the labour of colonial subjects as a means of having a sanitised and proper British experience of exotic goods. Advertisements were unexceptional and mundane, yet frequent, ways through which ideas and representations of Empire, and its subjects, were visually encountered by the community in South Shields and this may have been a medium through which local white communities constructed and rearticulated ideas of cultural and racial difference.

Embodied cultural markers (Nayak, 2003), such as traditional ethnic dress, were another visual way to represent difference between Western and non-Western culture. The representation of clothing to depict BAME seafarers as ‘different’ was used throughout the interwar period by the press, despite reinforcing a largely inaccurate imaginary. Sensationalised stories of BAME seafarers were often capitalised on by the national newspaper, the *Illustrated Police News (IPN)*. The *IPN* attracted its audience through reproducing unusual or sensationalised ‘true stories’ of crime, murder and disasters (Maunder, 2004). Despite its title and attempts to present ‘true stories’, the success of the paper was reliant upon the entertaining nature of their content and the publication had no official link with the police or judicial system. Throughout the early twentieth century, the *IPN* published several articles surrounding ‘alien immigration’ which reinforced xenophobic attitudes among its largely working class audience (Maunder, 2004). The commonplace use of sketches to accompany its more prominent stories served as a visual medium to shape popular ideas surrounding those who became its focus. Local news stories regarding BAME British Colonial subjects in the North East were sensationalised and depicted to a national working

class audience in ways which articulated the construction of difference and processes of othering.

**Figure 4.8** – Turban Fruits Advert, 1929 British Industries Fair Catalogue.



**Turban**  **Fruits**

**British Packed**

**TURBAN DATES** are the pick of the famous Bussorah crops. Plump and tender, each has the inimitable flavour of dates at their best. Carefully sterilized and packed in dustproof cartons. **Price 5/6 per dozen F.O.B.**

**TURBAN DESSERT FIGS.** The golden fruit with the golden flavour. Selected figs, carefully cleaned and packed in dustproof drums. **Prices 5/6, 9/6 and 14/- per dozen F.O.B**

**TURBAN FRUIT SALAD.** A choice variety of evaporated fruit for dessert. Apricots, Peaches, Pears, Plums, Figs, etc. **Prices 8/6 and 12/- per dozen F.O.B.**

**TURBAN MUSCATELS AND JORDAN ALMONDS.** A delicious combination. The finest muscatels and almonds packed together in dustproof wrappings. **Price 4/6 per dozen F.O.B.**

**TURBAN STUFFED DATES.** Picked dates with an added charm. Stoned and filled with the choicest Brazils, Blanched Almonds, Walnuts, or Preserved Ginger. In transparent dustproof packages. **Price 4/6 per dozen F.O.B.**

*C.I.F. prices on application.*

Turban Fruits are specially selected from the world's finest crops, scrupulously cleaned, sterilized and packed here in England by English girls, under modern hygienic conditions.

**FIELD & CO. (Fruit Merchants) LTD.**  
Turban House, 3, Eastcheap, London, E.C.3.

During the interwar period the South Shields Arab community, as well as BAME seafarers from other British port towns, were the focus of sketches and accompanying stories in the *IPN*. The way in which BAME seafarers were presented in sketches was used as a medium that furthered cultural othering between BAME seafarers and the white population, whilst also reflecting existing attitudes and institutional views. In the sketches concerning BAME seamen, they are consistently depicted to be wearing traditional non-Western clothing such as robes and headdresses (For example, see Figure 4.9).<sup>44</sup> The representation of the South Shields Arab community as wearing non-Western dress in their everyday life arguably reinforced imaginaries of embodied difference and spatially fixes and essentialises this difference. The murder of which the article refers to is presented as a ‘strange crime’ (*Illustrated Police News*, 27 February 1919), despite the facts of the crime appearing to be a fairly straight forward, and not necessarily uncommon, murder following a theft. The accompanying article to the sketch brings attention to the location of the murder scene in an Arab Boarding House in Holborn, and also depicts the victim’s white wife of nineteen years old, thus situating the ‘strange crime’ with wider anxieties concerning relationships between white women and BAME men and the circulating representations of Arab Boarding Houses as dangerous and violent spaces. The sensationalised reporting by the media of everyday behaviours and incidences involving the South Shields Arab community will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter and demonstrates how temporal and spatialised processes of othering were developed in dialogue with cultural representations. Again, as Hall (2013) suggests, it is the inter-textuality of representations, multiple representations

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<sup>44</sup> For examples see *Illustrated Police News*: 27 February 1919; 22 December 1921; 08 May 1930.

appearing simultaneously and being read in relation to one another, that meaning and knowledge is accumulated and then rearticulated in everyday encounters.

**Figure 4.9** – Sketch – ‘Strange Murder of an Arab at South Shields’ (*The Illustrated Police News*, 27 February 1919)



**STRANGE MURDER OF AN ARAB AT SOUTH SHIELDS.**

The inaccurate nature of these cultural representations can be ascertained both from local press excerpts and photographs taken in the 1930s. Councillor Cheeseman was quoted in the *Shields Gazette* stating that:

‘It was not fit and proper for them to live amongst white people no matter how thick the veneer of civilisation might be. They would find that sort of civilisation more in the dress they wore than in anything else. Take that away and they would find the real Asiatic.’  
(*Shields Gazette*, 07 February 1929)

Although clearly not the focus of Cheeseman’s statement, his language suggests that the Arab community in South Shields wore Western clothing in their everyday lives and not the exoticized clothing that was being depicted in the press. Furthermore, photographs taken of the South Shields Arab community in the 1930s, both during (Figure 4.10) and after the 1930 riot (Figure 4.11), shows the men wearing waistcoats, shirts and flat-caps which was far from the headdresses and Harem trousers they were so commonly being represented by sketches as having worn.

**Figure 4.10** – Photographs of arrests following the 1930 South Shields riot. (South Tyneside Photo Archive)









**Figure 4.11** – Photograph of two unknown Arab Seafarers, c1930. (South Tyneside Photo Archive)





Those living in port towns in interwar Britain would have encountered BAME individuals in person on a daily basis. They would have been aware of how members of the Arab community dressed and lived and perhaps understood that the representations of BAME individuals as ‘culturally other’ were exaggerated or in contrast to the reality of everyday life. Said (1978, 1993) develops the understanding of an imaginative geography, where how we think about places and their populations are influenced by the representations we are exposed to throughout our lives. As these representations are consumed, an image potentially forms in our mind which, even when we are exposed to the actualities of that place or people, remains influential, acting as a lens through which we understand what we are experiencing (Said, 1978). As was the case regarding the dress of BAME individuals in South Shields for example, ‘the formation of imaginative geography is not only a consequence of a sociocultural power from above, but also a lived process from below’ (Yu, 2018, p.226). Imaginative geographies are lived, contextualised and spatially contingent and as Yu (2018, p.241) notes, ‘if the imaginative images have been built, people will tend

to stick with them even though the reality is quite different'. Such persistence can be perhaps seen in the way in which BAME individuals living in interwar Britain were consistently represented as culturally 'other' through their non-Westernised dress in newspapers and popular imagination, despite the actuality of everyday encounter in the North East suggesting otherwise.

Embodied cultural markers, such as traditional dress, was but one of many ways in which BAME individuals and communities were represented as 'other' both within the port towns in which they lived and at the national level. This demonstrates how the embodied nature of social and cultural difference was negotiated, albeit in a context where there existed uneven power relations, in the everyday lives of a multi-ethnic working class community and take a more nuanced approach towards imaginative geographies and processes of othering (Clayton, 2009; Nayak, 2003; Wilson, 2017). Nonetheless, BAME communities experienced multiple forms of othering which were not only based upon visual differences but simultaneously represented minority groups as an actual, physical threat to the communities in which they lived. Employing an inter-textual approach which foregrounds the multiple, circulatory and atmospheric nature of representations, suggests the inter-textual nature of atmospheric and embodied encounters and their influence on everyday life.

#### **4.4 – Imaginaries and representations of violence**

Port towns in interwar Britain experienced distinct socio-economic conditions due to their socio-spatial structure.<sup>45</sup> Following the 1919 Seaport Riots, port towns

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<sup>45</sup> See Chapter 5 (2.2).

were characterised and represented as overtly violent and unstable spaces, where imaginaries of violence were seen to be a consequence of their ethnic diversity (Jenkinson, 2009; Tabili, 1994a). Violence was central to the expansion of the British Empire and positioned as a necessary means to overcome native barbarism and secure the civilising mission of Empire (MacKenzie, 1999). Colonial subjects were commonly portrayed as being irrational and violent (Jenkinson, 2009; Owen, 2012), and this was certainly the case regarding BAME seafarers living in interwar Britain, as well as internationally, thus demonstrating the complexities present between the colonial and post-colonial worlds. Imaginaries and representations of violence travelled internationally and evolved under specific localised conditions demonstrating that they were not bounded by their geographical location.

From exceptional moments of racialised violence, such as the 1919 and 1930 riots, to everyday conflict over employment and intra-community tensions, BAME seafarers were regularly represented as violent and this imaginary was reinforced by the popular press and those in positions of power. The representation of these events, in racialised terms, and relative disproportionate coverage by local press, and indeed later in the historiography, is perhaps illustrative of how, as Pavoni and Tulumello (2020, p.60) argue, ‘representations and narratives of violence are embedded and sedimented into the materiality of the urban’ and can condition the everyday experience.

The role of the popular press in disseminating imperial ideas and colonial imaginaries among the working class cannot be understated, and the significance of the press as a platform for cultural othering has been considered previously in this chapter. Nonetheless, newspapers were one of the most significant mediums in shaping othering processes relating to violence as they sensationalised, reinforced and

capitalised on perpetuating perceptions of BAME Colonial Subjects as violent, uncontrollable, unstable and a dangerous group within society. Newspapers were interacted with by the working classes in everyday life and their contents held immense potential to present imperial ideas to be consumed and shared by the masses. As previously discussed in Chapter 3 (5), newspapers were not independent and neutral tools, unbiasedly presenting local, national and global events as they unfolded but were imbued with the ideologies of the editors and owners and conscious to be popular with their audiences (Owen, 2012). This section draws largely from sketches present in the *Illustrated Police News*, which although a national publication, frequently contained visual representations of BAME individuals in the port towns of the North East alongside visual coverage of overseas colonial violence.

#### **4.4.1 – Knowledges of international colonial violence in interwar Britain**

Violence has been a central experience across the British Empire. The colonial state was established through force and conquest and control maintained by military presence and threat of further violence (Owen, 2012). A knowledge of the civilising mission of empire was developed among the British working class living in the metropole through a variety of mediums. From fictional exploration novels and poetry, to radio broadcasts and newspaper articles, a knowledge of apparently ‘necessary’ and ‘civilising’ colonial violence was present in the minds of the working classes (Virdee, 2012).

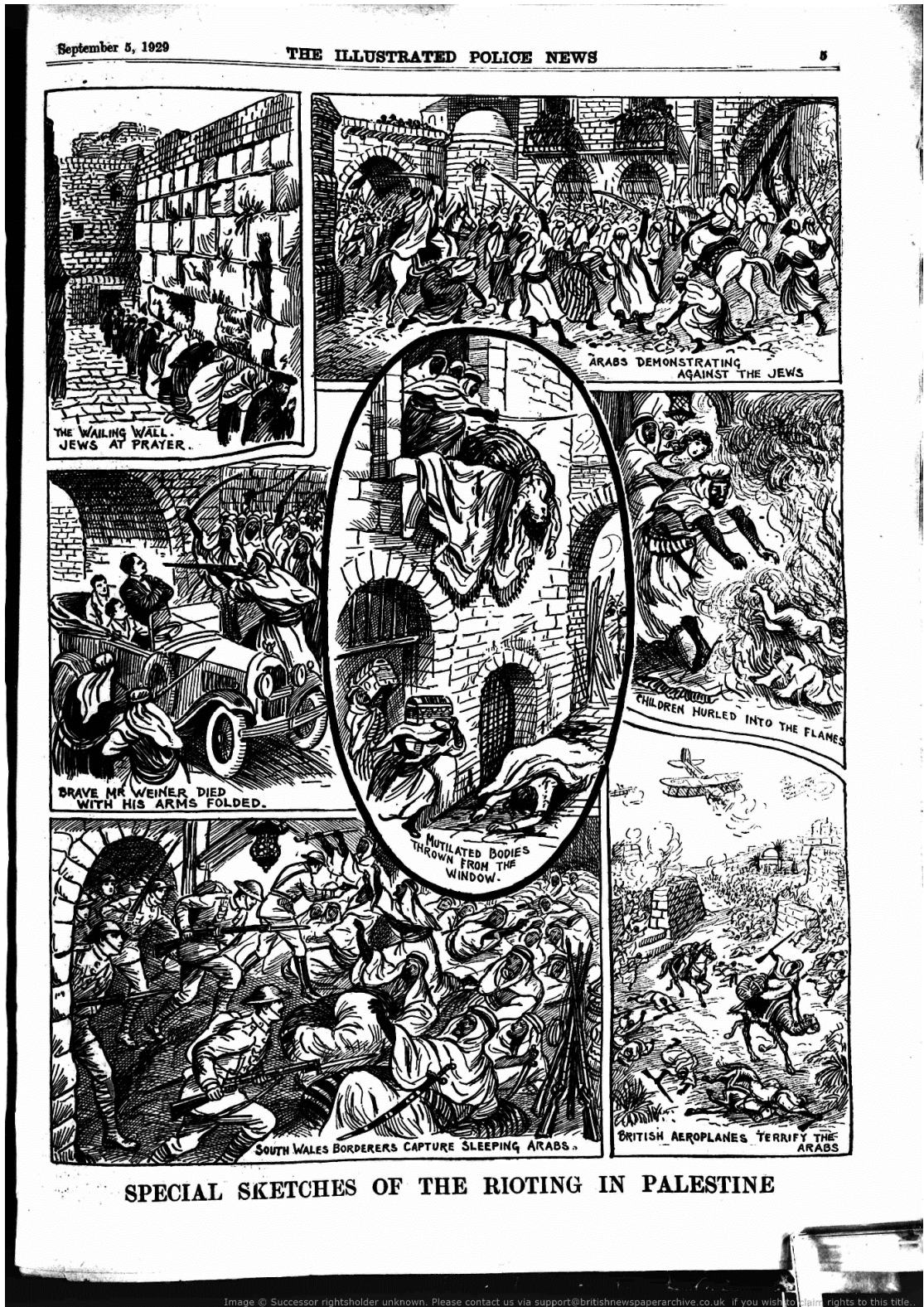
However, the reporting of violence in the colonies, perpetrated by colonial natives, was conveyed to ‘other’ BAME subjects from white Western communities by

representing them as a potential threat to social and political order in Britain (Hall et al., 2013). This wider approach situates local experiences in global discourses and demonstrates that violence in the colonies and racialised violence in Britain should not be considered in isolation as they were underpinned by fundamental connections. Owen (2012, p.644), in his work on the coverage of colonial violence in the *Manchester Guardian*, argues that violence was articulated in British newspapers in a manner stressing ‘the oriental despotism or savagery that colonial conquest had displaced, and the state of chaos to which the colony would return if the civilizing mission were to fail’. His work suggests how readers developed a knowledge of empire and of colonial subjects, especially those who migrated to Britain from colonies perceived as more volatile, such as those in the Middle East.

Throughout the interwar period, there was violence, revolts and civil unrest in several of the British colonies in the Middle East. In late 1929, rioting in Palestine between Jewish and Arab communities was reported by the *Illustrated Police News* to its British readership (*Illustrated Police News*, 05 September 1929). This article, and its accompanying sketch (Figure 4.12), provided a knowledge of a recent attack on members of the Jewish community, who had gathered at the Wailing Wall to pray, by Arabs. The article focused on the atrocities committed by the Arabs and brought attention to the perceived barbarity, uncivilised and brutal nature of the attack. Is it particularly relevant here given the composition of the South Shields community that has already been commented upon. The newspaper stated that:

‘Bodies of babies killed in the attack were thrown into the flames by the lust-maddened Arabs. At another place the tribes broke into the houses, and mutilated bodies of the victims were thrown from the windows.’ (*Illustrated Police News*, 05 September 1929)

Figure 4.12 – Sketch – ‘Special Sketches of the Rioting in Palestine’ (*The Illustrated Police News*, 05 September 1929)





Not only did the *Illustrated Police News* emphasise the barbarity in its article, it also accompanied it with a sketch to reinforce the violent and uncivilised nature of the event to its readership (Figure 4.12). The sketch depicts Arabs throwing children into flames and stealing from a house as a woman is thrown from the window above (*Illustrated Police News*, 05 September 1929). The sketch also portrays British soldiers coming to the rescue, ‘capturing sleeping Arabs’ and chasing the Arabs away with British planes, thus restoring peace and civility. Hall (1981) brings attention to how visual representations in the media are imbued with power through reinforcing ideas of subordination and domination. The colonial native was often portrayed in binary terms (Said, 1978), the ‘good native’ is portrayed with a certain primitive dignity and enacting behaviours of servitude, as can be seen in colonial product advertising campaigns, while ‘the bad side is portrayed in terms of cheating and cunning, and further out, savagery and barbarism’ (Hall, 1981, p.40).

This polarised representation and imaginary can be seen in the coverage of violence in the colonies, where, as Hall (1981, p.40) notes:

‘Cannibals, whirling dervishes, Indian tribesmen, garishly got up, constantly threatening to overrun the screen. They are likely to appear at any moment out of the darkness to decapitate the beautiful heroine, kidnap the children, burn the encampment or threatening to boil, cook and eat the innocent Explorer or colonial administrator and his lady wife. These natives always move as an anonymous collective mass – in tribes or hordes – and against them is always counterposed the isolated white figure, alone out there, confronting his destiny or shouldering his burden in the heart of darkness, displaying coolness under fire and an unshakeable authority – exerting mastery over the rebellious natives or quelling the threatened uprising with a single glance of his steel blue eyes.’

The article above drew upon such representations and divided Arabs, in the colonies, from the wider white British society and presented them as overtly violent, immoral and uncivilised. The events taking place in Palestine in 1929 also received

attention in the North East local press<sup>46</sup> with the *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette* reporting that ‘one of the most remarkable features of the East is the rapidity with which these ignorant and primitive people rally to the call of action where religious questions are concerned, and it is here that the chief danger lies’ (*Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 27 November 1929). This subtle reference to Arabs as ‘ignorant and primitive people’ who were prone to violence and disorder, would have inter-textually connected with local representations which furthered the imaginary present in the North East port towns, presenting Arabs as a violent and dangerous homogeneous group. Similar articles covering revolts in Afghanistan and Iraq also received attention in local press which not only shared a biased knowledge of colonial violence regarding the conflict, but also reinforced ideas of cultural and behavioural difference along racialised lines.<sup>47</sup> It is therefore apparent that the geography of representation is not locally specific but multi-scalar – representations intersected, aggregated and shifted dependant on wider historically contingent conditions.

Letters to the editor of the *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette* discuss the events which took place in Palestine in 1929, demonstrating a keen interest by readers. It is fair to suggest that such imperialist perspectives present in the local press would have influenced how white working class audiences constructed a knowledge of empire and its colonial subjects, especially Arabs, and, as will be discussed in Chapter 5, this knowledge based on multiple representations would shape

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<sup>46</sup> *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*: 05 November 1929; 27 November 1929; 28 December 1929.

<sup>47</sup> For examples of local press coverage of the 1919 Afghan Revolt see: *Shields Daily News*, 27 May 1919; *Shields Daily News*, 27 May 1919. For examples of local press coverage of the 1920 Iraqi Revolt see: *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 09 July 1920; *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 23 August 1920; *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 31 August 1920; *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 11 September 1920; *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 29 September 1920.

how white and BAME communities interacted in everyday life. A local-global relationship develops between events and experiences, the colonised and the colonisers, overseas and the events and experiences that were taking place at the local level, in South Shields or Sunderland for example, thus disrupting simple distinctions of colonial and post-colonial spaces in interwar Britain. In understanding place as constructed out of multiple socio-political circulations tied together, it becomes evident that experiences in and of these places are processual and absolutely not static (Massey, 1991). It is the co-existing presence of these multiple representations that speaks most to Massey's understanding of place and the emphasis upon diverse presence explored in this thesis.

In December 1924 *The Seaman*, official newspaper of the NSFU, published an article covering the murder of a British government representative in Egypt titled 'Our Gentle Egyptian Brethren' (*The Seaman*, 05 December 1924). The article begins with an overview of the murder of the Sirdar in Cairo and stated that 'when the British took Egypt in hand many years ago it was one of the worst governed countries in the world. The natives were oppressed, and bribery and corruption were the order of the day'. The article then moves on to discuss Egyptians in the British mercantile marine and groups Egyptian, Somali and Adenese seafarers together as 'Arabs'. The 'Arabs' are depicted as a group prone to violence and states that in Britain 'nearly all of them carry most deadly weapons, knuckle dusters, daggers, revolvers etc.' (*The Seaman*, 05 December 1929) and those confiscated weapons can be found in Union headquarters. In presenting BAME seafarers as a homogeneous group which was prone to violence and a collective threat explicitly othered them from the white seafaring population in Britain and further sharpened the sense of divide among a multi-ethnic working

class.<sup>48</sup> The negative representations of Arabs as violent, often served to bring attention to the assumed superiority of the West over the political, economic and sociocultural norms. As Said (1978, p.108) argues,

‘Arabs, for example, are thought of as camel-riding, terroristic, hook-nosed, venal lechers whose undeserved wealth is in affront to real civilisation. Always there lurks the assumption that although the Western consumer belongs to a numerical minority, he is entitled either to own or to expend (or both) the majority of the world’s resources... a white middle-class westerner believes it is his human prerogative not only to manage the non-white world but also to own it, just because by definition ‘it’ is not quite as human as ‘we’ are.’

This perception of colonial subjects as inherently violent was prevalent in port towns for much of the interwar period and shaped how BAME communities were marginalised both within the NSFU and the wider Mercantile marine. As will now be discussed, it was not only international colonial violence that was sensationalised by the press but also localised episodes of violence in port towns was used as a means of othering BAME seafarers from the wider, and predominantly white, communities in which they lived. It is argued here that these representations can be viewed in relation to one another and as part of an accumulated atmosphere of representations that shaped everyday atmospheric and embodied inter-ethnic encounters across the North East.

#### **4.4.2 – Violence in British port towns**

1919 saw some of the worst racialised violence in British port towns in the twentieth century and led to BAME seafaring communities being othered suggesting

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<sup>48</sup> See Chapter 3 (4.2) for a discussion on the implications of using homogenising language when discussing ethnically diverse groups and the methods I have taken to ensure the use of representative and inclusive language.

that the violence, irrationality and volatile nature of these communities had been inherited from them being colonial natives (Jenkinson, 2009; Tabili, 1994a). Newspaper reports of the February 1919 riot in South Shields consistently state it was an ‘Arab riot’ and present the Arab community as being the aggressors and instigators of the melee.<sup>49</sup> Newspapers largely underplayed the context and multiple causes of the riot, choosing to instead focus on how the Arabs responded. The *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail* is representative of the racialised tone of much of the popular press and focuses its attention to depict the Arab community as excessively violent and unreasonable stating that:

‘Most of the Arabs seem to have been armed with sticks, but not content with using these, they rushed to their boarding houses in East Holborn, which is close by, and returned with bottles, stones and revolvers, which they used to attack anyone who happened to be about’. (*Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 05 February 1919)

Evans (1994, p.66) brings attention to how the self-defence of the Arab community during the 1919 riot on the Mill Dam was perceived by white eye-witnesses as a ‘peculiarly eastern custom’ as the civilised west would have gone to the police station to air their grievances instead of engaging in such violence. However, as will be discussed in Chapter 5, racial bias in the policing of the 1919 riots, and many other instances of racialised violence throughout the interwar period, led for the South Shields Arab community to be hesitant in airing their grievances to the police and judiciary system for fear of unfair prosecution. Similar moments of exceptional racialised conflict, such as the 1930 riot in South Shields, would also be presented by the press in this biased manner.<sup>50</sup> Whilst the events of 1919 are considered in more

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<sup>49</sup> For examples see: *Shields Daily News*, 05 February 1919, ‘Arab Riot’; *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 04 March 1919, ‘The Arab Riot’; *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 14 May 1930, ‘Colour Riots at North Shields’; *Daily Herald*, 04 August 1930, ‘Arab Seamen in Dock Riot’; *Western Mail*, 16 September 1930, ‘Colour Riot Sequel’.

<sup>50</sup> *Daily Herald*, 05 August 1930; *Shields Gazette*, 05 August 1930; *The Seaman*, 24 September 1930.

depth in a later chapter, here, this wider association between South Shields and racialised riots is briefly reflected upon.

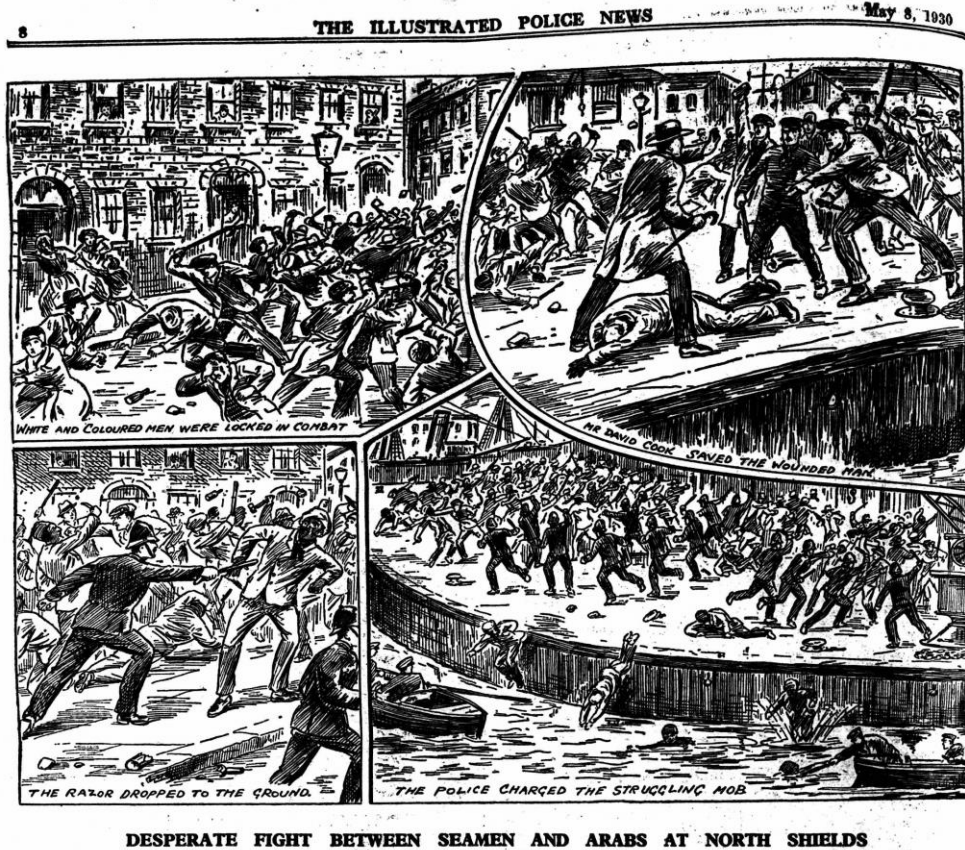
Throughout the interwar period, there were numerous outbreaks of violence and hostility over the employment of BAME seafarers in the port towns of the North East.<sup>51</sup> These varied in scale and severity but were a regular presence in local press. The manner in which these were reported in local and national newspapers sharpened the sense of divide between white and BAME seafarers along explicitly racialised lines. The *Illustrated Police News* reported on several instances of violence involving BAME seafarers in port towns and often included sketches as a means of visually reproducing the story.<sup>52</sup> For example, in May 1930 the *Illustrated Police News* published a story concerning a riot in North Shields which had broken out over employment competition between white seafarers (named “Seamen”) and BAME seafarers (named “Arabs”). In the accompanying sketch (Figure 4.13), BAME seafarers were depicted to be the aggressors, wielding violent weapons, daggers, revolvers and bottles. This reinforced the image of BAME men as inherently violent, dangerous and a menace to the communities in which they lived. The press often presented white men as restraining BAME ‘aggressors’ or calling for and assisting the police, when for the most part, as can be ascertained in the limited judicial records available, they behaved equally, and in some cases more, violently than BAME individuals.

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<sup>51</sup> See Chapter 6 (2)

<sup>52</sup> The *Illustrated Police News*: 24 April 1919, ‘East-End Riot Between Arabs and Sailors’; 14 May 1925, ‘Arabs’ and Negroes’ fight at Newport’; 08 May 1930, ‘Desperate fight between seamen and Arabs at North Shields’; 25 June 1931, ‘Arab shot dead in street at Cardiff’.

**Figure 4.13** – Sketch – ‘Desperate fight between seamen and Arabs at North Shields’ (*The Illustrated Police News*, 08 May 1930)



Presenting BAME seafarers as a violent menace to the port towns in which they lived othered them from the wider communities in which they lived and was used to justify increasingly exclusionary practices in the industry. The spectacle of riot drew attention to those involved and the representations of these events became significant. The NSFU and the wider repatriation campaign also benefitted from this approach and was supported by the national government and local bureaucracies. Experiences of othering and marginalisation were differentiated and varied processes in interwar Britain where inter-ethnic encounters, visual, textual, embodied and violent, were everyday experiences mediated through representations of racial difference. In this regard, there is much to be gained in an approach which foregrounds the atmospheric (Closs Stephens, 2016) and inter-textual (Hall, 2013) nature of representations as a

form of encounter in the everyday lives of a multi-ethnic working class. The material outcomes of the multiple discourses produced by processes of othering, representation and encounters are difficult to trace, and causality impossible to attribute. Yet, it is argued here that the representations considered were significant and shaped the everyday experience of BAME communities living in interwar Britain and these experiences will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

#### **4.5 – Conclusion**

This chapter has considered how a banal and atmospheric, imperialised knowledge, permeated the everyday experiences of the working classes in Britain in the early twentieth century through a variety of affectual encounters with racialised representations of difference. Developing a space-time awareness of encounters through the lens of the everyday, this chapter has demonstrated that in interwar Britain, there was a circulating body of representations present which were not spatially or temporally bounded, but rather served as an invisible repository which was drawn from and added to, simultaneously, throughout the period.

The representation of BAME individuals as exotic, uncivilised and as a form of entertainment, greatly sharpened the sense of divide between white British and non-Western culture, reinforcing orientalist representations and understandings of the ‘imperial other’. The banal nature of colonial product advertising ensured that representations of colonial subjects as submissive and exotic commodities of empire (Pieterse, 1995) were part of the backdrop of everyday life in the North East and enabled the consumption and reproduction of such representations. Colonial



exhibitions, traveling circuses and imperial product advertising were important and visual mediums where encounters were commodified and through which a partial knowledge of empire and colonial subjects was developed. This knowledge would then often act as a lens through which white individuals made sense of their current experiences (Said, 1978). Nevertheless, the employment of BAME workers in circuses and colonial exhibitions forms a central part of a material presence of BAME communities living in Britain in the early twentieth century (Bressey, 2010). This brings together the experience of atmospheric representations with the materialities of lived experience of 'race' within ethnically diverse communities and reaffirms the contribution that can be made in uncovering BAME experiences when representations are conceptualised as both embodied and atmospheric encounters.

As has been demonstrated, violence has long been associated with the civilising mission of the British Empire and how knowledge of both colonial violence and violence involving colonial subjects in Britain, led to an inaccurate perception of BAME communities as inherently violent, unstable and a threat to the wider social order. Exceptional episodes of disorder, such as the 1919 Seaport Riots, were explicitly racialised and allocated blame to the BAME communities while detracting attention from the wider socioeconomic, political, spatial and temporal causes (Jenkinson, 2009). The imaginary of BAME seafarers as having inherited violence from their position as colonial subjects (Tabili, 1994a) significantly shaped how they were treated, prosecuted and perceived by the police and judicial system, and the nature of this will be explored in more detail in the forthcoming chapter. These relations between representations here and far are important for reflection on the everyday geographies and wider events which are subsequently considered.

There is much to be gained in situating processes of othering alongside wider grievances, experiences and acts of contestation in the interwar period. The approach centred around the everyday, which has been employed in this chapter, and indeed thesis as a whole, demonstrates an innovative approach to understanding nuanced and less dominant histories. Such an approach allows for traditional histories of working class communities in the North East (Lawless, 1995; Tabili, 2011) to be critically revisited and support the creation of a more inclusive, relationally constructed historical geography of a multi-ethnic working class. It is essential to develop a knowledge of not only how imperial encounters and knowledges were constructed, consumed and experienced by a multi-ethnic working class, but how such knowledges were articulated in space. Such knowledge highlights the wider tension present between local policies, exclusionary conditions and everyday behaviours.

## Chapter 5 – Everyday experiences of racialisation and exclusion in the North East of England.

### 5.1 – Introduction

‘The life of these Arab firemen is becoming intolerable. There is a prejudice against them in the town – a prejudice born of ignorance, and since the last riots it appears that there has been an absolute set back against them. The behaviour of people down at the Mill Dam, unfortunately soldiers amongst them, whose uniform we are bound to respect, although there is no telling what type of individual is beneath it, is such that an Arab is now afraid to walk along the street.’ (Mr J. Muir Smith, defence counsellor, *Shields Gazette*, 10 March 1919)

This excerpt from the *Shields Gazette* directly quotes Mr Muir Smith’s statement of defence on behalf of two Arab seafarers who had been arrested following an altercation with two soldiers on the Mill Dam. This episode will be explored in detail in this chapter.<sup>53</sup> Muir Smith’s words bring attention to the multifarious nature of exclusionary conditions that BAME communities living in the region faced in everyday life. Popular racism, employment competition and economic depression intersected in multiple ways and surfaced at various points in space and time in interwar Britain. These exclusionary conditions were further exacerbated by the socioeconomic and political upheaval from wartime to peacetime which ruptured everyday life in ethnically diverse communities within and beyond 1919.

Building on an understanding of representations as an atmospheric encounter, this chapter explores everyday exclusionary conditions and embodied encounters across the North East of England in the interwar period. It considers the impact of circulating representations of difference to contribute to an understanding of how

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<sup>53</sup> See Chapter 5 (4.3)

exclusionary conditions shaped everyday encounters within ethnically diverse communities across the region. The formation, maintenance and articulation of the everyday experience of a multi-ethnic working class will be foregrounded throughout this chapter. Thinking within and beyond moments of racialised disorder will bring space and place, and the actions between communities and the environments in which they live, to the forefront of discussion (Navickas, 2011).

This thesis is centred upon developing an inclusive history of the everyday experiences of a multi-ethnic working class. In shifting attention from the exceptional to the everyday, the relational nature of ‘race’, space and the everyday experience can be uncovered. By taking mundane behaviours and experiences seriously and indicating the importance of such actions in their own right, the ‘daily negotiation of ethnic difference’ (Amin, 2002, p.959) can become central to analysis. Whilst exceptional moments of racialised disorder are important for this thesis (Jenkinson, 2009), there is much to be gained in shifting attention from an understanding of ethnically diverse settlements as inherently violent and volatile (Tabili, 2011) and explore wider and often contradictory conditions which influenced how a multi-ethnic working class navigated their daily lives.

Space is not a neutral medium within which everyday life is lived, but rather constituted by, and constitutive of, a complex array of conditions which establish, as Laurie and Shaw highlight (2018, p.8), ‘the very geographies of being’. Conditions of everyday life have a profound impact on how individuals and communities thrive, or struggle, and these conditions are dependent on the individual’s socioeconomic and political position in society (Madden, 2017). This chapter explores how everyday conditions of exclusion, violence and marginalisation intersected in moments of inter-ethnic encounter and shaped the everyday lives of those living in ethnically diverse

working class settlements across the North East of England throughout the interwar period.

This chapter builds upon the work of those such as Jenkinson (2009, 2017), Lee (1998), Tabili (1994a, 2011) and Lawless (1995) to argue that the politics of place experienced in inter-war port towns, and the wider regions in which they were situated, provided unequal conditions that shaped everyday experiences. Such an approach foregrounds the relation between ‘race’ and spatially specific conditions, the latter acting as an agent of power within in everyday encounters. This demonstrates an engagement with everyday conditions and everyday encounters as inter-related processes. The focus shifts from white behaviours enacted as a response to encounters with the BAME community, or vice versa, to a variety of behaviours in diverse communities across the North East. It has been demonstrated in the preceding chapter that representations should be understood as a form of encounter. Here it is argued that there is much to be gained in considering representations in dialogue with the everyday conditions which circulated beyond such representations to understand how ‘race’ intersected in more embodied and material ways with the everyday experiences of an ethnically diverse working class.

This chapter is organised thematically and characterises the non-linear trajectories of racialisation and the conditions of inclusion, exclusion and marginalisation. The challenge resulting from the inconsistent nature of relevant archival records regarding working class communities across the region in the interwar period has been addressed in Chapter 3. Since this is a regional study, archival fragments from across the North East have been triangulated with the more abundant material from South Shields. This allows the experiences considered in this chapter to

be assumed as indicative of the wider everyday experience of multi-ethnic working class communities across the region.

This chapter will further the work of Lee (1998) and Jenkinson (2009) to argue that the socioeconomic and political characteristics of port spaces were different from other working class communities in the region. These spaces were active arenas where a variety of racially exclusionary conditions combined to shape the everyday experience of those living in them (Laurie and Shaw, 2018). It will be demonstrated that, as Lipsitz (2007, p.12) highlights, ‘the racial demography of the places where people live, work, play, shop, and travel exposes them to a socially shared system of exclusion and inclusion’. This influenced everyday encounters between white and BAME communities in the North East of England. As Essed (2008) suggests, ‘everyday racism adapts to the culture, norms, and values of a society as it operates through the prevalent structure of power in society’. This chapter will argue that the exclusionary conditions developed and perpetuated by those in positions of power influenced everyday inter-ethnic encounters across a variety of spheres of interaction – at the level of the port town settlement, in intimate residential spaces and through the everyday enactment of law and order.

Building on an understanding of settlement-specific exclusionary conditions, this chapter will go on to unpack everyday inter-ethnic encounters through a spectrum of behaviours in and against domestic spaces, such as Arab Boarding Houses, to argue that imperial and racialised ideologies permeated the actuality of lived experiences in specific ways. In shifting focus from exceptional episodes of disorder, and away from workplace conflict, to focus on the spectrum of behaviours which made up everyday inter-ethnic encounters (Taylor, 2014), ensures that BAME perspectives and experiences are not only included in moments of violence or exceptionality. The

inclusion of everyday BAME experiences, aside from those surrounding the 1919 and 1930 ‘riots’ in South Shields, develops a more inclusive history of the everyday experiences which is more representative of the multi-ethnic working class communities across the region. To conclude, the chapter will discuss courts, policing and the judicial system through a lens of the everyday and argue that law and order in interwar port settlements was organised around, and responded to, racialised representations of everyday life. Sarat and Kearns (2009, p.8) suggest that ‘law does not just happen to the everyday; it is produced and reproduced in everyday encounters’ and as will be articulated in this chapter, BAME everyday experiences of law and the judicial system provides a novel approach to understanding how everyday conditions and everyday encounters intersect in everyday life.

This chapter demonstrates the need to not solely focus on moments of conflict due to wider exclusionary conditions, but also contextualise experiences to develop an understanding of the motivations and spatiality of the development of agency from within a multi-ethnic working class.

## **5.2 – Exclusionary conditions in port towns**

As Brown (2005, p.21) demonstrates, ‘place is an axis of power in its own right’; it is the medium through which representations of difference, racialised hierarchies and notions of identity intersect. It is where the everyday experience unfolds. Everyday life is embedded into a circulating web of conditions which provide the existential and physical resources to sustain, restrict and destroy the propensity to thrive, both at the individual and community level (Laurie and Shaw, 2018). This

section will bring notions of the everyday into conversation with an understanding of exclusionary conditions to support the hypothesis that everyday experiences should not only be understood as the here and now, but situated within an awareness of the historical legacies, spatial peculiarities, current conditions and future aspirations.

Port towns were the most ethnically diverse settlements in Britain in the interwar period (Byrne, 1977). Migration to South Shields, for example, can be dated back to the second century AD with the creation of the Roman port (Tabili, 1994a) and since then the town has been an international hub of the exchange of goods, people and ideas. Racial structures, and their impact on the everyday experience, cannot be simply understood out of their spatial, socio-economic and historical context (Hall, 1996b). Inter-ethnic encounters do not solely emerge through abstraction, instead these relations are situated in centuries of experience and conditioned by wider, evolving, contexts. In order to develop an account of the intersection between race, class, space and the everyday experience, it is therefore necessary to situate experiences of racialisation and exclusion within specific temporal and spatial conditions.

Port settlements in interwar Britain were distinctive spaces when compared to other working class settlements across the region. There is a small yet insightful body of work which consider the socioeconomic distinctiveness of port towns (Lee, 1998; Lawton and Lee, 2002) and its significance on exceptionalised episodes of racialised disorder (Jenkinson, 2017). Individuals living in port towns experienced specific conditions which often proved to be conducive to socioeconomic and political difficulty (Madden, 2017). As Laurie and Shaw (2018, p.8) have noted, ‘to exist is to be affected by conditions’. Such conditions are in the resources that can both sustain and harm, unify and antagonise communities. ‘Violent conditions’ (Laurie and Shaw,



2018) are those which limit the possibility for life to thrive and actualise. This section seeks to understand the everyday working class experience as a process which is shaped by circulating political, sociocultural and economic conditions and how violent or challenging conditions effect inter-ethnic encounters.

### **5.2.1 – Joseph Havelock Wilson and North East port towns**

Port towns were spaces where national and local political institutions were positioned side by side – often both in the physical architecture of the town and in its administrative operation. The Town Council, Board of Trade, Shipping Federation, Immigration Office, Labour Exchange, Judiciary System and National Sailors’ and Firemen’s Union were only a fraction of the national political organisations embedded into the local infrastructure of the town and capable of impacting the conditions of everyday life. As such, port towns were a complex and intersectional space, where national policies were enacted and experienced under locally specific conditions. This posed many challenges to those living in the area, especially BAME groups. As Webster (2003, p.117) outlines in his work on imagined geographies of racism, fear and violence in Northern England following the 2001 riots, ‘the people who control information about jobs tend to be the same as the gatekeepers for housing and leisure opportunities’. Policies enacted with racialised underpinnings are especially challenging for BAME groups. South Shields, and many other port town communities, in the interwar period are a primary example of overlapping conditions and the relational power dynamics of empire, nation and locality (Brown, 2005).

In December 1918, Joseph Havelock Wilson was elected as Liberal Member of Parliament for South Shields (Craig, 1983). Wilson had been a central figure in the establishment of the National Sailors' and Firemen's Union<sup>54</sup> (NSFU) in 1887, remaining president until his death. During the war, Wilson had become popular among the white working class communities across the port towns of the North East, and indeed Britain, by constructing his political image as 'the super-patriotic Trade Union leader' with firm beliefs and determination to protect the rights of British seafarers (Byrne, 1994, p.94). Locally, in his constituency, he was seen as representing the needs of those working in the economically entwined industries of the town – merchant shipping, metal working (ship building) and coal mining. As such, throughout his election campaign, he was commonly referred to as 'the seamen's candidate' (*Shields Daily News*, 12 October 1918) and 'the Sailors' Champion' (*Hull Daily Mail*, 07 December 1918). However, Wilson was an outright patriot and imperialist who held overtly racist views on minority ethnic communities and should perhaps be thought of as the '*white* seamen's candidate'. Building upon Byrne's (1994, p.91) argument that Wilson's views and actions regarding foreign seafarers significantly shaped the 'politics of the Arab issue in South Shields', this section seeks to further demonstrate how Wilson, his beliefs, actions and popular support, centrally featured in conditioning everyday experiences.

Throughout the war and his election campaign, Wilson openly shared his patriotic and anti-German views through local and national press interviews, local union events, public meetings and organised speeches.<sup>55</sup> Throughout the 1918 election

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<sup>54</sup> The National Sailors' and Firemen's Union adopted the title of National Union of Seamen in 1926 and so the title of the union will be used interchangeably depending on the time period being discussed.

<sup>55</sup> See following articles regarding Wilson's election campaign and the anti-German and patriotic views: *Liverpool Daily Post*, 14 August 1916; *Suffolk and Essex Free Press*, 03 October 1917; *Newcastle Journal*, 12 October 1918 – 'Why British Seamen are Patriotic. Mr Havelock Wilson's Way with

campaign, patriotism and the retribution and punishment of Germany and its Kaiser was a key theme of political debate (Byrne, 1994) and something that both Lloyd-George and Wilson would capitalise upon as part of their campaign to gain popular support. In an interview published in the *Shields Daily News* on the 12 October 1918, Wilson shared his views claiming that patriotism was legitimately heightened amongst seamen due to the international nature of their employment and their first-hand experiences of the benefits of the British Empire. Wilson further articulated this sentiment regarding the proposed treatment of Germany during negotiations for the armistice. He supported full indemnity from Germany and argued that they should not be negotiated with. To quote Wilson:

‘You can only beat them, and beat them to the ground, and you must tell them what is the will, not only of the people of this country, but the people of the world.’ (*Shields Daily News*, 12 October 1918)

Verbal and physical attacks targeted towards German and Austrian nationals, regardless of whether they were naturalised British subjects or not, had been a feature of wartime life in many working class communities in the region. Violent episodes of disorder broke out in 1914 after the bombardment of Hartlepool and in 1915, after the sinking of the *Lusitania*, which saw German owned shops, mostly pork butchers, attacked in North Shields, South Shields, Sunderland and Hartlepool. Germans were labelled ‘bairn murderers’ (*Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 21 December 1914) by the local press and the lack of police prosecution and prevention of these episodes of xenophobic violence demonstrates how local popular sentiment linked with the everyday experience of law and order. The racially motivated nature of these attacks were directly linked with a complex geopolitical and temporal conditions which were

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Germans.’; *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 15 October 1918; *Shields Daily News*, 17 October 1918; *Newcastle Journal*, 27 November 1918; *Newcastle Journal*, 05 December 1918.

experienced in Britain during the First World War. German communities had been represented as dangerously ‘other’ by the popular press, prominent political figures such as Wilson, the national government and from within the local British community.<sup>56</sup> The attacks on German civilians in port towns during the First World War share many similarities with violence faced by BAME communities in the interwar period. During that period, organised, destructive, mob-like behaviour from diverse crowds – made up of white men, women, soldiers, teenagers and the elderly – took place against BAME communities across the port towns of the North East. As was the case with the attacks on German property, the police often did little to prevent the violence or to disperse the crowd (*Shields Gazette*, 13 January 1919). This instance, and the later treatment of BAME communities throughout the interwar period, demonstrates the temporality and shifting nature of racialised exclusions within local communities, and their sensitivity to wider geopolitical and social conditions.

Wilson’s patriotic, racist and hierarchical ideas were not only expressed locally to his constituents but also permeated the NSFU nationally since its creation. These ideas thus became especially ubiquitous throughout the interwar period.<sup>57</sup> The NSFU in 1919, and indeed for much of the interwar period, was a proponent, and vehicle, of what Hyslop (1999) defines as white labourism (Featherstone, 2015). White labourism is centred around the idea of an internationally unified white working class which is bound together by its whiteness, trans-imperial loyalties and heightened sense of white superiority (Hyslop, 1999). Wilson was a passionate supporter of white preferential

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<sup>56</sup> For examples of anti-German sentiment in the press see: *Newcastle Journal*, 19 May 1914; *Western Daily Press*, 21 December 1914; *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 15 May 1915.

<sup>57</sup> WMRC MSS.175A/1. Proceedings of annual and special general meetings, 1911-1937. 22 September 1919. Annual General Meeting Part 1. Presidential address by J. Havelock Wilson.

employment<sup>58</sup> and his views were shared by many union officers, members of the South Shields Town Council, as well as white sailors themselves living across the region. The influential nature of white labourism in port town communities in interwar Britain shaped workplace negotiations, everyday encounters and daily experiences in spaces of employment.

Wilson's long standing racist views can be seen at the 1895 Trade Union Council Congress, where he was one of several members who voted to petition the government to prohibit the arrival of 'pauper aliens' in Britain. These 'pauper aliens' were Jewish refugees fleeing from Russian persecution (Sherwood, 1991). Racialised grievances from senior members of the NSFU also surfaced in the early twentieth century and were initially targeted towards the employment of Chinese seafarers, the popular memory of Wilson's role in this discrimination permeated the union for decades (Griffin, 2015; *The Seaman*, 26 March 1930).

In this regard, Wilson's continual racism and attitude towards, and treatment of, BAME seafarers impacted the everyday experience within the ethnically diverse seafaring community in South Shields. At the NSFU annual general meeting in September 1919, Wilson explicitly supported the preferential employment of white British seamen over BAME seafarers. He began by imploring the audience to 'have a look at the quality of the men' currently attempting to secure employment in the British merchant shipping industry, commenting that 'those coloured men were not a very reasonable body of men to deal with'.<sup>59</sup> He then went on to discuss demobilisation and the experience of servicemen returning home stating that:

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<sup>58</sup> WMRC MSS.175A/1. Proceedings of annual and special general meetings, 1911-1937. 22 September 1919. Annual General Meeting Part 1. Presidential address by J. Havelock Wilson.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12.

‘The Britisher who had served in the Army or in the Navy and who had done something for his country, should have the preference... The coloured man was not wanted, and the neutral alien was not wanted. You could not blame anyone for that. It is not only, after all, a natural feeling that the men who are natives of a country should have the preference of employment.’<sup>60</sup>

Wilson suggested repatriation as an acceptable solution to the problems he believed to be accentuated by BAME seafarers attempting to gain work in shipping. These sentiments of white British preferential employment are also echoed to his constituents at his annual meeting in South Shields in 1922. Wilson speaks of ‘trench dodgers making their pounds week after week’ while those who had fought for the country were returning home to dire employment opportunities and no chance of earning the wages that those ‘trench dodgers’ had earned during the war (*The Seaman*, 03 March 1922).

During the 1920s many of the ideologies that Wilson shaped and shared with his constituents and union members were rearticulated in everyday exchanges by members of the South Shields working class. In letters to the editor of the *Shields Gazette*, patriotism and war service was drawn upon to highlight the justification for white preferential employment over BAME seafarers.<sup>61</sup> Simultaneously, at South Shields Town Council meetings, Councillor Cheeseman stated he believed that there should be ‘a coloured man’s country for coloured men and a white man’s country for white men’ (*Shields Gazette*, 07 February 1929). The triangulated expression of such similar ideas, from Wilson as MP and NSFU President, from Town Council leaders and from the general public suggests that these ideas intersected in various ways and in various spaces to shape everyday encounters between BAME and white

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<sup>60</sup> WMRC MSS.175A/1. Proceedings of annual and special general meetings, 1911-1937. 22 September 1919. Annual General Meeting Part 1. Presidential address by J. Havelock Wilson, p.13.

<sup>61</sup> For examples of letters to the editor of the *Shields Gazette* which explicitly draw upon war service to criticise the Arab community see: *Shields Gazette*, 02 June 1921; 21 March 1921; 12 February 1925.

communities. In this regard, it can be argued that Wilson – his ideas, behaviours, policies and legacy – became embedded into the socio-political conditions present in port towns across the region throughout the interwar period and contributed to how BAME communities were encountered by the wider white, communities in which they lived. However, these ideas and exclusionary conditions were not simply accepted and endured by BAME communities but actively challenged and contested in the everyday. The nature of this agency will be discussed in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

### **5.2.2 – The socioeconomic distinctiveness of port towns**

Throughout the North East in the early twentieth century, the primary employment for working class men was coal mining, metal working (including ship building) and, in port towns, merchant shipping. In 1921 in North Shields, South Shields, Sunderland and Hartlepool, forty percent of men were employed in one of these three principal industries.<sup>62</sup> These industrial monopolies were entwined in a complex web of inter-dependence. The exportation market for coal heavily influenced the demand for both the building and maintenance of ships, and the wider merchant shipping trade (Lee, 1998). Consequently, if one of these three industries went into decline it would have severe repercussions on the others, which in turn, would lead to an increased level of local unemployment and challenging economic conditions (Tabili, 2011).

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<sup>62</sup> 1921 Census data from: GB Historical GIS / University of Portsmouth, A Vision of Britain through Time.

The merchant shipping industry was a precarious source of employment, where fluctuating demand was influenced by global markets and external geopolitical factors (Lee, 1998; Jenkinson, 2017). These already challenging employment conditions were impacted further by the economic depression that persisted for much of the interwar period. In 1919, the NSFU estimated that in the merchant shipping industry alone there were three men competing for every one job<sup>63</sup> and in 1931 male unemployment in the North East port town averaged twenty percent.<sup>64</sup> Unemployment would only begin to be alleviated in the late 1930s where preparation for another war would ensure that seafarer's prospects would improve.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, the nature of work for seafarers, especially those who worked as firemen and donkeymen, was deemed to be unskilled, which limited the on-shore employment opportunities in times of economic depression. On the other hand, coal mining and metal working, the other two significant employers for working class men in the North East port towns, were considered specialist and skilled jobs that required many years of training and apprenticeship.

### **5.3 –Inter-ethnic encounters in port towns**

Despite exceptional episodes of racialised disorder forming a part of the everyday experience, these events need to be situated within the multiple experiences present within port towns which were contingent on a range of complex and

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<sup>63</sup> WMRC MSS.175A/1. Proceedings of annual and special general meetings, 1911-1937. 22 September 1919. Annual General Meeting Part 1. Presidential address by J. Havelock Wilson, p.12.

<sup>64</sup> 1931 Census data from: GB Historical GIS / University of Portsmouth, A Vision of Britain through Time.

<sup>65</sup> WMRC MSS.175/1/5/2. Annual General Meeting. Officers' Reports. 1938.



overlapping conditions. This thesis argues that there is much to be gained in discussing everyday conditions in conversation with the actualities of behaviour and encounter in everyday life.

For much of historical inquiry, everyday, mundane and routine behaviours and experiences rarely receive significant attention (Adam, 1978), yet such behaviours are central to developing an understanding of everyday experiences of racial discrimination (Essed, 2008), multiculturalism (Clayton, 2009), and represent the dynamic influence of power on the everyday life of a multi-ethnic working class. It is necessary not to solely focus on white behaviours enacted against the BAME community, or vice versa, but to include a variety of behaviours present in order to provide an inclusive account of the working class experience across the North East.

Everyday working class experiences were not binary expressions of peace or violence but rather situated in a broad and complex spectrum of behaviours (Allport, 1954; Cesarani, 2014; Taylor, 2014; Tabili, 1994a). The communities in the port towns of the North East experienced violent riots, individual attacks, intra-community conflict as well as non-violent hostilities and confrontations, but also tolerance, cooperation, moments of curiosity and demonstrable respect. All experiences combined to shape and maintain everyday life.

There has been much work across the social sciences which has sought to develop an understanding of everyday inter-ethnic encounters as a spatially situated discourse (Clayton, 2009; Dwyer and Bressey, 2008; Nayak, 2016; Valentine, 2008). This chapter seeks to further these perspectives through a historical lens. It explores everyday inter-ethnic encounters in interwar Britain through space, at the settlement,

street and domestic level, and in relation to the atmospheric conditions noted above, to demonstrate the heterogenous experiences which made up everyday life.

Researching mundane behaviours and experiences in the archival record is challenging, especially when attempting to ‘turn up the volume’ of, and centre analysis on, BAME experiences. This section begins with a brief contextual overview of the 1919 riot in South Shields and then is organised thematically, utilising a variety of archival material – newspapers, union documents, Colonial Office collections etc. – to uncover everyday behaviours and determine their significance in wider processes and longer-term experiences of marginalisation, contestation and inclusion between white and BAME communities across the North East of England in the interwar period.

### **5.3.1 – Context of 1919 riots**

‘Arab Riot – Revolvers Fired on South Shields Crowd – Many Injured

Turbulent scenes, the likes of which have never before been seen in South Shields, were witnessed at the Mill Dam yesterday afternoon.

The disturbance apparently originated among a number of Arab seamen who were seeking employment at the South Shields Shipping Office, and in an incredibly short space of time hundreds of people became involved in a fierce conflict which assumed alarming proportions, and necessitated the calling out of naval and military detachments.

Numerous gangs of Arabs, armed with revolvers, knives, sticks and bottles, attacked the crowd indiscriminately and as far as can be ascertained more than a dozen persons sustained injuries, though fortunately the revolver shots all went astray. Had it not been for the fact that in their state of frenzied excitement, the Arabs discharged their weapons wildly and at random, very serious consequences would have resulted.

The trouble seems to have arisen through a dispute which occurred during the signing on of a crew at the South Shields Shipping Office, when an Arab seaman, who had presented himself for engagement, was informed that only white men were required for the crew. For some time past it has been a grievance with the coloured men living in the town – and there are many hundreds of them – that it was becoming increasingly difficult to obtain employment on British ships, despite the fact that they were British subjects, that they have filled gaps in British crews during the war, and that they belong to a recognised trade union. Matters reached a climax yesterday when this Arab was “turned down”.’ (*Shields Daily News*, 05 February 1919)

The riot in South Shields was a scene which would become familiar across many of the port towns in Britain throughout the first half of 1919. Violent confrontations between white and BAME seafaring communities occurred in eight British port towns<sup>66</sup> in 1919. This violence was a result of exclusionary employment conditions emerging from popular racism, economic depression and the wider socioeconomic challenges experienced when transitioning from wartime to peacetime (Jenkinson, 2009). The riot in South Shields arose when the BAME community contested racist hiring practices at the employment hub of the Mill Dam, as:

‘It was becoming increasingly difficult to obtain employment in British ships, despite the fact that they were British subjects, that have filled gaps in British crews during the war and that they belong to a recognised trade union.’ (*Shields Daily News*, 5th February 1919).

Tensions reached a climax on the 4<sup>th</sup> February when an Arab crew was refused employment. When one of these men protested the injustice, J.B. Fye, a Cooks and Stewards Union Official, confronted the protester and stated, “You black bastards this ship is not for you!” (Jenkinson, 2009). The Arab seaman was offended and taken

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<sup>66</sup> Riots occurred in: Glasgow, January 1919; South Shields, February 1919; Salford, March 1919; Liverpool, June 1919; Hull, June 1919; London/ Poplar, June 1919; Cardiff, June 1919; Newport, June, 1919.

aback by the comment and he slapped Fye and violence broke out among the onlooking crowd (Lawless, 1995).

The reporting of the riot in the popular press explicitly allocated blame to the BAME communities. The press suggested that the primary cause of the violence was that BAME seafarers were unwilling to accept being refused employment. Headlines such as ‘Arab Riot’ (*Shields Daily News*, 05 February 1919), ‘Arabs Run Amuck’, (*Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 05 February 1919) and ‘The Arab Riot’, (*Shields Gazette*, 05 February), explicitly allocated blame to the South Shields Arab community. The *Shields Daily News* (05 February 1919) even describes Fye as a victim, stating that he had been ‘discharged from the army with a disabled leg’ and ‘was severely injured about the head and face’. There is no mention of his racist comment which provoked the violence, Fye’s positionality and role in the riot will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6 (3.1).

In the available historiography, the Seaport Riots of 1919 have largely been thought of as ‘exceptional’ episodes of racialised violence (Evans, 1980; Jenkinson, 2009; Lawless, 1995). Nevertheless, there is much to be gained in paying attention to the wider trajectories of associated grievances which were experienced in 1919 (Griffin and Martin, 2021) and exploring these ‘exceptional’ moments through the lens of the everyday. Indeed, this lens makes it possible to revisit and reconceptualise these moments and understand them as embedded into the everyday experiences of those living within ethnically diverse working class communities in the early twentieth century.

### 5.3.2 – Everyday behaviours in port towns

Bhavnani et al. (2005), argue that attention should be paid to locally specific conditions which lead to eruptions of protest, rioting and racism and to pay attention to the complexities of everyday life, thus taking into account ‘both ideas of stereotyping and prejudice as well as the local context in which these attitudes and behaviours are expressed’ (Bhavnani et al., 2005, p.56). This chapter seeks to build upon the circulating cultures of representation and racialisation of BAME individuals in the North East of England, discussed in the preceding chapter, and develop a spatialised understanding of such circulating discourses on the everyday experience and on inter-ethnic encounters in interwar Britain.

As previously detailed, on the 4<sup>th</sup> February 1919 violence broke out on the Mill Dam, South Shields, between white and BAME seafarers. This violence was more than just the expression of racial hostilities but was the outcome of wider conditions associated with the transition from war to peace, claims to belong, economic depression and dire living conditions (Jenkinson, 2017). The 1919 riot was set in national and international webs of protest and dissent and characterised as a ‘riot’ and as an exceptional episode of disorder by local and national government institutions, the police and judicial system and the press at the time. From the Seaport Riots in Britain (Jenkinson, 2009), and the Red Summer riots in America (Evans, 2001; Voogd, 2008) to riots across the British Empire (Evans, 1994) and mutinies in the French infantry (Perry, 2019; Stovall, 2012) it is clear that 1919 was a year of international upheaval, dissent and the expression of racialised grievances.

Situating these events and experiences within national and international circumstances is as important as situating them in local temporal contexts. This enables these events to be understood from the point of view of everyday experiences of dissent and disorder against localised conditions (Amin, 2002; Bhavnani et al., 2005). There is a need to divert attention from understanding the Seaport Riots of 1919 as isolated moments of exceptionality and broaden analysis to include smaller, ‘unexceptional’ and everyday acts of disorder throughout 1919 and beyond. As outlined in Chapter 2, employing the lens of the everyday, and moving beyond the ‘exceptional’ events of the 4<sup>th</sup> February, brings attention to the significance that time, space and culture had on everyday working class experiences and demonstrates how they contributed to longer trajectories of protest, violence and exclusion. January to August 1919 saw multiple episodes of tension and disorder arise amongst the working people of South Shields. The impact of such racialised events on the everyday articulation of BAME agency and contestation will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6 (3.1). The riot of the 4<sup>th</sup> February was not spontaneous or isolated. It took place within the everyday experiences of intra-working class tensions in a post-war atmosphere (Griffin and Martin, 2021). Everyday or ‘hidden’ experiences need to be uncovered in relation to these events, in order to demonstrate that they are constitutive of the longer trajectories of associated grievances in inter-war Britain and the multiple experiences of those living in port towns.

The everyday experience of a multi-ethnic working class was not one of polar extremes, but rather a complex spectrum of behaviours expressed in the everyday. It is important to look beyond conflictual or spectacular multi-ethnic histories (Nayak, 2003; Tabili, 2011) in order to develop a more inclusive and diverse account of the everyday experiences of a multi-ethnic working class. As well as negative

experiences, moments of tolerance, empathy, indifference, and later in the period acceptance, were experienced between BAME and white communities across the region.

An example of how racial difference and inter-ethnic tensions were set aside is the way in which both BAME and white communities interacted with the monarchy. In the North East port towns, a significant proportion of BAME seafarers were British Colonial Subjects or Protected Persons and they often drew upon their rights as such in times of difficulty and distress (Brown, 2005; Tabili, 1994a). Brown (2005) argues that colonialism shaped economic and political conditions in interwar port towns in complex and often contradictory ways. This can be seen in moments of shared curiosity such as the visit of the Prince of Wales to South Shields in 1932. When Prince Edward visited the Seamen's Mission a crowd gathered to welcome him and the local press reported that 'a cosmopolitan touch was supplied by hundreds of coloured seamen who had deserted their coffee houses in Holborn in order to catch a glimpse of the prince' (*Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 27 April 1932).

Similarly, the death of King George V in 1936 brought the seamen of Hartlepool together in respectful mourning. A reporter visited the Hartlepool docks where he reported that 'all there had been drawn together by the tragic news – how any difference in matters of colour, creed and religion have all been submerged in a feeling of profound sorrow for a great nation and empire in the tremendous loss it has suffered' (*Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 21 January 1936). Since these accounts are based on journalists' perspectives, it is impossible to ascertain how the wider community actually felt from such a source. However, these moments demonstrate the complex intersection of race, nationality and colonialism under specific temporal and spatial conditions. Brown (2005) emphasises that 'race' is not autonomous but takes

shape by dynamically interacting with other forms of power and therefore can be understood as a mutable division – one which surfaces under specific conditions but can also be set aside in others. Understanding race as a ‘floating signifier’, as (Hall, 1996b) outlines, allows everyday moments and encounters to be foregrounded. This demonstrates the complexity and conflictual nature of articulations of race, racism and multiculturalism. The mundane nature of this cosmopolitanism stands in contrast to many other representations of race and ethnicity in the early twentieth century. It also reaffirms the importance of employing the lens of the everyday as a means to explore the experience of ‘race’ in this period.

This chapter has thus far highlighted that port towns were socioeconomically and politically distinct to other working class communities across the North East in this period (Jenkinson, 2017; Lee, 1998). Certain spaces within port towns, including the Arab Boarding House or the workplace, which are associated with hostility and tension will be the subject of the following section. Focussing on these environments will enable the development of an understanding that articulates how conditions shaped life in everyday spaces of belonging for BAME communities.

### **5.3.3 – Spaces of belonging and sites of contestation – the Arab boarding house**

Certain spaces within port towns became increasingly racialised sites where exclusionary conditions and racialised representations intersected in everyday encounters. Spaces of safety and transnational kinship networks of belonging were also central to the everyday experience, especially those of marginalised groups and migrants (Askins, 2016; Clayton, 2012; Ryan et al., 2008; Yu, 2018; Yuval Davis et



al., 2006). For BAME seafarers living in the North East of England in the interwar period, community life was largely centred around the boarding house. The BAME seafaring community in South Shields was made up of both a transient workforce – a mobile population depending on employment availability – and a smaller group who were permanent residents and had settled in the township establishing boarding houses, businesses and families.

The boarding house, or ‘Arab Boarding House’ as it was contemporarily referred to, was a central institution within BAME seafaring communities. It was considered a space of kinship, belonging and support (Lawless, 1995). Regardless of whether or not members of the community lived in Arab Boarding Houses or in privately rented accommodation across the town with their families, it is argued here that a sense of belonging and familiarity was found within the social spaces of the boarding houses. These social spaces were, as previously discussed in Chapter 4, stigmatised in their representation as spaces of violence and immorality. However, as will be demonstrated in Chapter 6 (4.1), they were significant sites of community agency and spaces from which exclusionary conditions faced by BAME communities were contested in the everyday.

Yu (2018, p.243), in her work on the Chinese community in New York, argues that for many migrants, their ‘sense of home is grounded in the lived space of Chineseness where they speak Chinese, consume Chinese culture, and connect with China by the “look, smell, and taste” in the everyday practice of life’. I argue that for the Arab Community in South Shields, the boarding houses were similar spaces. These were socially and spatially constructed sites, both material and imaginative (Yu, 2018), where everyday social interaction, community politics and religious celebration occurred. Furthermore, Arab Boarding Houses were significant platforms where

community organising would develop, as will be discussed in the following chapter. In addition to the boarding house providing spaces for living and socialising, boarding house residents, through the actions of the boarding house master, would be provided with employment opportunities, unemployment relief and legal, religious and moral guidance.<sup>67</sup> This section foregrounds intimate, domestic and less visible spaces, both architecturally and in the archival record, in order to develop an inclusive construction of everyday life and to ensure that the multifaceted nature of the intricacies of everyday life is reflected.

Perhaps one of the most significant roles of the boarding houses in the early years of the development of the Arab community in South Shields, was that they were spaces which established multiple religious provisions. It has been suggested that the lack of religious provisions, or inhibition to practice their religion freely, can be a determining factor on whether or not a community chooses to settle in a particular place (Clayton, 2012; Panayi, 2014). From the opening of the first Arab boarding houses in South Shields, by Ali Said at 1 Nile Street in August 1909,<sup>68</sup> their role in supporting the religious and moral needs of the men was clear.

At first this was usually demonstrated by a room set aside in the boarding house to pray, securing a Muslim section of the Harton Cemetery and making applications to the town council, which were mostly granted, to slaughter their own meat for religious festivals (Lawless, 1995). As the community expanded, each boarding house often had a member who would act as Imam, yet due to the nature of seafaring employment, it was reported by the local press that ‘next week, if he is lucky, the imam

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<sup>67</sup> For an in-depth account of the role of the boarding house in South Shields see Lawless (1995) Chapter 3.

<sup>68</sup> South Shields Corporation. Minutes of proceedings. Watch Committee Report. Vol.28, July - December 1909, p.257.

may be sweating in the stokehold of a Newcastle steamer, shovelling coal for £8 13s a month. But the star and crescent will still reign in Spring Lane, only another imam will be leading the prayer' (*Shields Gazette*, 20 April 1936). From the early 1930s Zaouias began to appear in South Shields (Lawless, 1995) which were buildings which had been converted to be used as a centre for Muslim Prayer (Figure 5.1).<sup>69</sup> Members of the Arab community in South Shields also participated in annual religious pilgrimages and in 1931 the local press reported that 'several South Shields Arabs went by means of Cook's tours as far as Jeddah on the Red Sea, and from there to Mecca with other pilgrims' (*Shields Gazette*, 20 January 1931). This demonstrates a physical presence of BAME spaces, as well as a more relational and international sense of religious and cultural connectivity within the everyday lives of members of the Arab community in South Shields.

Cultural and religious spaces, due to their location within wider community institutions, were both public and private spaces simultaneously. They were spaces where private issues were often made public – such as the intra-community tensions mentioned previously – and public representations, policies and bureaucracies shaped private everyday experiences, thus bringing attention to the plurality of social relations in everyday life (Essed, 2008). This multi-dimensional awareness allows for circulating cultural experiences and moments to be understood as constitutive of everyday life (Scott, 2009) and foregrounds the relational construction, both spatial and social, of everyday life which is central to this thesis.

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<sup>69</sup> TNA T 161/1117. Mosques for the Arab Communities at Cardiff and South Shields. 1936-1943.

**Figure 5.1** – Photograph of Muslim Mosque at the corner of Cuthbert Street and Smith Street, South Shields, c1930 (South Tyneside Photo Archive).



Boarding houses were not only spaces which were exclusively part of the BAME everyday experience but also became sites of local controversy and racialisation within and beyond the towns' boundaries. White working class women were often employed in Arab Boarding Houses as domestic assistants, to the general distaste of the white population. In 1921 a case appeared in the *Shields Gazette*, as well as some national newspapers such as *Illustrated Police News*, which publicly denounced Arab Boarding Houses as immoral places. A young white woman, aged eighteen, was reported as running away from home in South Shields with her baby, who was fathered by an Arab. Her mother had called the police and they began a search for her. They found her in an Arab boarding house in Holborn with the baby and her Arab partner. There were also other women present in the lounge of the house who were seen by the police constable to be supposedly 'sitting drinking tea and cuddling up to the Arabs' (*Shields Gazette*, 09 December 1921). This everyday occurrence, white women socialising with their Arab partners in cafes or social spaces operated by members of the Arab community, received significant attention in the press,<sup>70</sup> articulating the view that young girls were being 'lured' into the boarding houses. The boarding house master was taken to court on the accusation of running a 'house of ill repute'. In the evidence given by the accused's defence solicitor at the Police Court, it is clear that the women present in the lounge were wives, girlfriends and friends of the Arab seamen and that nothing untoward or immoral was taking place (*Shields Gazette*, 09 December 1921). The solicitor of the Arab boarding house master being charged stated that 'supposing Saleh had not been an Arab but an Englishman carrying on a

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<sup>70</sup> *Shields Gazette*, 09 December 1921; *Shields Daily News*, 10 December 1921; *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 13 December 1921; *Illustrated Police News*, 22 December 1921.

similar kind of business, he thought he would be justified in saying that the Bench would not have been troubled with the case' (*Shields Gazette*, 09 December 1921).

The depiction of this incident in the *Illustrated Police News* (22 December 1921, see Figure 5.2) represented the women in the lounge in a manner which clearly questions their morals, 'drinking tea and cuddling with the Arabs' and no statement is made to the fact that two of the women were married. The interwar period was transitional for working class women in Britain. Increased suffrage for women, along with wider participation in work outside of the domestic sphere during wartime, led many women to gain a sense of independence and freedom that proved to the distaste of many men (Tabili, 1994a). Brown (2005) argues that the dynamics of race, colonialism, nationality, sexuality, gender and class intersected in specific ways in specific places in response to inter-ethnic tensions in port towns across interwar Britain. This complex intersectional experience can be seen in both the treatment of the Arab Boarding House Master and the women involved in the South Shields 'scandal' of December 1921.

**Figure 5.2** – Sketch – ‘White girls and Arabs scandal in South Shields’ (*The Illustrated Police News*, 22 December 1921)



Victorian moral expectations persisted in many communities in interwar Britain and inter-racial relationships were considered problematic for multiple reasons (Brown, 2005). In addition to encouraging BAME seafarers to settle in Britain and place a greater burden on the restricted job market, such relationships were perceived to be encouraging the immoral behaviour of white women. Although not published

until 1928, the *Report on an Investigation into the Colour Problem in Liverpool and Other Ports*, commonly referred to as the *Fletcher Report*, was commissioned by the Association for the Welfare of Half-Caste Children in conjunction with the University of Liverpool. It sought to uncover the source of the “colour problem” and despite being primarily centred upon Liverpool, published generalised results for all port towns which had an ethnically diverse population (Brown, 2005; Christian, 2008). As Brown (2005, p.38) argues:

‘Ultimately, the Fletcher Report concluded that “the coloured problem” in that city owed not to the racist structure of British society, the ideologies promulgated by the British state and its institutions, nor those circulating within Liverpool’s social welfare establishment, nor to the everyday racism of White Liverpoolians who routinely subjected coloured seamen to violence. Rather, Fletcher attributed the colour problem in Liverpool to African seamen.’

The *Fletcher Report* was published in 1928 and circulated to government departments, members of parliament, the media, union officials and local judicial officials including police chief constables (Brown, 2005). The incident in South Shields in December 1921 demonstrates the complex nature of inter-ethnic relations in interwar Britain and reflects common representations of the Arab Boarding House as an immoral space which was challenging colonial racial hierarchies. This posed BAME communities as a threat to moral, social and political order. Alternatively, and reading this material against the grain, the experiences noted above allow an insight to be gained into the Arab Boarding House as an everyday site of connection, community and safety and highlights the intersectional construction of these spaces within and beyond the BAME community itself. These circulating representations, and the inter-textual nature of knowledge accumulation (Hall, 2013), influenced how these spaces were negotiated by both the BAME and white individuals in their everyday lives. As will be discussed in the following chapter, the intersection of



exclusionary conditions and everyday encounters shaped expressions of agency and contestation which sought to defend and maintain the key institution of the Arab Boarding House. Nonetheless, social and residential spaces were not the only sites where everyday experiences, racialisation and inter-ethnic encounters took place in port towns in interwar Britain. The overlapping conditions present in port towns created and maintained complex spaces of interaction, not all as neatly spatially bound as the Arab Boarding House.

#### **5.4 – Courts, police and everyday life**

The everyday experience of the working class in interwar Britain was shaped by the actions and behaviours of those living in the settlements as well as conditioned by those in positions of institutional and bureaucratic power. The experience of law, policing and the judicial system may seem distinct from the everyday experience but the ways in which law was enacted and practised in local spaces opens up new insights into the everyday experiences of the working class, especially regarding racialisation and contestation. Some geographies of everyday life are only visible through the lens of law and order (Sarat and Kearns, 2009). Indeed, there were material consequences to the experience of law and order on BAME communities. It has been made clear throughout this thesis that taking mundane actions and experiences seriously permits the development of a dynamic and relational understanding of the everyday (Neal and Murji, 2015). As Sarat and Kearns (2009, p.2) argue, ‘law itself is organised around and responds to images and representations of everyday life’ and it is the reproduction

of law in everyday life, in relation to wider circulating representations of BAME communities as ‘other’ which is the focus of this section.

For example, as discussed in the preceding chapter, representations of BAME communities as violent and a collective threat to social order were circulated throughout the interwar period by the press, the NSFU and local and national government institutions. They therefore shaped everyday inter-ethnic encounters. Hall et al. (2013), in their work on the construction of a racialised panic around mugging in 1970s Britain, demonstrate how representations of minority groups as violent can become an axis around which the public signify the perceived crisis. They further argue that once a society comes to associate specific groups with violence/ violent behaviour, they reduce all moments of contestation, dissent and disorder to that embedded violence. This further entrenches the notion of minority groups as a collective and identifiable threat to social and political order. As Kelliher (2020) notes, such an understanding resonates with Pavoni and Tulumello’s (2018) work on ‘atmospheres of fear’ which explores how ‘representations and narratives of violence are embedded and sedimented into the materiality of the urban’ (Pavoni and Tulumello, 2018, p.60). The implications of BAME communities in the North East being represented as violent and ‘deviant’ will be explored through the lens of everyday experiences in judicial spaces to stress how they were embedded into the materiality of everyday life.

The local enforcement of national policies and racialisation in the police and judicial system may appear as separated from the everyday experience, due to the perceived exceptional nature of such episodes. However, in the North East port towns of the interwar period, these institutions and episodes are inherently linked to the everyday experience of the multi-ethnic working class. Local courts were public

spaces where large crowds often congregated to gain admittance to the public gallery and such scenes were especially common where cases were being made against BAME individuals (*The Seaman*, 07 May 1930; *The Seaman*, 27 August 1930). Such scenes can therefore be viewed as everyday experiences and challenge the assumption that the processes of law and order were not engaged with as part of everyday life. The available archival collections regarding court and police proceedings reveals the everyday multi-ethnic working class experience of encountering authority as a site through which partial access can be gained and experiences uncovered which are indicative of the wider everyday experience and have wider atmospheric consequences.

#### **5.4.1 – Local enforcement of national policies**

As previously discussed, port towns were distinct settlements with complex socioeconomic and political conditions which shaped multiple aspects of life. Ethnic diversity, single industry dominance and overlapping political institutions framed how national policies would be enacted locally in everyday life. South Shields in the 1930s is a prime example of this. Law and order do not just appear independently and condition the everyday experience, rather they are produced and reproduced through, and within, everyday encounters (Sarat and Kearns, 2009) in addition to being often enacted or adapted in response to locally specific and temporally contingent conditions.

The plight of Indian peddlars has been noted previously as an expression of the unemployment predicaments some BAME seafarers find themselves in as a result of

the economic depression suffered by the industry, their lack of transferable skills and few alternative employment opportunities. The treatment of these former seafarers was complicated further due to the selective use of national law to ensure that they were positioned as alien seamen, thereby guaranteeing increasing levels of police control. Throughout June 1934, several letters were exchanged between the South Shields Chief Constable and the Undersecretary of State in the Aliens Department. The Chief Constable expressed his concerns about the monitoring of Indian pedlars, as he feared that ‘without some means of supervision, it is felt that there might be a repetition of the Arab problem’.<sup>71</sup> The ‘Arab problem’ to which the South Shields Constable refers to is not one moment, the 1919 or 1930 riot for example, but rather a perception of decades of everyday interactions, negotiations and encounters. Such aggregating representations shaped a specific imaginative geography and racial bias amongst those in positions of power, as well as the wider public. The Aliens Department's response suggested that despite the Indian pedlars no longer working as seafarers, they should still be treated as such since they entered the country in possession of Special Certificates of Nationality (a document only issued to seafarers). In other words, they should be treated as seamen and dealt with under the provisions of the 1925 Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen)<sup>72</sup> Order, regardless of the fact that they were now working on shore.<sup>73</sup> Consequently, a practice was adopted in

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<sup>71</sup> TNA HO 213/242. Letter from South Shields Chief Constable to Aliens Department, Home Office. 09 June 1934.

<sup>72</sup> The 1925 Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order demanded that undocumented BAME seafarers to be registered as Aliens which would restrict their rights to work and reside in Britain and subject them to deportation should they be involved in any crime or disorder. For a detailed analysis of the 1925 order see Tabili (1994b).

<sup>73</sup> TNA HO 213/242. Letter from Aliens Department, Home Office to South Shields Chief Constable. 20 June 1934.

South Shields to register the pedlars as ‘alien seamen’ so that they could be strictly supervised by the police, in an attempt to restrict their settlement in the township.<sup>74</sup>

The enactment and capitalisation on national policies and procedures in order to shape specific local issues, significantly influenced how BAME seafarers experienced life in port towns and also how they were perceived and treated by both the general public and at the institutional level. As will now be discussed, the enactment of national policies in local spaces, especially the 1925 order which labelled BAME seafarers as ‘alien’ and placed them under direct police supervision, had significant, often detrimental, impacts on the everyday lives of BAME seafarers. Should they become involved in crime or disorder at any level, this order meant that they would be subject to deportation from Britain.

The Arab community in South Shields experienced a similar, and highly controversial, situation in the winter of 1930-31. Following years of high unemployment levels among BAME seafarers across the port towns of the North East, the Arab Boarding House Keepers had amassed significant debts and could no longer continue to support their unemployed lodgers. In September 1930, after several attempts to secure outdoor relief from the South Shields Public Assistance Committee, ‘some ninety coloured alien seamen applied to... and were granted indoor assistance in the Institution’.<sup>75</sup> The admittance of the Arab seaman to the Harton Institute,<sup>76</sup> which can be seen in Figure 5.3, was met with considerable uproar and disdain with numerous letters of protestation being published in the *Shields Gazette*.

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<sup>74</sup> TNA HO 213/242. Letter from South Shields Chief Constable to Aliens Department, Home Office. 27 June 1934.

<sup>75</sup> TNA HO 45/14299. Letter from South Shields Chief Constable to the Under Secretary of State. 3 October 1930.

<sup>76</sup> The Harton Institute was also known as the South Shields Union Workhouse and provided indoor relief under the borough’s poor law provision.

**Figure 5.3** – Photograph of Arab seafarers entering the Harton Institute (*Shields Gazette*, 30 September 1930)



Most of these letters were connected to the financial burden imposed on the town with the race and nationality of those applying for indoor relief explicitly referenced. One author writes:

‘Now, like a thunderbolt, we are asked to put our hands in our pockets and pull out hundreds of pounds per week to pay for the keep of our coloured friends. This is going a step too far.’ (*Shields Gazette*, 30 September 1930)

Many others called for the immediate deportation of those Arabs seeking indoor relief (*Shields Gazette*, 30 September 1930; 01 October 1930; 02 October 1930; 03 October 1930; 04 October 1930; 20 October 1930). These vehement letters verbalised the racialisation of poverty that was currently being experienced by many unemployed seafarers in the township. The previous month, discussions in the Home Office had brought attention to the desperate plight of many destitute BAME seafarers living in the port towns of Britain and stressed that:

‘The most probable line which the outcry, which is possible, may take is that local rates ought not to bear the burden of coloured unemployed seamen in the United Kingdom. And there may be a demand for wholesale deportation by the Secretary of State.’<sup>77</sup>

The idea of the deportation of destitute BAME seafarers was present in both local and national mind-sets. Yet, for the most part, many of these seafarers claimed to be British Subjects or British Protected Persons and therefore had the right to not suffer deportation from Britain. Issues over BAME seafarers claims to British nationality proliferated the Colonial Office and India Office records since the implementation of the 1925 Coloured Alien Seaman Order, which sought to register all BAME seafarers who did not have explicit proof of identity as ‘foreign aliens’. Proving British Subject or Protected Person status was exceedingly difficult especially for Adenese seamen due to the limited bureaucratic infrastructures of the nomadic tribes which made up the Port of Aden and the Aden Protectorate (Brown, 2005; Lawless, 1995). The knowledge of increased surveillance, policing and the associated implications of such, could shape how BAME seafarers negotiated everyday life. This can perhaps be seen in how many Arab Boarding House Keepers strictly obeyed bureaucratic measure regarding their businesses as they were aware that they were held to a higher standard than their white counterparts.

For example, in February 1929 Hassan Mohamed, licensed Arab Boarding House Keeper at 123 Commercial Road in South Shields, wrote to the local newspaper to contest the representations of the community as making living conditions in Holborn worse than ever were (*Shields Gazette*, 09 February 1929). Mohamed

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<sup>77</sup> TNA HO 45/14299. Minutes of meeting held between Aliens Department and Under Secretary of State. 19 September 1930.

explicitly demonstrates an awareness of the increased police supervision him and his community was subjected to. He states:

‘We invite any councillor to inspect our houses (which are also subject to frequent police inspection) and see for himself if they are not clean and properly conducted.’ (*Shields Gazette*, 09 February 1929)

This opposition to dominant representations indicates an awareness of being under increased police supervision and demonstrates how compliance was used as a means of attempting to ensure the security and longevity of the community.

Following months of discussion, and the inability of many of the Arabs seeking indoor relief to explicitly prove British nationality, the South Shields Public Assistance Committee applied to the justices of the South Shields Police Court to contact the Home Office for a deportation order to be made against those who claimed indoor relief at the Harton Institution (*Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 28 January 1931). Deportation orders could be made against any ‘alien’ who had received poor relief and had been in the country for less than twelve months. The South Shields Chief Constable wrote to the Home Office in October 1930 to gain advice on the deportation of these men. He acknowledged that:

‘A large number of men originally came to the United Kingdom more than twelve months ago, some of them in fact before 1925, and my difficulty is to decide whether that date or the date of their last reporting their arrival in the country after serving as a member of the crew of a ship, should be given as to evidence as to the date of their last entering the United Kingdom.’<sup>78</sup>

The decision was made that despite some of these men having resided in Britain for over six years, their last date of arrival would be understood as the last time

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<sup>78</sup> TNA HO 45/14299. Letter from South Shields Chief Constable to the Under Secretary of State. 03 October 1930.



they disembarked from a ship in Britain. This led to thirty-eight Arab seafarers who were unable to provide birth certificates of proof of British subject status being deported to Aden in January 1931.

This event has received fleeting, if any, attention in the wider historiography of BAME communities, and working classes at large, in the region (Jenkinson, 2009; Lawless, 1995; Tabili, 1994a, 2011). The 1931 deportations were a significant moment for the Arab community in South Shields as they were not following an episode of racialised disorder, such as the deportations that followed the 1919 and 1930 riots, but were the outcome of the manifestation of local conditions and daily actions which were criminalised under national legislation. This allows an understanding of deportations not as disruptive exceptional moments, but rather as moments embedded into everyday life, not only for those being deported, but for the wider BAME communities across the region. Tyler (2013) stresses the significance of how British citizenship has been designed and developed to abject specific groups of the population. Representing groups as deportable has a significant impact on everyday encounters, experiences of belonging, and further how we understand the precarious nature of migrant lives (Tyler, 2018). Although the limited archival evidence available surrounding the 1931 deportations of members of the South Shields Arab Community restricts any concrete conclusion to be made, it is fair to assume that the treatment of these men as deportable would have shaped the everyday lives of both the South Shields Arab Community and other BAME communities across the region for some time. It is also noteworthy that following the 1931 deportations, petitions to the Colonial Office, and local institutions, by Arab Boarding House Keepers for financial support for their boarders, which had taken place for much of the 1920s, ceased entirely. Although there is no direct evidence, due to the continued economic

depression and high unemployment levels in shipping, it can be perhaps assumed that following the 1931 deportations, an increased awareness among the BAME seafaring community as to their precarious position in Britain and their 'deportability' led to increased anxiety at the very real repercussions of petitioning for institutional involvement in unemployment relief.

The local treatment of these men in South Shields in 1930 appears to have been manipulated further when evidence arose at the deportation hearing that the implications of them receiving indoor relief was not explicitly explained upon their admittance to the Harton Institute. Mr Smith, the defence solicitor for the Arabs, asked James Moran, the receiving officer at the institute: 'was it pointed out to them that they were aliens and that, if they went into the Workhouse, they might be sent out of the country?', Moran replied that even though he knew it was the law it was not part of his job to tell them what the potential consequences might be (*Shields Gazette*, 12 December 1930). This evidences the implications of the local enforcement of national policies on the everyday life of BAME seafarers in interwar Britain. Policies were co-constitutively developed in line with local and national popular sentiments, demonstrating how law intersected with the everyday experience and had variable meanings depending on wider conditions. Numerous angry letters were received by the *Shields Gazette* which ranged from calling for deportation of the entire community (*Shields Gazette*, 30 September 1930) to the purchasing of a disused passenger liner to house the destitute seafarers away from the town in order to reduce the cost on the ratepayers (*Shields Gazette*, 02 October 1930). The deportation took place under great secrecy to avoid any demonstrations from the wider community.

The Arabs were loaded onto police vans late at night and taken to Newcastle train station and the few friends of those being deported who 'went to the station to

see the men off were excluded' by the police (*Shields Gazette*, 30 January 1931). The scene at the station was one of utter resignation and acceptance:

'The Arabs stood waiting in a bunch for their train. They were very quiet. They ranged from mere boys to venerable men. Many of them held in their hands small paper parcels containing their supper.'  
(*Shields Gazette*, 30 January 1931)

This episode provides an insight into the realities of everyday actions conditioned by wider national and local political agendas and the administration of legal policies under specifically local circumstances shaping the everyday lives of BAME seafarers. Employing a lens of the everyday to the 1931 deportations allows attention to be paid to the variety of meanings they had. They were lived and negotiated by those deported, but also positioned, by press and national institutions as a warning to other BAME seamen both in the region and across the country. The 1931 South Shields deportations were reported in local and regional newspapers in other port town settlements such as Cardiff (*Western Mail*, 17 December 1930, 18 December 1930). The *Western Mail*, a newspaper which covered Cardiff, Newport and Barry, which were port towns where BAME seafarers also resided, reported on the decision to deport the South Shields Arabs and stated that the local councils in South Wales had 'decided to make enquiries as to what course had been followed in South Shields' should they wish to adopt a similar scheme in their own locality (*Western Mail*, 17 December 1930). This demonstrates how the racialisation of space and the spatialization of race are interlocking as not only were there localised consequences for the Arab community in South Shields, but the conditions of exclusion were embedded into larger processes and national campaigns for the removal of destitute BAME seafarers from Britain (Lipsitz, 2007).

#### 5.4.2 – Racialisation of everyday behaviours

BAME seafarers experienced racial bias and unwarranted attention in various spaces of their everyday lives. Racial bias shaped how white individuals treated BAME communities in interwar Britain and was influenced by circulating representations, orientalist perspectives and an assumed cultural and moral superiority of white communities (Said, 1978). Such bias can be seen in the policing of BAME communities and their judiciary treatment in port towns in interwar Britain which shaped their negotiation of residential, social, political and commercial spaces. From increased policing of Arab boarding houses compared to white seamen's boarding houses (Lawless, 1995) to racially disproportionate arrests and unwarranted police attention (Jenkinson, 2009), racial bias in policing and the judicial system shaped everyday life.

Throughout the interwar period BAME individuals' English language proficiency was heavily mocked in the press as it was seen to delegitimise their claims to British nationality and 'other' them from the white population.<sup>79</sup> Arabic was often referred to as 'the jabbering of excited foreigners' (*The Seaman*, 22 October 1930), or 'a confusing noise... to our ears, because they made noises in their own language'.<sup>80</sup> Yet, there is one particular case where the use of Arabic was racialised and criminalised to such an extent by the judiciary system, that it secured the deportation of Ali Said in 1930 following the riot in South Shields. Miles Ogborn (2019), in his

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<sup>79</sup> Most of the direct quotes of BAME voices in newspapers appear in a way that mocks their language proficiency and subsequently their respectability. For example, "Me not do it; me no know who do it" (*Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 08 March 1930); "Me not put them there." (*The Seaman*, 06 November 1929); "Me want go home" (*Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 18 January 1922).

<sup>80</sup> WMRC MSS.175/7/LE/104. Durham Assize – R E X vs Ali Said and others – Shorthand notes of trial. Day 2. 18 November 1930, p.21.

work on speech in the Anglo-Caribbean world, argues for the need to pay attention to speech, in all its forms, to better understand the dynamics of power that underpin specific moments in historical societies. It will be demonstrated in the following section that when such attention is paid to speech, everyday experiences of marginalisation and discrimination become central to understanding wider power structures and everyday encounters between white and BAME communities.

August 1930 saw a violent clash take place on the Mill Dam, South Shields, where BAME seafarers, members of the Seamen's Minority Movement (SMM)<sup>81</sup> and white seamen fought over tensions arising from the employment of BAME seafarers and the implementation of a new racialised practice of employment, the Rota System.<sup>82</sup> During the four-day assize trial at Durham, there was a debate about the necessity to charge not only those who participated in the riot, but also those whom supposedly incited the riot. Ali Said, was a highly prominent and long-standing Arab Boarding House Keeper who had lived in the town since before the First World War. He was seen as a respected figurehead and perceived to have significant influence over the entire Arab community not only in the North East but also via his networks with Cardiff and Glasgow.<sup>83</sup> As Arabs congregated on the Mill Dam alongside members of the SMM to hear speeches given by leaders of the organisation, tension over the racialised nature of employment practices and exclusionary NUS policies began to

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<sup>81</sup> The Seamen's Minority Movement (SMM) was the maritime branch of the Communist Minority Movement which was comprised of left-wing trade unions (Featherstone, 2015). It acted as an alternative to the NSFU and was multi-ethnic in its membership and organisation. The role of the SMM, and their alliance with BAME seafarers will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6 (3.2).

<sup>82</sup> The 1930 Rota System was a system of registration developed by the NSFU and the Board of Trade to control and regulate the employment of BAME seafarers. The intricacies of this system and the resistance it evoked within BAME communities will be discussed in Chapter 6 (3.2) of this thesis.

<sup>83</sup> In the court proceedings following the 1930 South Shields riot, Ali Said's connection to Glasgow and Cardiff was brought to attention. WMRC MSS.175/7/LE/105 – Durham Assize – R E X vs Ali Said and others – Shorthand notes of trial. Day 3-4. 19 – 20 November 1930, p.115.

develop among the crowd which was noted at trial by police officers, NUS officials and other white witnesses present on the Mill Dam that day.<sup>84</sup>

After the meeting, Said was seen by a police constable walking amongst the crowd, speaking to the Arabs; the police constable stressed that as he was speaking in Arabic it was unclear exactly what he was saying to the men but accused Said of using language which was exciting them.<sup>85</sup> The constable then went on to warn Said against exciting the Arabs to which he replied that he was doing no such thing. Said's defence counsel stated that:

'Although he may have been exciting them, he was exciting them quite properly by arguing the politics of the moment. There is ample evidence that they were excited before he spoke to them, and the police say – it is only a matter of opinion – that they became more excited afterwards. They may well have done, because it affected their living, and everyone knows how difficult it is nowadays to get a living for seamen. Surely they had every right to be excited, and then Ali Said suddenly realised that the excitement had gone too far, and he told them to stop. You must not blame him if he innocently excited them'.<sup>86</sup>

This is an example of the racialisation and politicisation of everyday behaviours experienced by BAME communities in interwar Britain. During employment contestations in all of the North East ports in 1930, white NUS officers frequently walked amongst crowds of angered white seamen 'arguing the politics of the moment' (*The Seaman*, 26 February 1930; *The Seaman*, 23 April 1930). There was no involvement by the police in stopping these union officers from purposefully raising the controversial topics of BAME seafarer employment within crowds of white

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<sup>84</sup> WMRC MSS.175/7/LE/103. Durham Assize – R E X vs Ali Said and others – Shorthand notes of trial. Day 1. 17 November 1930, p.45; WMRC MSS.175/7/LE/104. Durham Assize – R E X vs Ali Said and others – Shorthand notes of trial. Day 2. 18 November 1930, p.23, p.37.

<sup>85</sup> WMRC MSS.175/7/LE/104. Durham Assize – R E X vs Ali Said and others – Shorthand notes of trial. Day 2. 18 November 1930, p.17.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p.33.

volatile seamen, thereby inciting them to violence. Furthermore, in instances where violence erupted, such as the riot in North Shields in April 1930, there was no mention in the popular press of the possible inflammation caused by union officers addressing the crowds (*Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 30 April 1930). It only becomes apparent when looking at the NUS records and *The Seaman* newspaper (*The Seaman*, 07 May 1930) that the union officers had been present and addressing the crowds.

Just before the riot broke out a group of white seamen had been engaged as an engine room crew for a ship. When the men came out of the Shipping Office and walked across the crowded Mill Dam the crowd turned to face the white crew and a riot broke out. In that moment Said allegedly pointed to the men and shouted “waquaf”. The prosecution contended that this served as a signal for the Arabs to attack the white men. In court Decran Salma, an Egyptian shopkeeper in the town was called as a translator. Salma explained that “waquaf” means stop, but was keen to point out that the nature of the Arabic language means that “waquaf” could mean either ‘stop’, ‘stop the people’, ‘stop him’, or ‘stop now’ depending on the context.<sup>87</sup> Justice Roche, the presiding magistrate during the trial following the riot, with no knowledge of the Arabic language, determined that due to the moment in which “waquaf” was used, Said was inciting the Arabs to attack the white men.<sup>88</sup> Said’s defence insisted that he was using the word innocently stating, ‘that he was not saying “stop those men”, but that he was saying “stop! Don’t attack them”’.<sup>89</sup> Said’s use of the word ‘stop’ would prove to be the strongest piece of evidence used against him by the prosecution.

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<sup>87</sup> WMRC MSS.175/7/LE/104. Durham Assize – R E X vs Ali Said and others – Shorthand notes of trial. Day 2. 18 November 1930, p.112.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p.32.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p.32.

It led to him being found guilty of inciting the riot and he was subsequently deported from Britain, despite having lived in South Shields for over thirty years.

The way in which Arabic was racialised and perceived as subversive and deviant within white society (Said, 1978) was enough to convince the jury that Said was a key instigator of the riot, and he was sentenced to deportation. Essed (2008), in her work on everyday racisms, stresses that the everyday experiences of racism by ethnic minority groups is centred around marginalisation, problematisation and repression of potential resistance. The racialisation of language deficiency was one of many ways in which BAME communities were marginalised and problematised in interwar period.

In addition to language being a key component in the processes of othering and the racialisation of BAME seafarers in interwar Britain, their everyday culture and behaviour was racialised by the police, in the courts and across wider society. For example, in the immediate aftermath of the February 1919 riot in South Shields, Zanda Shay, an Indian fireman, was ‘charged with having conducted himself in a manner likely to incite persons to cause a breach of the peace’ (*Shields Gazette*, 07 February 1919). Shay was walking along the Mill Dam in search of employment when he was reported to a policeman by a white man for having his hands in his pockets and acting in a nervous manner (*Shields Gazette*, 07 February 1919). He was stopped, searched and found to have two stones in his pockets. At the police court his defence solicitor stated that Shay ‘had heard of the riot on the mill dam a few days earlier and had gone there to seek employment, he had a feeling of fear and trepidation and was afraid of being attacked and that was why he was carrying the stones’ (*Shields Gazette*, 07 February 1919).



The fear of the violence on the 4<sup>th</sup> February, and racialised arrests in its aftermath, led to the Mill Dam becoming a space of increasing fear and hostility for BAME seafarers. Had Shay been a white unemployed seafarer, walking along the Mill Dam with his hands in his pockets searching for employment and acting nervously, it is unlikely that he would have warranted attention from those around him, including the police. Fear of crime and personal safety can change how people navigate spaces in their daily life and alter how everyday encounters play out in such spaces (Hudson et al., 2009). Understanding how racialised violence has lived consequences within and beyond the immediate moment, for example, can allow further attention to be paid to how everyday behaviours of marginalised groups become racialised in specific ways, at specific times and in specific spaces and the repercussions of this on BAME everyday experiences. This moment is also illustrative of the added stress and anxiety experienced by individuals and communities living in racialised atmospheres. Closs Stephens (2016), although discussing the affective atmosphere of nationalism, stresses how affective atmospheres permeate various aspects of everyday life and circulate around moments, objects, and in the case of South Shields, spaces such as the Mill Dam.

As indicated in the case above, the items which a BAME seafarer carried on his person were racialised, those which might seem as mundane and banal, and likely ignored, if carried by a white man, were deemed dangerous weapons, demonstrative of the violent nature of the BAME community. These notions can be linked with the circulating representations of BAME individuals as inherently violent and it is through the repetition of these representations and wider structures of exclusionary practices that everyday experiences of racialised discrimination can be understood (Hall et al., 2013). As articulated throughout this thesis, the ‘slow violence’ (Pain, 2019) of

structural racism and exclusion cannot be understood as separate to moments of physically violent encounters between white and BAME communities in everyday life. As Kelliher (2020, p.3) demonstrates, ‘these are mutually constituted temporalities of violence’. In regard to this thesis, it is the temporalities of the ‘slow violence’ of institutional exclusionary conditions and structural racism that is mutually constituted with physical and violent attacks and confrontations which BAME communities experienced in everyday life.

Throughout the interwar period BAME seafarers, when arrested, some were found to have knives, razors, walking sticks and revolvers on their persons (*The Seaman*, 05 December 1924). In court, the reasons for carrying such items were consistently racialised and weaponised.<sup>90</sup> A frequent point made by defence counsels in such cases was that in middle-eastern culture men commonly carried knives and revolvers as status symbols but with no intent to use them as weapons.<sup>91</sup> Following the trial of those arrested for participating in the 1930 North Shields riot, many were found to have razors on their persons which was seen to be evidence of a premeditation towards violence. The defence counsel brought to the attention of the judge that:

‘Somalis carried razors solely because of their religion, which required them to be clean shaven. They did not take the razors with them deliberately to use them for any other purpose than shaving.’  
(*Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 02 July 1930)

The judge confessed that he did not know of this aspect of their religious culture and re-evaluated the evidence.

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<sup>90</sup> For examples see: *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 23 May 1919, ‘Killed by Silver Dagger’; *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 11 August 1920, ‘Lively Affray at West Hartlepool’; *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 31 January 1930, ‘Stabbing Affair in South Shields’; *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 30 April 1930, ‘Knives and Razors’; *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 02 July 1930, ‘Somalis & The Shields Riot – Why they carried shaving tackle – A matter of faith?’.

<sup>91</sup> WMRC MSS.175/7/LE/105 – Durham Assize – R E X vs Ali Said and others – Shorthand notes of trial. Day 3-4. 19 – 20 November 1930, p.33.

Similarly, in the trial following the 1930 riot in South Shields many Arabs were accused of violent behaviour for carrying walking sticks. The defence counsel argued that these were not inherently violent weapons but rather ‘the sort of things they carry about in their daily social life’.<sup>92</sup> Many white men in interwar Britain would carry pocketknives, walking sticks and revolvers on their person as part of their everyday lives, yet because they were white, they were deemed as innocent and non-threatening apparel.<sup>93</sup> This suggests that the everyday behaviours and possessions of BAME seafarers were racialised by the police and judiciary system to support the idea that BAME individuals were violent men, intent on committing violent acts and disrupting the peace. Such representations were informed by, and contributed to, wider circulating national and imperial discourses and anxieties in the period, which sought to position BAME individuals as violent and an unwanted threat to national social and political order. This not only suggests that everyday encounters were more than just the product of local immediate moments, but also highlights the contested nature of violence as a concept, related to different bodies, in different ways, at different moments and in different spaces dependant on circulating conditions of exclusion.

Even oath swearing, a familiar experience by all of those who encountered court life, was racialised in an attempt to weaken the testimony of BAME individuals in court and is indicative of the way in which law can be experienced in the everyday lives of a multi-ethnic working class (Sarat and Kearns, 2009). In January 1925, two Arab seamen appeared at the police court to give evidence in a case. Concerns over the validity of statements made by Muslims under oath were raised. The judge stressed that if a Muslim swore an oath on the Bible, as the two Arabs had, it was an inducement

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<sup>92</sup> WMRC MSS.175/7/LE/105 – Durham Assize – R E X vs Ali Said and others – Shorthand notes of trial. Day 3-4. 19 – 20 November 1930, p.18.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

to lie and their testimony should be discounted (*Shields Gazette*, 29 January 1925). In order to satisfy the judge, and ensure the witnesses were sworn in properly, a copy of the Koran was obtained for the men to take their oath upon (*Shields Gazette*, 29 January 1925). One of the witnesses was hesitant to take the oath in English as he could not speak the language, after much frustration and with the help of a translator, the judge resigned and suggested that he take ‘the oath as he would do in Egypt or wherever he belonged to’ and he swore to tell the truth in Arabic (*Shields Gazette*, 29 January 1925). The frustration of the judge, and lack of cultural knowledge in stating ‘Egypt or wherever he belonged to’, demonstrates that BAME seafarers were often homogenised in terms of heritage, culture and religion.

As outlined in Chapter 2 (3), processes of othering can shape dominant discourses which can in turn construct certain populations as homogeneous, innately different and thus a collective threat to social and political order (Ahmed, 2014). The homogenisation of BAME culture can be seen in various mediums of representation in interwar Britain. Examples include colonial product advertising, the ‘African Village’ at the NECE and the everyday comments made by both those in positions of political and bureaucratic power and by the white working class.<sup>94</sup> This perhaps demonstrates how circulating representations of BAME individuals as ‘other’ influenced everyday judicial, as well as social and political, life. The limitations of archival collections which contain few explicit documentaries of everyday life means that informed speculations have to be made to assume that such lived experiences, within the setting considered thus far, are reflective of broader everyday experiences.

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<sup>94</sup> For examples of comments homogenising BAME culture see: *The Seaman*, 14 March 1919, ‘Nearer East Menace – Arabian Night scenes at port resented by seamen’; *Shields Daily News*, 11 February 1921, ‘Seamen’s threat – coloured men and unemployment – there will be trouble in South Shields’; *Shields Gazette*, 17 March 1923, ‘Arabs in England’; *The Seaman*, 05 December 1924, ‘Our Gentle Egyptian Brethren’; *Shields Gazette*, 07 February 1929, ‘A Public Danger’.

### 5.4.3 – Racial bias in prosecution

Racial bias not only proliferated policing and experiences at the street level and in judiciary proceedings, but also in the prosecution of BAME seafarers.<sup>95</sup> Following two large riots in South Shields in 1919 and in North Shields in 1930, BAME seafarers were disproportionately arrested and often served disproportionate sentences due to racial bias in the courtroom (Jenkinson, 2009). In order to overcome archival absences and challenges, assumptions must be made that such episodes are indicative of a wider experience. Through an interpretation of court room press reports of events, such as the 1919 riot trials, the everyday actions of police and members of the judicial system as legitimate historical actors, can be viewed to have shaped the landscape in which such disputes occurred (Tabili, 2009).

On the New Quay in North Shields during the 1930 riot, where there was a large and violent altercation between white and BAME seafarers, Muslah Yehia was knocked to the ground by a white crowd which ‘not only kicked him but hit him on the head with sticks’ (*Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 02 July 1930). When he was unconscious the crowd took hold of him by the feet and began ‘dipping the man in the river when he was rescued by two of the River Tyne Police’ (*Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 30 April 1930). The police managed to keep the crowd back and rescue Yehia who, according to one of the police who rescued him, was ‘badly injured about the head and had obviously been treated in a brutal manner’ (*Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 02 July 1930). Not only were none of the white aggressors arrested by the

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<sup>95</sup> See Jenkinson (2009, pp.131-152, Chapter 4 – Police and court responses) for a detailed account of the arrest and prosecution of BAME and white individuals following the 1919 Seaport Riots. She ascertained the disproportionate nature of BAME arrests and prosecution compares to white rioters and also that BAME individuals were often subjected to harsher sentencing.

police at the scene, but afterwards, Yehia himself was sentenced to prison for playing a part in the riot.

Mr Robson, defending Yehia and the other Arabs who were arrested that day, stated that many of the witnesses called were racially prejudiced, and that the whole event had been ‘a most disreputable and disgraceful piece of intimidation by white men on coloured men’ (*Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 02 July 1930). In response, the judge stated that he would make ‘the sentence on Yehia a little shorter than the others because he has already been punished by having his hand and head broken in the course of the disturbance’ (*Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 02 July 1930). Yehia received twelve months imprisonment with hard labour, compared to the fifteen months sentence for the other Arabs accused of participating in the riot. There are many incidences of BAME individuals in port towns across the North East who were alleged victims of crime, abuse or physical attack and despite evidence being given in their favour, they would often be prosecuted and receive punishment in the form of fines or even prison sentences.<sup>96</sup>

Nevertheless, it was not only in the aftermath of large racialised riots that racial bias contributed towards the nature of the sentence. In March 1919, two soldiers were walking down Coronation Street, South Shields, and two Arabs were walking behind them when an altercation erupted. The soldiers claimed to understand some Arabic and supposedly heard the Arabs saying ‘I’ll kill all the soldiers’. They confronted the

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<sup>96</sup> For examples see: *Shields Daily News*, 16 August 1919; *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 05 January 1922; *Shields Gazette*, 18 January 1922; *Shields Gazette*, 01 June 1922; *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 20 March 1923; *Shields Gazette*, 12 July 1930; *Shields Daily News*, 04 November 1931.

Arabs about the comment and a struggle followed (*Shields Gazette*, 10 March 1919).

However, the defence argued:

‘That the story of the Arab was that while walking down Coronation Street they met several soldiers, one of whom, as they passed, struck Hassan on the back of the neck. Turning round, Hassan asked, “What’s the matter?” whereupon he was kicked to the ground. A knife was produced by one of the soldiers and an effort was made to steal his watch and chain. Hassan then took out his razor.’ (*Shields Gazette*, 10 March 1919)

Hassan was fined 40 shillings and the case against the soldiers was dismissed due to there being ‘an element of doubt’ in the testimony (*Shields Gazette*, 10 March 1919). The fact that those involved in this altercation were soldiers was of prime significance in the way the violence and judicial aftermath unfolded. The legacies of a brutal war heightened the respect and loyalty demonstrated towards soldiers (Jenkinson, 2017) by local residents and the judicial system in South Shields in 1919. Consequently, not only was the testimony of Hassan discredited because of his race but also discounted further due to the perceptions of soldiers in the aftermath of the First World War.

The way in which law and order was enacted upon, in an often racialised manner in the interwar period, provides a glimpse into the complex and intersectional nature of national legislation and colonial imperatives with local conditions and atmospheres of exclusion in the everyday. Although racialisation shaped the wider everyday experience of law and order, certain spaces in port towns, such as Arab Boarding Houses or spaces of (un)employment, were distinctive sites of everyday encounter and overwhelmingly prone to the expression of inter-ethnic tensions. These examples are indicative of the tensions present across the North East in the interwar period, but are also aligned with the more pervasive atmospheres of hostility and exclusion within such spaces which this thesis is seeking to capture through the lens

of the everyday. Although, individually, there is not enough evidence to make distinct conclusions on each case, collectively they demonstrate the unevenness of power relations within the geographies of violence presented here, as both an everyday experience, and as site of connected structures and conditions. This furthers an awareness of a pattern or trend in the treatment of minority ethnic groups shaped by multiple spaces and institutions.

## **5.5 – Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the spatial significance of everyday encounters in ethnically diverse communities, bringing together circulating representations, challenging conditions and experiences. Understanding the conditions of exclusion and affective atmospheres through the lens of the everyday is rarely employed in historical research due to the constraints of the archive. However, this chapter has proposed that it is possible to bring together diverse accounts to develop an account of everyday encounters. The chapter has also indicated the co-constitutive nature of conditions which is indicative of the wider everyday experience of ethnically diverse communities in interwar Britain. It has been argued that in employing an everyday lens it is possible to think within and beyond exceptional moments of racialised violence to articulate the role of circulating conditions, atmospheres and legacies on the actuality and negotiation of everyday life. The chapter now brings together these empirical materials with three concluding comments.

Port towns in interwar Britain experienced distinct socioeconomic and political conditions which created landscapes of inequality and marginalisation for BAME



individuals. This chapter has demonstrated how ‘place is an axis of power in its own right’ (Brown, 2005, p.21), and how particular conditions within spaces, such as port towns, enable or constrain how the everyday is navigated. The intersectional nature of conditions for BAME individuals in port towns suggests that experiences are processual, relational and inherently shaped by circulating discourses of power and the conditions with the possibility to restrict the modalities of everyday life. The analysis of discourses and actions of political figures, such as Joseph Havelock Wilson, demonstrate the local intricacies of the relational nature of nation, empire and locality in the interwar period (Brown, 2005). It has also been argued that such figures, through their physical presence and press interviews, can become very much ingrained into everyday life, not only influencing behaviours and beliefs but also providing an ideological means to construct and articulate their own beliefs from below. This contributes to developing an understanding of the everyday as multiple – inclusive of diverse and contradictory perspectives which potentially had material consequences on embodied encounters in daily life.

Significant works have articulated the socioeconomic distinctiveness of port towns as conducive to racialised disorder (Jenkinson, 2017; Lee, 1998). This chapter argues the port towns cannot be considered a homogeneous space, and that certain subspaces within these towns, such as the Arab Boarding House or the workplace, became increasingly significant to BAME individuals under certain historically specific conditions. It is also argued that the port town is not a discrete and bounded entity but rather situated in a wider landscape, nation and empire. As Brown (2005) has argued in relation to Liverpool, imperialism structured much of the socioeconomic and political atmosphere in interwar port towns in often contradictory and inconsistent ways. This can be seen in the 1931 deportations of BAME seafarers from South

Shields where local, national and global conditions of exclusion intersected to affect the lives of not only members of the South Shields Arab Community, but had potential everyday ramifications for unemployed BAME seafarers across the nation.

This chapter has established that the ways in which law was enacted upon, and often racialised, embedded judicial and police experiences within the everyday experience. This can offer a novel approach to centring BAME everyday experiences, particularly within the archive, regarding exclusion and contestation. National policies were often enacted under locally specific conditions in response to momentary conflicts, social challenges or political objectives. This shaped how BAME individuals experienced law and order in their everyday lives and how, as will be developed in the following chapter, they aired their grievances and articulated agency, both industrial and social, throughout the interwar period. The racialisation of everyday behaviours was just one way in which law and order was embedded into the everyday life of BAME individuals and the spatiality of this, for example higher policing in contested spaces such as the workplace or the boarding house, influenced how BAME individuals navigated spaces and the bureaucracies that informed them. The available archival material, regarding court and police proceedings, reveals the everyday experience of how an ethnically diverse working class encountered authority. As will be articulated in the following chapter, certain spaces became significant platforms from which resistance would be developed by BAME communities in the North East of England and also sites, such as the Arab Boarding House, became spaces dependent upon solidarity to protect and sustain them.

To conclude, this chapter has provided an account of everyday inter-ethnic encounters. It has built upon key themes articulated thus far in this thesis of othering and circulating representations of difference and highlighted the conditions which

enabled such discourses to disseminate into everyday life. It has been suggested that such circulating conditions and atmospheres of exclusion have been downplayed in the regional histories of BAME seafarers in interwar Britain (Lawless, 1995), as has much of the more mundane experiences of everyday life. This chapter has bridged these circulating representations of ‘otherness’, with everyday experiences of structural and physical exclusion, in order to provide a context to the following chapter which will discuss how acts of agency from within a multi-ethnic working class were developed and articulated across the North East of England in the early twentieth century.

## Chapter 6 – Contesting racialised exclusion: an intersectional understanding of everyday acts

### 6.1 – Introduction

‘When I go to sign, the Union man steps in and tells the man to take white. Well, sir, I have a house to keep and a wife and children, and 10s a week rent, and if we don’t get fair play we will do the same as they do in Cardiff and Newport, and sir, what does a colour man pay union for if he can’t get a ship. We all are one, only our skin. God made us all in this world, and I think if I can’t get a job just now, my wife and children will be in the Workhouse. Well, sir, if we don’t get a chance there will be trouble in South Shields. There is a lot of colour in Shields, and I think there will be trouble the way the men talk, and I am telling you because now I married I stop in England, and I think I have been ashore a long time now.’ (Letter from Thomas Peters a West African Seaman to the General Secretary of the Seaman’s Union, South Shields Branch. *Shields Daily News*, 11 February 1921)

The above excerpt is taken from a letter written by Thomas Peters, a West African seafarer living in South Shields, which was published in the *Shields Daily News* (11 February 1921) and later in *The Seaman* (18 February 1921). Peters was arrested and charged with ‘having committed an act likely to cause a breach of the peace’ (*Shields Daily News*, 11 February 1921) and bound for £5 over twelve months as punishment. Peters’ letter was seen by the union, local police and the judiciary prosecutors as a threat of collective violence (*The Seaman*, 08 February 1921) and in court, the magistrate ‘expressed his hope that the case would be a warning to him and others’ (*Shields Daily News*, 11 February 1921). Everyday acts of contestation, in this case letter writing, were ways in which BAME communities aired grievances to challenge exclusionary conditions both within and beyond the workplace. In order to develop an inclusive history of ethnically diverse working class communities, the presence of ‘race’ in the development of agency cannot be overlooked.

This thesis has demonstrated that BAME individuals and communities experienced multifarious forms of discrimination, othering and exclusionary conditions in their everyday lives. These challenging experiences and circulating representations of otherness were not simply accepted and endured by marginalised groups living across North East England. BAME working people should not be seen as passive victims of both structural and physical violence (Kelliher, 2020; Tabili, 1994a) and as Ashe et al. (2016, p.35) note, there is a ‘long history of racialised minorities collectively fighting back against violence and harassment through physical resistance, political mobilisation and cultural action’.

This chapter revisits the circulating representations and exclusionary conditions discussed thus far to demonstrate how they were contested in everyday encounters between and across BAME and white communities. Although a challenging concept to define, I understand agency as a relational and dynamic process which is comprised of many, visible and invisible, collective and individual, acts and behaviours which can be emergent as well as confrontational, sometimes without success, yet seek to challenge constraining social, economic and political conditions. This understanding draws upon work within political geography and specifically debates within labour geography, given the prevalence of labour related grievances considered above and below (Coe and Lier, 2011; Featherstone, 2008; Herod, 1997; Hughes, 2020; Peck, 2018).

There is a co-constitutive relationship between domination and resistance (Hughes, 2020), and as Sharp et al. (2020, p.20) argue:

‘Domination and resistance cannot exist independently of each other, but neither can they be reducible to one another: they are thoroughly hybrid phenomena, the one always contains the seeds of

the other, the one always bearing at least a trace of the other that contaminates or subverts it.’

Building on the understanding of domination and resistance as processes developing in dialogue with one another, this chapter will outline how exclusionary conditions and experiences were engaged with and contested by ethnically diverse communities in their everyday lives. Foregrounding such moments demonstrates the subtleties of agency and lived experiences. This thesis draws significantly on the lens of the everyday to uncover marginalised experiences and ‘turn up the volume’ of non-dominant perspectives to create an inclusive history of a multi-ethnic working class and this chapter will contribute to this.

In developing a more nuanced understanding of agency, and its everyday presence, this chapter employs Katz’ (2004) work on ‘Resilience, Reworking and Resistance’ as a theoretical tool to foreground the diversity of agency among ethnically diverse working class communities in interwar Britain. Here, I briefly unpack these three concepts as they will prove integral to the discussion that follows. Firstly, agency through resilience is centred around acts which enable individuals or communities to get by, whether that be financially, domestically or socially (Katz, 2004). Building on resilience, reworking centres around practices which seek to alter and improve conditions of daily life through the creation of enabling spaces, without attempting to challenge the system itself (Katz, 2004). Resistance can be considered much less prevalent at the everyday level than that of resilience or reworking. Acts of resistance require a ‘critical consciousness to confront and redress historically and geographically specific conditions of oppression at various scales’ (Katz, 2004, p.251).

Building upon some of the ideas raised above, Hughes' (2020) work on re-thinking resistance calls firmly for geographers to make a conscious effort to engage with more elusive forms of resistance, as so often it is the more mundane and quiet forms of resistance that are enacted deliberately on behalf of a cause. This chapter argues that seemingly mundane actions, which are emergent, purposeful and implicit, should be understood as contestation which reflects a BAME resisting presence. Yet it should also be acknowledged, as Horton and Kraftl (2009, p.15) suggest, that mundane acts of resistance are 'of a sort expressed in non-traditional, multiple styles that are quite different from the ostensibly more spectacular practices commonly associated with 'activism'.

Uncovering everyday agency in the archive is a challenging process. Rather than searching for grand moments of successful collective action, this chapter engages with more mundane and 'quiet' everyday actions in order to contribute to evolving debates on agency at the intersection of labour and historical geography (Emery, 2018; Hastings and Cumbers, 2019; Martin, 2021; McFarland, 2017; Newbery, 2013; Peck, 2018). Essentially, this chapter argues for thinking beyond a simplistic combination of labour and race histories with a more nuanced approach to stress the plurality within place-based events and the intersection of race and class (Massey, 2005).

To do so, this chapter begins by discussing how exclusionary conditions prevalent in the merchant shipping industry were contested in spaces of (un)employment across the port settlements in the region. These were unpredictable and unstable spaces where ideas of inequality, desperation for employment and the exclusionary practices of the industry intersected and furthered racialised behaviours, leading to conflict and contestation to develop between white and BAME seafarers, employers and union officials.

Building on the everyday contestation of exclusionary conditions in spaces of work, this chapter goes on to think within and beyond ‘exceptional’ episodes of racialised disorder, the 1919 and 1930 ‘riots’<sup>97</sup> in South Shields, to demonstrate the significance of employing a lens of the everyday when rethinking agency. In doing so, the chapter confronts superficial assumptions that they were isolated moments of violence. These moments have often become a focus for many researching and writing BAME British History (Eddo-Lodge, 2018; Fryer, 1984; Jenkinson, 2009; Olusoga, 2016; Ramdin, 1987). It is argued here that some of these accounts are not sufficiently attentive to the wider atmospheres of exclusion and temporalities of violence that encapsulated such moments (Closs Stephens, 2016). Employing this atmospheric awareness in regard to BAME experiences in contesting exclusion, allows the impact of the longer temporalities, and material consequences, of atmospheres of violence and exclusion to be uncovered. This contributes to a more inclusive history of the region where BAME perspectives are not only present in times of ‘riot’. Significantly for the purposes here, it also asserts how such conditions were always under negotiation and contested in multiple ways.

Finally, this chapter will conclude by extending the analysis of agency beyond the seafarer and their sites of employment; by highlighting less traditional extra-workplace moments of agency and activism that took place within the everyday lives of BAME communities across the region in the interwar period. The actions of boarding house keepers and white women connected to BAME men will be discussed to demonstrate how agency was significant in sustaining BAME communities and how spaces within the community became platforms from which further acts of contestation could be developed. I argue that implicit and everyday actions should not

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<sup>97</sup> See Chapter 2 (4.2) for a discussion on the language of ‘riot’.



go unnoticed or be diminished in the historical record as they are indicative of the ‘the real, banal, messy, faltering ways in which activism happens’ (Horton and Kraftl, 2009, p.17) in everyday life.

As has been stressed throughout this thesis, there is a clear imbalance in archival material and substantial absences in the records available. The imbalance in material for this chapter, is not only heavily favoured towards South Shields, as it was home to the largest BAME community in the region, but is largely centred towards ‘exceptional’ moments of violence and disorder, such as the 1919 and 1930 riots in South Shields. As a result, a conscious effort has been made to utilise a variety of material and triangulate experiences with more abundant material regarding other port towns, such as Liverpool (Brown, 2005; Frost, 2000). This allows an account to develop which does not only feature BAME experiences at moments of violent conflict but is perhaps more indicative of the actuality of everyday life.

This chapter employs a thematic approach to argue that the experience of agency in everyday life was not linear but rather a web of small acts, organised action, community resilience and individual contestations which acted at various temporalities and within wider atmospheres of exclusion (Horton and Kraftl, 2009). Closs Stephens (2016) discusses the affective atmosphere of nationalism to understand how nationalistic acts and behaviours emerge and endure in everyday life. Employing this atmospheric awareness regarding BAME experiences of contestation allows the impact of the longer temporalities, and material consequences, of atmospheres of violence and exclusion to be uncovered. In this regard, it is significant to note the varying temporalities of violence and exclusion experienced by BAME people living in the region during the interwar period. Bureaucratic exclusions and state organised racial projects were developed in a wider landscape of marginalisation than embodied

encounters between white and BAME seafarers in port settlements. Yet, the ‘slow violence’ (Pain, 2019) of institutional racism cannot be separated from the physical violence BAME seafarers experienced in their everyday lives. They are, as Kelliher (2020, p.3), ‘mutually constituted temporalities of violence’. This chapter seeks to foreground the messier, contradictory, banal, diverse, emergent and unpredictable expressions of contestation of this violence (Horton and Kraftl, 2009).

## **6.2 – Contesting workplace exclusion**

Throughout the interwar period, spaces of (un)employment, such as the Mill Dam in South Shields and the New Quay in North Shields, became some of the most conflictual and contentious spaces in port towns where the actualities of economic depression and rising competition for work, played out in explicitly racialised terms. Sites of (un)employment were spaces where atmospheres of violence and fear (Pavoni and Tulumello, 2020) were heightened particularly in moments of BAME agency and contestation (Hall, et al., 2013). These were sites of seemingly exceptional episodes of racialised disorder, such as the 1919 and 1930 riots in South Shields, yet these events were embedded into everyday life; overlapping with, and situated alongside residential and social spaces (Askins, 2016; Clayton, 2009; Nayak, 2012). As Nayak (2016) argues, racial and ethnic dynamics are often embedded into localised contexts and cultures dependant on geographical location. These sites of (un)employment shaped how BAME individuals and communities confronted and challenged exclusionary conditions within and beyond the workplace. This section demonstrates how the Mill Dam in South Shields, North Shields’ New Quay, the Marine Office in

Hartlepool and the Union and Shipping Offices on Sunderland's Borough Road, were all critical and unstable sites where racialised employment tensions visibly surfaced and influenced equally unpredictable everyday encounters between white and BAME seafarers across the region. Here, the notion of encounter is shifted towards notions of agency and practices, to sit alongside the representations and conditions previously considered in Chapters 5 and 6.

### **6.2.1 – Negotiating violence: the employment of BAME seafarers**

A substantial source of tension in interwar port towns was the employment of BAME seafarers. Industrial relations can often be racially fractured and produce exclusionary and uneven relations between workers within landscapes of production (Ince et al., 2015). Hall (1996a) argues that 'race' can be a medium through which class relations are experienced, especially within ethnically diverse communities. This thesis has already established how class relations and racialised tensions intersected in specific ways in interwar port towns. Circulating representations of BAME individuals as a violent threat to social order<sup>98</sup> shaped how the behaviour and presence of BAME individuals in spaces of work was racialised and politicised.

During the early twentieth century, white communities across the region developed a sense of entitlement and preferential access to employment. Statements made by local MPs, Town Councillors, Chief Constables and Union leaders, as well as the wider white community, in newspapers, union records and town council meeting minutes, articulated a view that due to high unemployment levels, white 'British

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<sup>98</sup> See Chapter 4 (4).

sailors should have the first call on British ships' (*Sunderland Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 10 April 1930). Legally, the majority of BAME seafarers were 'British' through their British Subject or British Protected Person status and were aware of the rights they were entitled to as colonial subjects (*Shields Gazette*, 14 February 1925; 21 March 1923; 15 February 1929). Claiming British citizenship for BAME British Colonial Subjects in the interwar period was a challenging bureaucratic process which required explicit proof from each individual and it became evident that, as Tyler (2013, p.48) argues:

'British citizenship has been designed to abject specific groups and populations, producing paralysed, dejected and 'deportable' populations of non-citizens within the internal borders of the nation'.

The ways in which British nationality was defined and reconstituted in the interwar period demonstrates that legal citizenship did not always guarantee full inclusion into the social construct of nation as 'Britishness' was racialised and 'whitened' (Brown, 2005; Tabili, 1994b; Thompson, 2005). The articulation of nationality and national belonging in spaces of (un)employment was both explicit and banal in a sense that mundane behaviours and acts of national legislation, such as the 1925 Coloured Alien Seamen Order (Tabili, 1994b), developed simultaneously to shape the everyday experience (Ince et al., 2015).

The presence of BAME colonial seafarers was sensationalised in the press and local imagination with their employment becoming highly contentious and exaggerated (Tabili, 1994a). BAME seafarers were largely employed below deck and comprised a small part of the crew, generally between three and ten positions (Gordon and Reilly, 1986). Across all of the North East port towns in 1931, BAME seafarers made up between one and four percent of the total men engaged in the merchant

shipping industry.<sup>99</sup> As Appadurai (2006) argues, although minority groups can often be numerically small in comparison to the white population, this does not prevent them from being represented as a threat and objects of fear and anger. Through circulating representations, such as those discussed in Chapter 4 (4), BAME individuals and communities were represented as dangerous, volatile, resource draining and as an unnecessary threat to national social and political order (Ahmed, 2014). Conflict arising out of the employment of BAME seafarers, although clearly influenced by popular racism, should perhaps be also understood as an expression of grievances which had been racialised and consequently detracted from less visible and complicated consequences of economic depression and rising unemployment in interwar Britain.

Throughout the interwar period and across the port towns of the North East, there were multiple experiences of conflict and contestation arising from the employment of BAME seafarers. These conflicts often comprised of actions by BAME individuals and communities that confronted the exclusionary conditions faced in employment spaces. For the most part, only the most extreme and violent episodes of disorder receive significant scholarly attention (Byrne, 1977; Jenkinson, 2009, 2017). This chapter seeks to develop an understanding which is indicative of the everyday experiences of a multi-ethnic class and therefore attention must be paid to a variety of encounters, including those which were more ordinary and realised without violence. Here, the earlier discussion of Katz's work around agency is deployed within the historical settings considered.

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<sup>99</sup> TNA CO 725/54/9, 1931 Census data and Numbers of Coloured Alien Seamen registered under the Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order, 1925.

1930 saw unemployment increasing rapidly due to an international economic depression which hit the primary industries of port towns of the North East severely (Tabili, 2011; Lawless, 1995). August 1930 saw the local implementation of a racialised Rota System within the British Merchant Shipping Industry which had been collaboratively developed by the NUS, Board of Trade and employers. This national campaign sought to control and restrict the employment of BAME seafarers as a response to perceived challenges encountered in the most ethnically diverse port towns in Britain whilst also appealing to the popular sentiment of white preference in the industry (Byrne, 1977). The implementation of the Rota System in August 1930 legalised racial discrimination and the restriction of BAME employment in British Shipping and was contested in a distinct and largely organised manner.

This section will now foreground several moments of workplace contestation in early 1930 from across the port towns of the region through a series of empirical vignettes to represent the diverse nature of everyday inter-ethnic encounter in moments of workplace negotiation. This will demonstrate that contestation over employment was not always violent but often prevalent in everyday moments of mediation and peaceful resolution. This analysis begins with a discussion of such encounters in the months preceding the implementation of the Rota System in August 1930.

In February 1930 a disturbance broke out in West Hartlepool outside of the Shipping Office when a small group of Arab seafarers were signed on, apparently instead of white men. Although this alone created tension, issues of ‘local belonging’ and a sense of localised white preference to work, caused further indignation when it was realised that the Arabs who had been signed on were not from Hartlepool but had travelled from South Shields in search of employment (*The Seaman*, 26 February

1930). Tensions were managed by a strong police and NUS presence at the Shipping Office. The NUS secretary of the Middlesbrough branch petitioned, albeit unsuccessfully, the ship's master to take local white workers over the Arab seamen (*The Seaman*, 26 February 1930). After much discussion and verbal expressions of dissatisfaction, ten Arab seamen were signed, and the crowd dispersed. This episode is demonstrative of the more sustained and unpredictable nature of racialised disputes in the seafaring industry and brings to evidence that outright violence was not the only possible outcome of such everyday moments of employment conflict and negotiation.

The following month, in South Shields, a similar scene was experienced on the Mill Dam. On the morning of the 19<sup>th</sup> March, news had spread that Arab firemen were to be signed on as an engine room crew at the Federation Office (*The Seaman*, 9 April 1930). A large crowd of unemployed white and BAME seafarers congregated on the Mill Dam some time before the hour of engagement. Throughout the morning as more men gathered, traffic was impeded, and the press reported that the crowd became increasingly 'agitated and excited' at the chance to secure employment and the police struggled to maintain order (*Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 20 March 1930). An announcement was made that twelve Arab seamen were required, and the crowd were reported as rushing towards the Federation Office with both white and Arab men clamouring to get through the office door to secure work (*Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 20 March 1930; *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 20 March 1930; *The Seaman*, 9 April 1930).

After the Arabs had been signed on, the rest of the crew, who were all white men, were chosen and signed on without further trouble, other than some reportedly crude remarks of frustration (*Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 20 March 1930). This episode again reflects the unpredictability of behaviours experienced in volatile spaces

of (un)employment where control and order were precariously managed by the local police and union officers. The decision to call for an Arab stokehold crew represents the racialised nature of employment in the industry as BAME seafarers could be receive preferential as well as exclusionary treatment depending on the agenda of the employer. This caused much disagreement among white seafarers and despite hundreds of unemployed white men gathering and ‘clamouring’ for work, alongside BAME seafarers, there was no outbreak of violence.

Shortly following the incidents in Hartlepool and South Shields, there was a hostile demonstration of over four hundred sailors outside of the Shipping Office in Sunderland following a rumour that Arab firemen were going to be signed on (*Leeds Mercury*, 12 April 1930). The union press reported that the ‘unemployed Sunderland seamen had collected in groups around the offices’ while the Arab seafarers stood to one side (*The Seaman*, 23 April 1930). As the Arabs crossed the street to enter the office, frustration was evident from the body of unemployed white sailors who moved in and blocked the entrance to the office in protest (*The Seaman*, 23 April 1930). As the morning progressed, the deadlock continued, and the situation became more volatile. At midday a conference was documented between:

‘Mr Emms, Seamen’s Union Organiser at Sunderland, Mr Atkinson, Shipping Federation representative, Mr. Jones, captain of the *Hollinside* and two of the Arabs was held. Half an hour later it was announced that the firemen would be white, at which news the waiting crowd broke into cheer after cheer. There was a rush towards the Union offices and another to the Shipping Federation, where eight English Firemen were chosen.’ (*The Seaman*, 23 April 1930)

A strong police force had been present the entire time to control the crowd and prevent an outbreak of violence. The decision to call a conference had been a crucial one which reflects the volatility and unpredictability of situations where employment



competition was encountered. The ‘cheer after cheer’ which was reported among the white crowd after it was announced that a white crew would be engaged, demonstrates the strong and precarious emotional atmosphere that was present outside of the Union Offices in Sunderland that day. The threat of a violent outbreak must have been highly likely and as noted above the most peaceable option to de-escalate the situation, decided by the representatives, would be to employ a white crew.

Two Arabs were part of this conference and although their opinions were not recorded in history, the fact that the episode ends without violent confrontation further challenges the association of BAME seafarers with representations as being ignorant, inherently violent and, to quote Wilson, ‘not a very reasonable body of men to deal with’.<sup>100</sup> Contestation and resentment regarding the employment of Arabs over white seafarers also took place on the Newcastle Quayside in April 1930 and similarly was resolved without violence with mediation from union officials and the police, although in this case the captain persisted and engaged Arab seafarers for the stokehold crew.<sup>101</sup>

In bringing attention to more mundane and banal experiences of racialised negotiation in everyday spaces of (un)employment, which often did not lead to violence, it is possible to appreciate how racial difference was historically encountered. These experiences were unpredictable and contingent on a variety of volatile socioeconomic, temporal and spatial conditions. These moments, although not physically violent, informed and reflected the wider atmosphere of racialised

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<sup>100</sup> WMRC MSS.175A/1. Proceedings of annual and special general meetings, 1911-1937. 22 September 1919. Annual General Meeting Part 1. Presidential address by J. Havelock Wilson, p.12.

<sup>101</sup> *The Seaman*, 23 April 1930; WMRC MSS.175A/1. Proceedings of annual and special general meetings, 1911-1937. 09 July 1930. Newcastle Branch Resolutions. Statement by Mr Creigh, pp.146-147.

workplace grievances and the development of acts of everyday BAME agency and contestation throughout the interwar period and especially in the 1930s.

Nevertheless, disputes over the employment of BAME seafarers did not always end peacefully. On the 29<sup>th</sup> April, violence broke out outside the Board of Trade Offices on the New Quay, North Shields. This episode disrupts the common regional history of associating racialised violence with South Shields and is indicative of a much wider landscape of racialised employment contestation across the North East. Each port town in the region, and arguably the country, were connected hubs where racialised employment conditions were experienced alongside wider atmospheres of exclusion.

The violence in North Shields was reported to be the outcome of long-standing tensions regarding the employment of BAME seafarers (*Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 30 April 1930). News of the engagement of thirteen Somali seamen had become public and a crowd of about 500 unemployed white seamen positioned themselves on the New Quay for two hours, waiting for the Somalis to arrive (*Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 30 April 1930). It was reported that, ‘as the coloured men were about to enter the offices of the Board of Trade... a number of unemployed white seamen barred their way’ (*Illustrated Police News*, 08 May 1930). A fight then broke out and although order was momentarily restored, violence continued when ‘a large crowd of Arab seamen arrived by ferry’ from South Shields to support the Somalis (*Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 30 April 1930). The solidarity shared between Adenese and Somali seamen during this episode is evidence of a resistant practice born out of both their shared identity, through religion and kinship, and indicates a commonality of experience and collective response in contesting moments of exclusionary workplace practices. This outbreak of violence was deemed to be the ‘culmination of

the many demonstrations by white seaman which have been made in North and South Shields during the past few months' (*The Seaman*, 07 May 1930).

After the police charged the crowd and eventually broke up the riot, they arrested seventeen Somali and Adenese seafarers. No white men were arrested, despite clear evidence of their involvement in the violence (*Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 30 April 1930). The collective actions of both Somali and Adenese seafarers demonstrates a solidarity that transcends the boundaries of nationality to collectively challenge racial exclusion in the workplace. Tensions would remain hostile to BAME seafarers in North Shields for months following this incident and shaped how solidarity and resistance was expressed by BAME seafarers. Moments of racialised employment contestation did not end on the day when the confrontation occurred – these incidents reverberated through time and space and had a lasting impact on the everyday experiences of BAME communities across the region throughout the interwar period.

The following morning, news circulated that another ship was looking to sign a crew in North Shields and a large crowd of white seafarers gathered on the New Quay and, according to newspaper reports, 'lined the entire edge of the quay' standing shoulder to shoulder (*The Seaman*, 07 May 1930). A group of Arab seafarers from South Shields crossed the river by ferry to present themselves for work. As they disembarked, it was reported that the white crowd made a rush towards them, which was restrained by police as the Arabs were escorted back to South Shields and the white men returned to their positions lining the New Quay (*The Seaman*, 07 May 1930).

Despite the overt hostility and threats of violence being made towards the Arabs, they were determined not to accept this exclusion and continued to present themselves for work. Throughout the morning the BAME seafarers made several attempts to return to North Shields. In each instance, when they tried to disembark from the ferry it was reported that:

‘The whites became greatly excited, and if the police had not been so smart at thrusting them back beyond the gate at the top of the landing there would undoubtedly have been serious trouble.’ (*The Seaman*, 07 May 1930)

Despite the efforts made by the BAME seamen, they were not able to pass the white barricade and a white crew was signed that day. The agency demonstrated, albeit unsuccessful, by these BAME seafarers was one of resistance (Katz, 2004) both towards the racism within the workplace and in society and demonstrates persistence in challenging these exclusionary conditions. Understanding persistence as resistance stresses the oppositional nature of these everyday acts in relation not only to a specific configuration of power (Hughes, 2020) in spaces of (un)employment, but also in direct opposition to social marginalisation and exclusion. These experiences are significant for documenting everyday acts of contestation at the intersection of historical, political and labour geographies, explicitly understanding it as a processual lived experience.

The volatile interaction between BAME and white seafarers on the New Quay that day can be understood as the expression of racialised tensions that had proliferated much of the interwar period. Yet, it is the organised and symbolic nature of the actions of the ‘white men lining the New Quay’ standing shoulder to shoulder and facing the ferry that is of particular interest. In his work on the picket-line in 1970s Britain, Kelliher (2020) notes that picket-lines establish clear boundaries in space, both physical and moral, and embed notions of difference between workers along

politicised, and it is argued here in this case, racialised lines. A spatialised understanding of the events and collective behaviours exhibited by both BAME and white seafarers on the New Quay that day can bring attention to how ‘race’ became a medium through which class actions were organised (Hall, 1996a). The physicality of white men excluding BAME seafarers from spaces of employment, rearticulated the complex exclusionary conditions and processes of othering that were prevalent at this time. The persistent actions of BAME seafarers to continue to present themselves for work in the face of racist behaviour, demonstrates a collective community agency rooted in publicly reaffirming their right to belong and work in Britain. This moment is indicative of how multiple, and often conflicting, labour geographies can be found within an ethnically diverse working class in micro-spaces which are situated in wider landscapes of control and exclusion (Griffin, 2018a; Kelliher, 2020).

These vignettes of contestation throughout the first half of 1930 across all the North East port towns were often used to evidence the need for the development of new employment practices (*The Seaman*, 07 May 1930) and would lead to the implementation of the heavily racialised and contested Rota Scheme, which will be discussed in section 3.2 of this chapter. The everyday negotiation of racial difference and the politicised exclusionary conditions prevalent in spaces of (un)employment in interwar port towns suggests that more mundane moments of everyday agency can be understood in dialogue with the more sensational episodes of industrial and social conflict that has proliferated the historiography of working class communities in the North East. This shifts attention from the association of BAME communities with moments of violence and contributes to a diverse and variable understanding of the negotiation of racial difference within an ethnically diverse working class. Nevertheless, throughout the interwar period collective actions, both peaceful and

violent, were not the only ways in which BAME employment was experienced and racialised. The everyday experience of racialised employment practices was shaped and contested by individual as well as collective actions.

### **6.2.2 – Individual actions against exclusionary conditions**

Individual actions by and against BAME seafarers greatly shaped the everyday experience of the working class in spaces of employment. Throughout the interwar period, individuals in port towns articulated and expressed their frustrations at employment practices, racialised hierarchies and socioeconomic challenges in multiple ways, some of which were more violent than others. Employing the lens of the everyday allows an attentiveness to be paid to individual acts and position them as significant in their own right, and as part of the wider atmosphere of contestation that was being developed among BAME communities in the interwar period. This contributes to conceptualising agency as a personal as well as collective experience (Emery, 2018; Griffin, 2018a; Hasting and Cumbers, 2019).

On the 4<sup>th</sup> July 1919, the NSFU newspaper reported that a Nigerian fireman had been arrested in South Shields. Robert Anderson confronted a NSFU official on the Mill Dam to protest about the racialised nature of employment practices. The press reported that ‘he commenced making use of very filthy language towards the white men who had been signed on’ and followed a NSFU delegate, Mr Gilroy, into his office where he allegedly threatened, “if I don’t get a ship this week there will be murder in this office” (*The Seaman*, 04 July 1919). Anderson reportedly pointed to Gilroy in a very threatening manner and the police were called (*The Seaman*, 04 July

1919). Anderson's statement was made shortly after two ships had signed all white crews. There are few examples evidencing individual white seafarers confronting officials in spaces of employment, which perhaps suggests that the banal and mundane occurrence of it was not worthy of reportage. It would be extremely unlikely that these incidents simply did not occur when the collective protestation over BAME employment was voiced frequently and recorded in NSFU local branch meeting minutes.<sup>102</sup> However, this statement was made by a Nigerian fireman, in the Shipping Offices on the Mill Dam, and Anderson was arrested, tried at the police court and fined twenty pounds. The statement made by Anderson highlighted the distress that was being faced by many BAME seafarers, who had been living unemployed in Britain for some time (Lawless, 1995). Despite technically being a racially inclusive union, the NSFU was imbued with ideas of imperial racial hierarchy especially during the post-war depression (Featherstone, 2015).

The following year, Elias Brown, a West Indian seaman, appeared at the South Shields police court following an alleged assault of John Murray, Port Consultant. Brown had been a member of the NSFU for seven years, had lived in the country for some time and was reportedly torpedoed twice during the war (*The Seaman*, 09 July 1920). He had been unemployed for four months and was becoming frustrated with local employment practices where BAME engine room crews were largely employed directly from the boarding house, as a result Brown was at a significant disadvantage with not living in an Arab Boarding House. Brown entered the Board of Trade offices

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<sup>102</sup> Frequent calls were made at local NSFU branch meetings for the restriction of Arab labour on British ships, the removal of Arab seafarers from the union and even calls for repatriation of BAME seafarers. Examples can be found in: WMRC MSS.175/6/BR/31 North Shields Branch Minute Book, 04 September 1928, 03 June 1929, 09 October 1929, 12 May 1930, 25 July 1931, 17 November 1931; WMRC MSS.175/6/BR/27 Middlesbrough Branch Minute Book, 15 June 1927, 22 May 1930.

on the Mill Dam and asked Murray “Why cannot I get a ship?” (*The Seaman*, 09 July 1920). What happened next is unclear. Brown’s defence counsel argued that:

‘It was not correct that he struck Murray. Murray pushed him away and said “Get out of this; go to the shipping office” and he merely pushed him in return.’ (*The Seaman*, 09 July 1920)

The presiding magistrate of this case, Dr Whyte, remarked ‘that an unfortunate distinction in coloured men had been made, and as the Bench could not agree as to the assault, the case would be dismissed’ (*The Seaman*, 09 July 1920). Tensions between BAME seafarers were prevalent throughout the interwar period especially due to intra-minority hierarchies present in Britain. Events such as this disrupts assumptions of homogeneous and collective BAME experiences and complicates the simple binary of supposing the only tensions were between BAME and white communities. This further demonstrates the varying nature of power relations in this period as although whiteness was a dominant and influential ideology, intra-minority hierarchies were present which further complicates historical representations of contestation and disorder in interwar port towns.

Although certain employment practices favoured those living in Arab Boarding Houses, West Indian British subjects living in Britain were often seen by national and local institutions as superior to Arabs and West Africans due to linguistic, religious and cultural similarities with Britain (Collins, 1952). This perhaps explains the relatively unbiased treatment of Brown by the magistrate as they were similar cases involving Arabs and West Africans where a much harsher punishment had been imposed.<sup>103</sup> This begins to demonstrate a nuanced nature and plurality of BAME

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<sup>103</sup> For example, in February 1921, a West African seafarer was charged with having committed an act likely to cause a breach of peace after sending a letter to a NSFU official threatening action if BAME seafarers were not given the same chance of employment as white men. He was bound over for £5 for twelve months and the magistrate expressed that he hoped the ‘case would be a warning to him and others’ (*The Seaman*, 18 February 1921).



experiences in contesting racialised employment practices at the individual and everyday level.

Working class experiences of spaces of (un)employment, whether on the individual or collective level, were significantly constitutive of their wider everyday experience. These spaces were politically charged, subject to racialisation and the occupational segregation and ethnic integration present in port towns, they ensured that spaces of work overlapped social and residential spaces. Conflicts and contestation over employment conditions, practices and availability of positions were central to everyday life in port towns and the spaces in which they were articulated could become sites of violence, cooperation, manipulation and agency within and beyond the interwar period. This chapter will now go on to further this discussion in relation to thinking within and beyond specific episodes of racialised disorder that took place in South Shields in 1919 and 1930.

### **6.3 – Thinking within and beyond violent episodes of racialised disorder**

Violent episodes of racialised disorder, such as the 1919 Seaport Riots, have become a central focus for those researching and writing BAME British histories of the early twentieth century (Eddo-Lodge, 2018; Fryer, 1984; Jenkinson, 2009; Olusoga, 2016; Ramdin, 1987) and are often viewed or presented as isolated and exceptional episodes of racialised disorder, or, as to quote Fryer (1984, p.310) ‘sporadic outbreaks of anti-black rioting’. However, this perceived ‘exceptionality’ of the 1919 and 1930 riots overplays the spontaneity of the events, paying less attention to the wider local, national and global webs of experiences and dissent that they were

situated in (Griffin and Martin, 2021). In order to develop an account of the events of 1919 and 1930 in South Shields as embedded into wider webs of experience, the ‘everyday’ will be employed in this chapter as a conceptual tool to foreground the understanding that the everyday is inclusive of moments of exceptionality (Highmore, 2002). The riots of 1919 and 1930 are moments where the routines of everyday life were ruptured with violence (Taylor, 2014). Yet, these moments need to be understood alongside everyday acts of contestation and solidarity and attention paid to how ‘race’ shapes class experiences in particular spatiotemporal contexts (Hall, 1996a) and under hostile and exclusionary atmospheres (Closs Stephens, 2016).

### **6.3.1 – 1919: transitions, racial hostility and dissent**

Racial prejudice, and its contestation by BAME communities, was a central source of tension in port towns throughout 1919, as conditions became exacerbated by the economic depression. There is a need to move beyond a superficial understanding of sensationalised moments, to unpack and explore the complex and everyday intersection of race and class under the specific temporal and spatial conditions of interwar port settlements (Jenkinson, 2009, 2017; Stovall, 2012). Sensationalising the Seaport Riots of 1919 reinforces these events as sporadic moments and more importantly, as isolated or exceptional episodes of racialised disorder. In South Shields throughout 1919 there were multiple conflictual moments situated in everyday life, which suggest that the 4<sup>th</sup> February riot was not a spontaneous, isolated or exceptional act, but rather embedded in the wider webs of everyday inter-ethnic encounter. Before

exploring these wider webs further, though, the chapter details the events themselves to contextualise the analysis that follows.

As outlined in Chapter 5 (3.1) in South Shields on the 4<sup>th</sup> of February 1919 tensions arising out of rising unemployment, and out of racially exclusionary positions in the NSFU and within the local white community, contributed towards violence between white and BAME communities. These conditions were not discrete to the North East with Jenkinson (2009) drawing detailed attention to the complex and interlocking causes of the 1919 Seaport Riots across Britain and in the Caribbean.

Outside of the Shipping Office on the Mill Dam, white and BAME seafarers gathered hoping to be employed. The master of the ship announced that only white seafarers were desired, which was met by protestation from BAME seafarers who were expecting to be engaged as firemen (*Shields Daily News*, 05 February 1919). The BAME seafarers present took grievance with such racist hiring practices, as the press later reported that for Arabs,

‘It was becoming increasingly difficult to obtain employment in British ships, despite the fact that they were British subjects, that have filled gaps in British crews during the war and that they belong to a recognised trade union.’ (*Shields Daily News*, 05 February 1919)

When one of the Arabs protested, J.B. Fye, a Cooks and Stewards Union official, replied “You black bastards this ship is not for you!”. This language can be seen as representative of the hostile atmosphere present in the town in 1919 (Carr, 2005). The outcome of the altercation led to the local press reporting of ‘turbulent scenes, the likes of which have never been before seen in South Shields’ (*Shields Daily News*, 05 February 1919).

Union officials were central members of the industry and they interacted daily with BAME and white members of the union. Many of these officers shared the exclusionary position of the NSFU, supported the anti-BAME campaign and expressed this at the everyday level.<sup>104</sup> It can be argued that the racist language expressed by a union official, acted as a lynch-pin event for the riot on the 4<sup>th</sup> February. Fye had a history of perpetuating racist ideologies in the workplace and appeared in court in 1914 for instigating a confrontation between Arab seafarers and white seamen on the Mill Dam (*Shields Gazette*, 03 September 1914). These moments are suggestive of a longer trajectory of racist and hostile atmospheres which circulated in the years preceding the events of 1919.

In February 1919, Fye's racist verbal abuse towards an Arab seafarer, and how the offended individual challenged such racism, sparked the violence that erupted on the Mill Dam that day (Carr, 2005; *Shields Gazette*, 10 February 1919). At the court proceedings Mr Muir Smith, defence lawyer for the Arabs, stated that Fye's language, and the fact that it was:

'Used to a crowd anxious to get employment, and used by a union official, was likely to incite the crowd. It was actually the dropping of the match into the keg of gunpowder.' (*Shields Gazette*, 10 February 1919)

Despite Fye being in a position of power and using such inflammatory language he was not imprisoned but fined. Fye himself can be understood as a personal embodiment of the white labourism (Hyslop, 1999) present within the seafaring unions of the interwar period as he was, until his naturalisation in September 1918, an

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<sup>104</sup> Throughout the interwar period NSFU officers spoke out publicly against BAME employment on British ships at local branch meetings, annual general meetings and in interviews to the press. For examples see: *The Seaman*, 26 February 1930; *The Seaman*, 07 May 1930; *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 21 March 1930; WMRC MSS.175A/1 - Proceedings of annual and special general meetings, 1911-1937; WMRC MSS.175/6/BR/31 North Shields Minute book. 1919-1946; WMRC MSS.175/6/BR/27 - Middlesbrough branch minute book. 1926-1959.

American citizen and therefore an ‘alien’ worker himself.<sup>105</sup> He was clearly not opposed to foreign employment so long as those who were seeking employment were white. These ideologies were akin to the anti-BAME sentiment being expressed by the NSFU at the time, through the exclusionary conditions that were being developed and shared by union leaders in 1919 such as Joseph Havelock Wilson. Despite gaining substantial attention in the contemporary media and current historiography (Jenkinson, 2009), it is argued here that the events of the 4<sup>th</sup> February were not exceptional but rather situated in a complex web of dissent and disorder which took place in the interwar period and need to be understood in dialogue with the exclusionary political and socioeconomic conditions which were outlined in detail in the preceding chapter.

The moment in which the racist exchange between Fye and the Arab fireman broke out into violence can be understood as a moment of agency; one of direct contestation by BAME communities of popular racism, the exclusionary conditions perpetuated by the union and the wider tensions surrounding the transition from war to peace. As Ashe et al. (2016, p.36) argue, there is a need to detract from narratives which present racialised minorities as passive victims of violence but rather develop an understanding of ‘how racist violence often provides the impetus for political action’. Following the 1919 riot, and for much of the interwar period, BAME seafarers would not be passive in their experience of exclusionary conditions but, as will be argued throughout this chapter, develop intricate expressions of agency both in response to direct moments of contestation and in challenging wider everyday exclusions and racisms.

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<sup>105</sup> TNA HO 144/1498/364777 - Nationality and Naturalisation: Fye, John Barnabus, from the United States of America. Resident in South Shields. Certificate 3,375 issued 14 September 1918.

Historicising riots is a challenging process, but the 4<sup>th</sup> February was just one moment of everyday contestation between BAME and white members of the community in South Shields in 1919 and should be understood in relation to smaller, less visible and everyday acts of confrontation and contestation (Horton and Kraftl, 2009). This approach challenges understandings of the events of the 4<sup>th</sup> February as being an isolated, exceptional and spontaneous moment of racialised disorder (Griffin and Martin, 2021). The chapter looks to acknowledge the pronounced cultural and political shifts taking place in the everyday lives of ethnically diverse working class communities, of which the riot was simply a spectacular symptom (Tabili, 2009). This perspective will enhance our understanding of everyday experiences of racialised disorder within and beyond 1919.

From January to September 1919 there were multiple episodes of disorder which transpired among the working people of South Shields. There were racialised attacks on Arab Boarding Houses and commercial property, conflict between servicemen (both active and demobilised) and the police, violence between soldiers and Arabs, employment tensions on the Mill Dam between BAME seafarers and white seafarers and attacks on public houses to protest the beer shortage.<sup>106</sup> The ‘spectacular’ events of 1919 were examples of the ways in which the routines of everyday life are subject to instances of violent rupture (Taylor, 2014), yet were inherently related to the everyday conditions that were present in the town. 1919 in South Shields is not only about riots and xenophobia but rather the juncture of circulating atmospheres of racial hostility with everyday encounters of specific social, economic and cultural conditions present in port towns. Experiences of dissent, contestation and agency

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<sup>106</sup> See Appendix 3: Table of information regarding events which took place in South Shields in 1919.

continued to develop throughout the interwar period and were articulated at varying scales.

It would be impossible, both due to spatial limits in this thesis and the inconsistent nature of everyday experiences in the archival record, to comment in detail on every experience of disorder and contestation in South Shields in 1919, yet it is clear that these were moments in everyday life where the intersection of race, class, occupation and the socioeconomic and political transition from war time to peace time is most apparent. This section will now highlight a selection of events which took place from January to March 1919 to demonstrate how the February riot was not an exceptional moment of violence and disorder and instead was indicative of wider mundane moments.

On the evening of Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> January 1919, an Arab owned shop on Waterloo Vale, was attacked. Its windows were smashed, the gas fittings pulled out and a substantial amount of damage was done to the premises (*Shields Gazette*, 13 January 1919). The following afternoon, the largest Arab Boarding House in the town was likewise attacked without provocation by a crowd of over two hundred civilians, soldiers and demobilised servicemen. However, as reported by the press at the Police Court, a woman put her fist through the window of the boarding house which seemed to be a signal for the crowd to attack the house and those inside (*Shields Gazette*, 15 January 1919). This disturbance differed from other incidents in South Shields throughout 1919 in several ways but also shared many similarities. This attack was pre-arranged, it was not spontaneous; there was evident hostility towards the police from the white crowd, individuals resisted arrest and several men were charged with obstructing the police in their duty (*Shields Gazette*, 15 January 1919); and it involved

a wider variety of people living in South Shields – white men, women, soldiers, seafarers, miners and engineers.

This disorder was not an outbreak of violence directly concerned with seafaring (un)employment as there were many occupations involved. This violence erupted, played out and ended in a residential space which could explain why it has not become a central focus in the historiography and the press at the time, in the way that the events of the 4<sup>th</sup> February have. The causes of this ‘Street Riot’ could not be easily attributed to conditions arising out of unemployment and economic depression but rather encompassed racialised tensions within the town. Events such as the ‘Street Riot’ are reflective of the consistent presence of racism in South Shields in the interwar period that was not confined to one moment or specific event but circulated in everyday life within a racialised atmosphere of hostility.

Similar violence between white and BAME communities shortly before the riots in 1919 was experienced in other port towns such as Cardiff (Evans, 1980; Jenkinson, 2009). This violence, preceding the riots, has arguably been downplayed in terms of significance in relation to the events, yet the regularity of such scenes speaks to a wider atmosphere of racialised exclusion that was shaped by trade union organising, popular racism and BAME contestation but also enacted and felt in everyday spaces (Griffin and Martin, 2021). As Hall et al. (2013) note, in *Policing the Crisis*, it is the repetition of violence, found in different times and places, that speaks to a wider structural, and perhaps atmospheric, racism.

The Mill Dam riot of the 4<sup>th</sup> February had multiple legacies some of which were felt in the immediate aftermath. For many BAME seafarers the Mill Dam became a space with an atmosphere of hostility and insecurity. Employing an atmospheric



awareness (Closs Stephens, 2016) to everyday experiences and encounters in 1919 allows an understanding to develop which not only uncovers how atmospheres of fear and violence is influenced by wider circulating conditions and representations, but also how such atmospheres inform the materiality of everyday life (Pavoni and Tulumello, 2020). This focus on less tangible experiences is further useful when working with fragmented archival records as it supports understanding everyday moments as indicative of wider experiences.

Tension and hostility between soldiers and the Arab community were prevalent throughout 1919. The significant number of demobilised and active servicemen in South Shields in 1919 was often a factor in those that participated in most acts of disorder, racialised or not (Jenkinson, 2009). In March 1919, two soldiers were walking down Coronation Street, followed by two Arabs when an altercation erupted. The white British soldiers claim to have understood some basic Arabic and supposedly heard the Arabs saying ‘I’ll kill all the soldiers’ and when they confronted the Arabs, a struggle followed (*Shields Gazette*, 10 March 1919). However, at the Police Court, Mr Muir Smith, defence counsel for the Arabs involved argued that:

‘The story of the Arab was that while walking down Coronation Street they met several soldiers, one of whom, as they passed, struck Hassan on the back of the neck. Turning round, Hassan asked “what’s the matter?” whereupon he was kicked to the ground. A knife was produced by one of the soldiers and an effort was made to steal his watch and chain. Hassan then took out his razor’ (*Shields Gazette*, 10 March 1919).

Hassan was fined 40 shillings and the case against the soldiers was dismissed due to the judge stating that there was ‘an element of doubt’ regarding this case (*Shields Gazette*, 10 March 1919). In response to the lack of prosecution, Mr Muir Smith made a statement to the local press on behalf of the Arab community that:

‘The life of these Arab firemen is becoming intolerable. There is a prejudice born out of ignorance, and since the last riots, it appears that there has been an absolute setback against them. The behaviour of people down at the Mill Dam, unfortunately soldiers amongst them, whose uniform we are bound to respect, although there is no telling what type of individual is beneath it, is such that an Arab is now afraid to walk along the street.’ (*Shields Gazette*, 10 March 1919).

Notably, his commentary speaks to a wider anxiety within street encounters, arguably informed by an atmosphere and presence of racialised violence, which again disrupts understandings of riots as singular and contained violent events, and is instead suggestive of a wider atmosphere of racialised hostility (Griffin and Martin, 2021). The presence of active and demobilised servicemen, and the impact this had on working class tensions in South Shields, was heightened in 1919 especially after the clash between soldiers and police in January, and the later disorder between soldiers and Arabs in March. Although much of the work on 1919 brings attention to the presence of active and demobilised servicemen (Evans, 1994; Jenkinson, 2009, 2017; Rowe, 2000; Tabili, 1994a) the significance of their actions is usually only considered in economic terms – returning men seeking limited local employment. Yet, the public knowledge of the deplorable conditions suffered by those who fought during the war led to them being treated with precariousness not only by those in power, but by the working class community as a whole (*Shields Gazette*, 23 January 1919). Publicly displaying solidarities towards servicemen, even if they had acted inappropriately, demonstrates the impact of the less tangible legacies of war on the working class everyday experience. It is clear that attention needs to be paid to the local psyche demonstrated towards soldiers by residents, police and the judicial system, how it was influenced by circulating racial and imperial beliefs and how this shaped the everyday experience within and beyond 1919.

The events which transpired in South Shields in early 1919 are indicative of the complexity of the transition from war to peace and the increasing socioeconomic and political tensions in the town. The Mill Dam riot in February 1919 was just one of many instances of violence and contestation to unfold in 1919 and contributes to challenging an understanding that the everyday lives of the ethnically diverse South Shields community was interjected with multiple violences. Instead, thinking within and beyond exceptional episodes of racialised disorder, and unpacking the complexities and locally specific contexts, allows for smaller, less visible and everyday acts of exclusion and dissent to be recognised as significant and constitutive of longer trajectories of unrest (Griffin and Martin, 2021). Just as 1919 has been subject to much attention, so has the riot on the Mill Dam in 1930 and despite being often labelled a ‘race riot’ (Byrne, 1977) it differed from 1919. Although similarly shaped by circulating institutional and popular racism, the 1930 riot was more closely linked with wider contestation within the seafaring industry which led to a racialised industrial dispute between BAME seafarers and the Seaman’s Minority Movement against the exclusionary policies enacted by the NUS and government.

### **6.3.2 – Solidarity and resistance: the 1930 Rota System in South Shields**

As demonstrated previously, tensions between white and BAME seafarers over employment peaked in 1930 and there were frequent confrontations, peaceful and violent, in spaces of (un)employment in all of the port towns across the region. However, for the most part, the only incident which is discussed in the historiography is the August 1930 riot which took place in South Shields (Byrne, 1977; Lawless,

1995). This focus on one violent moment of racialised disorder, which was embedded into longer temporalities of contestation and violence, is similar to that surrounding the 1919 riot. Focussing on a singular moment can detract focus from longer trajectories, everyday experiences and exclusionary conditions which form the backdrop from which moments of conflict occur (Laurie and Shaw, 2018).

The interwar period saw an organised campaign by the NUS towards the restriction of BAME employment in Britain which was challenged by BAME seafarers. 1930 can be understood as the peak of this campaign where the NUS would transcend intra-union actions – such as speeches made in branch meetings and articles in *The Seaman* – to encourage the implementation of a formalised racist scheme which sought to restrict BAME labour in the merchant shipping industry. Throughout the late 1920s there had been growing calls from across the union to implement a system where BAME workers would be registered in an attempt to support white preferential employment and subvert the perceived corruptness of hiring practices regarding BAME sailors.<sup>107</sup>

In December 1929, a NUS deputation held a meeting with Board of Trade Officials and five Members of Parliament specifically to discuss the perceived challenges faced by white workers regarding the employment of Arab seamen (*The Seaman*, 18 December 1929). The proposed scheme required that all BAME seamen be re-registered immediately and that a system be imposed to regulate their labour. After several months of discussion and negotiation, the details of the system were

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<sup>107</sup> Calls for such a system of registration can be seen across all levels of membership of the union. High ranking officials such as the secretary for the North East Coast, Mr Clouston (*The Seaman*, 13 August 1930) consistently made his view on the matter clear through the union and local presses. At the local level, branch meeting minute books see the calls for such a system being made from white members of the union (WMRC MSS.175/6/BR/27 - Middlesbrough branch minute book - 1926-1959 - 22nd May 1930; WMRC MSS.175/6/BR/31 - North Shields Minute book - 1919-1946 – 12 May 1930)

established. In addition to the registration and regulation of the employment of all 'coloured alien seamen', the Rota System sought to remove the role of the Arab Boarding House Keeper in securing employment for men, as this was framed as a corrupt practice which placed white seamen at a serious disadvantage. The new system would come into force on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 1930. All BAME seafarers would have to register and receive a card with an identification number on, which indicated their place in the rota and when a ship required BAME seafarers for their crew they would be recruited in numerical order (*The Seaman*, 02 July 1930). The scheme was presented as a step towards securing equal employment opportunities for BAME as well as white seafarers. The reality was that the scheme further legitimised the discrimination of BAME seafarers through imposing additional bureaucratic barriers to their employment.<sup>108</sup>

Leading up to the implementation of the Rota Scheme, an alliance formed between BAME seafarers and the South Shields branch of the Seamen's Minority Movement (SMM)<sup>109</sup> with the aim of contesting both the Rota System for BAME seafarers and the PC5 scheme which prevented the employment of any seafarer unless they were members of the NUS (Byrne, 1994). Connections between marginalised groups, be that a result of racial or political affiliation, is central to understanding the development of agency within a multi-ethnic working class (Featherstone, 2005; Kelliher, 2017, 2018; Linebaugh and Rediker, 1990). There is a need to emphasise, as Kelliher (2017, p.109) does in his work on LGBT alliances with striking coalminers

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<sup>108</sup> WMRC MSS.175/7/LE/103 – Durham Assize – R E X vs Ali Said and others – Shorthand notes of trial – Day 1, p.11; *The Seaman*, 02 July 1930.

<sup>109</sup> 'The National Minority Movement (NMM) was founded in 1924 on the initiative of the Communist Party of Great Britain. It co-ordinated committees of militant members of existing trade unions, organised on an industrial basis. The NMM aimed to revolutionise the policies and structures of trade unions by decreasing bureaucracy and overthrowing the existing leadership.'  
[http://www.unionhistory.info/timeline/TI\\_Display.php?irn=3000074&QueryPage=.%2FAdvSearch.php](http://www.unionhistory.info/timeline/TI_Display.php?irn=3000074&QueryPage=.%2FAdvSearch.php) [date accessed: 12 January 2021]

in the 1980s, ‘the ways in which forms of intersectional politics are constructed across space and time through the relationships of solidarity’. Although communist and BAME seafarers experienced different exclusionary conditions, it can be argued that their shared experiences of marginalisation, harassment and hostility from the media, union and police shaped how they developed solidarity to challenge such conditions in 1930 (Kelliher, 2017).

The SMM acted as an alternative to the NUS and was aligned with the Communist-led Minority Movement of various left-wing trade unions (Featherstone, 2015). The SMM supported ethnic diversity in the merchant shipping industry and challenged white labourism (Hyslop, 1999) and other restrictive practices which proliferated the NUS. As Featherstone (2015, p.12) demonstrates, ‘the experiences of black seafarers attempts to organize in the Seamen's Minority Movement offers important insights into their relations with the white Communist left’. The SMM and its potential ability to unite and organise both BAME and white seafarers was positioned as a threat to the established NUS. In 1927, Havelock Wilson aired his concerns regarding the SMM and their potential capacity to ‘capture the men of the sea and smash up their organisations. The only thing to do with such people is to fight them, carry the war into their camp’.<sup>110</sup>

This alliance, and its efforts in challenging the Rota System and PC5, in South Shields in 1930, can be understood through the lens of intersectionality as both the SMM and BAME seafarers experienced multifarious discriminations because of the intersectional nature of their racial, political and social identities (Kelliher, 2018). Foregrounding the intersectional nature of this alliance allows agency, solidarity and

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<sup>110</sup> WMRC MSS.175/4/21 – National Union of Seamen. Memoranda of Special General Meeting. Monday, August 1st, 1927. Report from General President, p.2.

resistance to be considered as interlocking with the exclusionary workplace conditions, social stigma and racial prejudice that proliferated ethnically diverse port communities in the interwar period. This centres the articulation of lived experience of difference in moments of contestation which have previously been exceptionalised and racialised (Kelliher, 2018).

Historically, BAME seafaring communities across the North East had been consistent and supportive members of the NSFU (Byrne, 1994), even in the immediate post-war period where conditions of BAME exclusion was embedded into the policies and practices of the union. As union campaigns to exclude BAME seafarers from the workforce intensified during the 1920s, with the implementation of the 1925 Coloured Alien Seamen Order and the preparation for the 1930 Rota Scheme, the racism of the NUS led many BAME seafarers to distance themselves from the union and ally with the SMM (Byrne, 1994). Byrne (1994, p.97) argues that the development of this relationship with the SMM would lead to second and third generation BAME seafarers in South Shields becoming allies of left-wing trade unions and ‘the backbone of the Communist Party in the town’. The collective power of minority seafarers in shifting alliance from employers to fellow workers has also been noted in wider maritime contexts by Davies (2013) in his work on the 1946 mutiny in the Royal Indian Navy when many sailors distanced themselves from the authorities showing solidarity instead with their fellow seamen. Understanding how such alliances form, enables an insight to be gained which is indicative of everyday experiences of agency and solidarity from within a maritime space and multi-ethnic working class.

Leading up to the implementation of the Rota Scheme in August 1930 the alliance between BAME seafarers and the SMM grew. Daily meetings were held on the Mill Dam by the SMM and members of the Arab community picketed the NUS

offices.<sup>111</sup> In July 1930 a meeting was held between NUS officials and South Shields Arab Boarding House Keepers. Following that meeting, several letters of opposition to the proposed scheme were sent to the local press by key members of the Arab community (*Shields Gazette*, 22 July 1930). Ali Said, Abdul Ali and Ahmed Alwin all contested similar points regarding the scheme. Alwin challenged the racialised nature of the scheme asking why white men are not also placed on the register as due to the Arab seamen being ‘British subjects they are entitled to all the rights of British seamen’ (*Shields Gazette*, 22 July 1930). These complaints exposed the complexities, limitations and detriments of aligning ‘Britishness’ with ‘whiteness’ through the formation of racialised exclusions within the NUS.

Abdul Ali presented a similar argument, quoting union officials present at the meeting with Arab Boarding House Keepers. When Mr Clouston, NUS District Secretary, was asked why the system is not being applied to white men, he stated that ‘I want to keep you and your men on one side as it will save a lot of trouble. I want your men to stay in the boarding houses and I will send for you when I want you’ (*Shields Gazette*, 22 July 1930). The implications of this language used by the union represents the precarious, commodified and subordinate position of BAME individuals, as racialised and imperial hierarchies were being reconstituted on shore in Britain (Tabili, 1994a). Ali Said built on these arguments and brought attention to the wider campaign of hate that had been instigated by the NUS and desired to make it clear to both the union and the wider white seafaring community that ‘the coloured seamen are not going to accept the rota system. They are going to support the white seamen and not be used against them’ (*Shields Gazette*, 22 July 1930). The desire to

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<sup>111</sup> WMRC MSS.175/7/LE/104 – Durham Assize – R E X vs Ali Said and others – Shorthand notes of trial - Day2 – 18 November 1930, p.22.



stand firm and resist the Rota Scheme was demonstrated by BAME seafarers throughout the summer of 1930. Their refusal to sign the Rota, and their alliance with white seafarers in the SMM, who were challenging the PC5, would become a distinct source of contestation.

Much to the frustrations of the SMM and the Arab community in South Shields, their peaceful protests, picketing and letters of outrage gained little sympathy from employers, politicians and the union. Tensions escalated on the 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1930 when South Shields experienced a riot of comparable scale to that which took place in February 1919. On the morning of 2<sup>nd</sup> August white and BAME seafarers gathered on the Mill Dam, many in search of employment, and, as had been a common occurrence in the months leading up to the implementation of the Rota Scheme, speeches were made from members of the SMM. A call for an engine room crew was made and a picket-line of SMM members and BAME seamen formed in front the of NUS offices. The crowd became agitated and when several white seafarers attempted to sign on, a rush was made, and a riot ensued.<sup>112</sup>

As has been demonstrated, spaces of (un)employment, such as the Mill Dam, were unstable and unpredictable spaces where encounters between BAME and white seafarers could range from violent to peaceful in their negotiation and outcome. It is clear that the ‘slow violence’ (Pain, 2019) of racialisation and exclusion in the workplace cannot be thought of as distinct from the outbreak of violence. As Kelliher (2020, p.3) argues in relation to the spatial politics of violence and the picket line in 1970s Britain:

‘These are mutually constituted temporalities of violence. State violence against pickets, this paper argues, was constructed in

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<sup>112</sup> For a detailed narrative account of the nature of the riot see Lawless, 1995, pp.135-148.

broader arenas than the immediate encounter between strikers and police. It was produced by the instructions of Home Secretaries, judges' strict interpretation of picketing law, and lobbying by employers' organisations. Agency in this sense is complex, rarely attributable to a single individual, but nevertheless present.'

Similarly, the event in South Shields on the 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1930, was not spontaneous, isolated or purely a 'race riot', although racism certainly circulated in these moments. This episode should be understood as a rupture in everyday life situated against a background of long-standing socioeconomic, political and racially exclusionary conditions and the expression of agency through an unpredictable encounter between white and BAME seafarers.

The riot broke out following white seafarers crossing the picket line, with many of those involved sustaining severe injuries (*Shields Gazette*, 05 August 1930) and the prosecution of those involved was heavily biased. The only white men arrested were members of the SMM and sixteen Arab seafarers were found guilty of participating in or instigating the riot and fourteen of those men were deported from Britain.<sup>113</sup>

Despite the brutal and racially biased policing of the riot and the hostilities demonstrated by the local white community in its aftermath, the Arab community stood strong and continued to resist the Rota Scheme by refusing to sign for several weeks. The role of the Arab Boarding House and its masters were integral to this expression of resistance as had they not been able and willing to financially support their men through unemployment, their solidarity would have likely collapsed much earlier. However, it was clear that the NUS and the Board of Trade were set on maintaining the new Rota Scheme and by mid-September 1930, the Chief Constable of South Shields reported to the Home Office that:

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<sup>113</sup> WMRC MSS.175/7/LE/105 – Durham Assize – R E X vs Ali Said and others – Shorthand notes of trial - Day 4 – 20 November 1930, p.6.

‘Any serious opposition to the Rota System has broken down and so far 235 Arabs and 78 Somalis have signed up. The number grows every day and I anticipate that in a few weeks, all coloured seamen to whom the system applies will be in the register.’<sup>114</sup>

The events of the summer of 1930 demonstrate the development of everyday agency within an ethnically diverse working class community. The alliance which formed between BAME seafarers and the SMM enabled multiple acts to emerge to contest and resist the Rota System (Lawless, 1995). Peaceful protests, picket lines and political meetings were organised frequently on the Mill Dam by the SMM and letters of complaint were written to union representatives, the local press and national institutions to bring attention to the exclusionary nature of the Rota System. These mundane and everyday acts are evidence of how agency, solidarity and contestation developed within the arenas of everyday life for those living and working in ethnically diverse port communities. There was a critical consciousness among the Arab Community in South Shields which sought to confront and struggle against conditions which were implemented to exclude them. This resistance was enabled by those in positions of power in the community and the kinship networks which were embedded into the Arab Boarding Houses across the township. Understanding the actions above as emergent resistance, and tracing it as it evolved within everyday life (Hughes, 2020), broadens conceptualisations of resistance and allows the everyday experiences of marginalised groups to be central to, rather than on the periphery of analysis.

The conditions and power structures that shaped everyday life in interwar port towns did not allow BAME individuals to engage in agency freely (Cumbers et al., 2010) neither were all acts successful (Coe and Jordhus-Lier, 2010), yet this does not detract from the attempts and actions themselves. The oppositional nature of everyday

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<sup>114</sup> TNA HO 45/14299 – Letter from Chief Constable of South Shields to the Home Office, 15 September 1930.

acts of contestation and resistance are significant regardless of their success, as Hughes (2020, p.6) argues, ‘even these ‘quiet’ actions at the level of the everyday remain purposefully oppositional; they are action on behalf of a cause – deliberate tactics with political orientations’. Thus far, this chapter has been centred on the actions of workers in challenging workplace exclusions, however, as will now be demonstrated, there is much to be gained for labour geography and labour history in extending analysis of agency and contestation beyond the worker, the workplace and the working day (Martin, 2021).

#### **6.4 – Everyday agency – beyond the workplace**

Despite frequent racist attacks, physical, verbal and bureaucratic, BAME communities did not accept and endure challenging and exclusionary conditions but developed strategies of coping and resistance (Ashe et al., 2016; Tabili, 1994a). As outlined by Ashe et al. (2016, p.36), racist violence and exclusionary behaviours ‘often provides the impetus for political action, including different forms of mobilisation’. This section will demonstrate how the development of agency and contestation in everyday moments reflects the significance of mundane acts by paying attention to the wider spectrum of experiences of contestation (Back, 2015).

This section expands notions of agentic acts away from grand moments of collective action and shifts focus from the worker, the workplace and the working day, instead paying attention to smaller, less visible and not always successful acts, which quite often remain purposeful and developed in opposition to processes of domination (Horton and Kraftl, 2009; Hughes, 2020). This framing contributes to debates and

conceptualisations of agency at the intersection between labour and historical geography to further existing contributions which look at subtle processes of agency based on lived experience (Emery, 2018; Hastings and Cumbers, 2019; Martin, 2021; McFarland, 2017; Newbery, 2013; Peck, 2018). This approach also speaks to the framing of the everyday and intersectionality that has been outlined in the literature review as there is the need to look beyond spaces of work to uncover the BAME presence in moments of labour struggle and contestation.

#### **6.4.1 – Community resilience and kinship networks**

The ways in which BAME seafaring communities navigated rising levels of unemployment during the economic depression in the 1920s and 1930s demonstrate resilient moments of agency. Katz (2004) outlines that agency through resilience is centred around the idea of the acts which enable individuals or communities to ‘get by’, whether that be financially, domestically or socially. The actions of the Arab Boarding House Keepers in South Shields are illustrative of resilience which was centred on ensuring the means for the community to ‘get by’ financially and socially (Katz, 2004), not only to maintain their employment in the merchant shipping industry but also to ensure the longevity of community life in the town.

Arab Boarding Houses were central institutions within BAME communities and the kinship networks these sites were embedded in was integral not only in resisting exclusionary conditions but also as a platform for financial support in times of unemployment. Tabili (1994a, p.139) highlights how the transient seafaring portion of BAME communities in the North East were ‘held together by bonds of kinship and

personal obligation'. Arab Boarding House Masters were key figures in organising men in times of protest, for example in resisting the 1930 Rota System, while being active agents in the organisation of localised and immediate financial relief.

Throughout the interwar period, the South Shields Arab community relied heavily upon collective community charity as they were frequently denied access to local and national unemployment relief (Lawless, 1995; Tabili, 1994a). Tensions between BAME seafarers and boarding house keepers, and local and national authorities over the need for state administered unemployment relief came to a head in 1930. The increasing levels of unemployment and the disastrous effect of the implementation and contestation of the Rota System in 1930 pushed the finances of many of the Arab Boarding House Keepers in South Shields to breaking point.

In the Colonial Office archives are letters and petitions from most, if not all, of the licensed Arab Boarding House Keepers in South Shields.<sup>115</sup> These petitions sought to bring to the attention of Government Officials the dire situation present among BAME seafarers living in the North East of England and implore the state for financial relief. Many of the letters are accompanied by logs which detail the significant debt the boarding house keepers had amassed throughout the 1920s to maintain their unemployed lodgers, and they make it clear that they were no longer in a position to continue such support (Figure 6.1).

After collectively amassing thousands of pounds of debt from their unemployed lodgers and making numerous unsuccessful and often unacknowledged

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<sup>115</sup> TNA CO 725/21/9 – This file which is dated September – November 1930 contains letters and petitions from the following Arab Boarding House Keepers in South Shields: Mr Ali Hamed Dheli; Mr M Muckble; Mr A Moshen; Mr Abdul Sophie; Mrs Josephine Hassan; Mr Abdo Osman; Mr Abdulla Hassan; Mr Muro Mocassar; Mr Ahmed Cassim; Mr Cassim Ali; Mr A Hamid; Mr Ali Said. These were the proprietors of the largest and most established Arab Boarding Houses in South Shields in 1930.

petitions to the Colonial Office and India Office for financial support,<sup>116</sup> as well as petitioning the South Shields Public Assistance Committee for outdoor relief for the unemployed seamen, the Arab Boarding House Keepers of South Shields were struggling to maintain their men. The Colonial Office responded collectively stating that ‘no responsibility can be accepted by His Majesty’s Government for the debts which any Arab seamen may owe you, since this is a matter which rests entirely between you and the seamen concerned’.<sup>117</sup> This response was common throughout the interwar period as refusing financial relief, other than supported repatriation, was a technique employed by local and national authorities and aligned with wider campaigns for the deportation and repatriation of BAME seafarers (Tabili, 1994a).

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<sup>116</sup> TNA CO 725/21/9 – Adenese Seamen General – 1930. This file contains ten petitions from Arab Boarding House Keepers in South Shields to the Colonial Office detailing the exact amounts owed to them by their lodgers and stressing the unsustainable nature of their support. They petitioned ardently for unemployment support to be granted to these men. The total amount of debt amassed and recorded by the Boarding House Keepers of South Shields throughout the 1920s was reported on the petitions to be £16,742 which in modern day worth is approximately £766,000.

<sup>117</sup> TNA CO 725/21/9 – Letter from The Under Secretary of State, Colonial Office to Mr A Mohsen, 31 October 1930. Mr A Mohsen had collated the petitions from the Arab Boarding House Keepers of South Shields in October 1930.

**Figure 6.1 – Petition from Mohamet Muckble to the Under Secretary of State for India, 1930 (TNA CO 725/21/9)**

MOHAMET MUCKBLE			BOARDING HOUSE KEEPER			GEAST HOLBOEN			SOUTH SHIELDS		
NAME	DATE	AMOUNT	NAME	DATE	AMOUNT	NAME	DATE	AMOUNT	NAME	DATE	AMOUNT
AHMET ALI	19/11/20	£13.0.0	JOHN ALBERT LOUIS	20/9/21	£30.0.0	HYDER ALI	9/1/22	£40.0.0			
HASSAN SALEH	16/9/21	25.0.0	BEN MOHAMET	29/7/21	40.0.0	ABDI SALLAMAN	24/3/22	10.10.0			
YACOB RAHINDAH	16/7/21	6.15.0	ABDUL HASSAN	19/7/21	2.0.0	ALI SALA	30/7/22	3.10.0			
ALI HAMADI	17/9/21	145.0.0	MOUSSA JAMA	27/11/21	87.0.0	HASSAN AHMET	22/3/22	10.10.0			
AHMET HYDRER	12/8/21	14.0.0	HASSA CASSAN	17/4/21	8.0.0	ABRAHIM MOHAMET	22/3/22	9.0.0			
MOHOMET MOSLEY	30/8/21	23.0.0	ALI SAID	19/11/21	4.15.0	MUSSA AHMET	5/12/22	10.0.0			
SILAN MOHAMET	22/4/21	38.0.0	ALI MOHAMET	11/11/22	60.0.0	AHMET MOHAMET	29/6/22	16.5.0			
SAID ABDULAR	17/7/21	15.10.0	CASSAM AHMET	9/1/22	3.10.0	ALI SAIF ELCOLADIA	12/3/22	2.10.0			
ISMAIL NALOOK	17/7/21	29.0.0	SALA AHMET	7/11/22	14.0.0	SALEM HASSAN	5/6/23	23.0.0			
ALI AHMET GOMIE	11/8/21	45.0.0	DOLLAR BIN ALI	2/6/22	13.10.0	HASSAN SALA	8/7/23	22.0.0			
ABDI MOHAMET	10/8/21	10.0.0	ALI ARI	10/1/22	34.10.0	KASSAM MOHAMET	6/7/23	23.0.0			
YOUSIF AHMET	20/9/21	50.0.0	HASSAN MULLEN	11/1/22	26.0.0	METHANA MOHAMED	7/5/23	10.0.0			
MOCKROOD ALI	19/10/21	77.0.0	MONASSAR ALI	12/10/22	34.0.0	VAPPUSHINGO DEVANGELLA	27/12/23	45.0.0			
MESEN METAN MARACE	11/8/21	40.0.0	ABDULAR SALA	20/10/22	34.0.0	NAEI AHMET	11/2/23	10.0.0			
FARRAH ALI	6/8/21	40.0.0	MOHAMET ALI	13/7/22	6.0.0	AHMET MUSSLA	23/1/23	10.0.0			
ISA MOHAMET	3/11/21	69.0.0	ALI SALA	30/11/22	8.0.0	MOHAMET HASSAN	22/1/23	8.0.0			
ABDULAR JANAN	16/9/21	88.0.0	AHMET SALEH	5/7/22	4.10.0	ABRAHIM MOHAMET	10/4/24	7.10.0			
ALI ABDULLAR	10/8/21	50.0.0	YOUSIF HELMI	15/6/22	20.0.0	SALAH ABDUL	10/4/24	24.0.0			
MUCKBIL SAID	10/8/21	20.0.0	ALI NASSAR	12/12/22	8.0.0	MOHAMET ALI	10/4/24	16.0.0			
ALI HAMADI	17/8/21	23.0.0	H.M. AIAL AHMED	27/3/22	10.10.0	ALI MOHAMET	15/2/24	15.10.0			
CASSIM FARRAH	8/6/21	7.10.0	AWED AHMET	28/3/22	10.10.0	IMAN DIN	30/5/28	7.10.0			
M. ALI	19/10/21	92.0.0	BASHA MOHAMET	28/3/22	10.10.0	SALAH RAGIAR	1/7/28	75.0.0			
ALI KASSAM	19/10/21	75.0.0	ALI KASSAM	21/6/22	52.0.0						
		£999.15.0			£574.5.0						
											£998.15.0
											574.5.0
											TOTAL £1972.15.0

The Under Secretary of State For India  
Economic & Overseas Dept  
India Office, Whitehall  
London, S.W.1.

Sir  
The above is a list of names of persons who have had food,  
board and lodging to the amount stated against their names and of which I hold promissary notes to repay same duly signed and witnessed on the dates shown in the list. The whole of the amount is still outstanding. I have staying with me at present 24 Arab seamen, who are unemployed through depression in the shipping industry. Our men do not want to go into the workhouse, and I ask on their behalf, if it is not possible to give some relief to these men, if it is not possible to give relief, will you please inform me if they are entitled to outdoor relief from the Public assistance committee, without being forced to go into the workhouse.

I am Sir  
your obedient servant  
Mohamet Muckble

Although this financial support had been central to the resilience of the Arab community in South Shields, it can be argued that the knowledge of this support by local and national government furthered compounded the need for intra-community support. Katz (2004, pp.245-246) argues that acts of resilience, such as everyday neighbouring, community self-help organisations or religious groups, not only enable material survival but can also preserve dignity and self-worth and, for much of the interwar period, the South Shields Arab community was proud in its relative financial self-sufficiency.<sup>118</sup> However, perceptions of community self-sufficiency can be a

<sup>118</sup> There are several examples of members of the Arab community writing to the *Shields Gazette* to challenge the idea of them being a financial drain on local resources and they often stress their independence and financial resilience as a community. For examples see *Shields Gazette*: 21 March 1923; 23 March 1923; 12 February 1925; 08 February 1929; 09 February 1929; 14 February 1929; 15 February 1929; 24 January 1930.



source of tension between minority communities and local and national institutions. DeVerteuil and Golubchikov (2016) bring attention to how such resilience can devolve responsibility from those in positions of authority and leave minority communities with access to fewer resources due to the belief that they can maintain themselves without the need for state involvement. Likewise, the decision to offer financial support to marginalised groups can be politically influenced and socially constructed around those who are seen to be ‘deserving of support’ (Askins, 2016) and it is clear from local and national opinion that local and national institutions believed BAME seafarers should be repatriated and not maintained in Britain (Jenkinson, 2009; Tabili, 1994a, 1994b).

The potentially conflicting nature of the acts of resilience employed by Arab Boarding House Masters in interwar South Shields and the capitalisation on this by local and national institutions offers an alternate perspective to the politics of kinship and community support. The significance of this intra-community form of charity as a means of sustenance and resilience was noted by many figures of authority across the region. For example, in 1930 the Chief Superintendent of the Mercantile Marine office in North Shields commented to the national Board of Trade that if it were not for the efforts of Boarding House Keepers and other BAME businessmen, many BAME seamen ‘would be obliged to seek aid from the Public Assistance Officers’.<sup>119</sup> Even as late as 1936, when unemployment levels began to decrease, the local press reported that ‘if it had not been for the freemasonry which exists between Arabs they would have been reduced to accepting indoor relief at Harton Institution long ago’ (*Shields Gazette*, 16 April 1936). Understood through this lens, both the practice of

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<sup>119</sup> TNA CO 725/21/8 Letter from William Walker, Chief Superintendent North Shields Mercantile Marine Office to The Assistant Secretary, Mercantile Marine Department, Board of Trade. 29 July 1930.

providing everyday financial relief and the actions made to campaign national and local institutions for state supported relief, is demonstrative of resilience. It is a resilience that developed despite racialised control, micro-aggressions and racist atmospheres of exclusion. Including everyday instances of resilience, such as the petitions and financial relief schemes noted above, is indicative of implicit moments of activism and agency (Horton and Kraftl, 2009) which were intentional in negotiating the exclusionary atmospheres in daily life in interwar South Shields.

#### **6.4.2 – Reworking: sustaining the Arab Boarding House**

Boarding houses were key institutions for BAME communities and spaces of kinship, belonging and support (Lawless, 1995), yet they were also represented as violent, dangerous and subversive of socio-political order.<sup>120</sup> Boarding houses were platforms from which collective community agency developed but their precarious bureaucratic position meant that they also needed distinct actions to sustain them. This section outlines the relational nature of spatial structures and agency (Coe and Lier, 2010), in order to centre analysis on everyday acts of reworking (Katz, 2004) as a significant form of agency in maintaining the Arab Boarding Houses, and indeed community, in South Shields. Building on Katz' (2004) definition, practices of reworking are those which alter or improve conditions of daily existence without explicitly challenging the existing structures and processes in place. As Coe and Lier (2010, p.216) highlight, 'it is not that participants agree with the hegemonic system, but rather reworking is about challenging the system on its own terms to try to reduce

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<sup>120</sup> See Chapter 4 (2)

some of its inequalities' and I argue that this was the case regarding the actions taken by prospective Arab Boarding House Keepers in interwar South Shields when navigating the bureaucracies of boarding house license applications.

For much of the interwar period, the majority of BAME boarding houses were in the waterfront wards of South Shields (Lawless, 1995). This housed the largest and most established community of Arab seafarers, as well as a smaller number of West Indian and West African seafarers.<sup>121</sup> Arab Boarding Houses were visible markers of the community (Figure 6.2) and they often had signage as to the nature of the business.<sup>122</sup> This visibility not only led to them being physically attacked but also ensured that they were sites of everyday bureaucratic, political and socioeconomic contestation. All attempts to attack these spaces were contested by the Arab community through a variety of mediums. As such, despite these spaces being central in organising the Arab community against exclusionary conditions and workplace struggles, they were also sites which required agency to maintain and uphold them in the everyday, such as acts of reworking when applying for boarding house licences.

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<sup>121</sup> See Appendix 1 for population statistics.

<sup>122</sup> For example, figure 6.2 shows the front of 'M. Muckble's Licensed Seamen's Boarding House Keeper and Restaurant for Arab, Somalis, Indians and Malays' which had been operating since 1913. (South Shields Corporation. Minutes of proceedings. Watch Committee Report. Vol.35, January - June 1913, p.342. Licence granted for Mohamet Muckble for Arab Boarding House at 20 Nelson's Bank, East Holborn)

**Figure 6.2** – Photograph of M. Muckble’s Boarding House, 11 East Holborn, South Shields, 1934 (South Tyneside Photo Archive)



Since the late nineteenth century, legislation stated that it was an offence for any private household to accommodate seafarers. It was an attempt by authorities to protect seamen against exploitation and subsequently they were required to stay in a registered seamen’s boarding house (Lawless, 1995, p.48). Applications had to be made for any seamen’s boarding house and required approval by the Chief Constable,

the Chief Medical Officer and the Town Council. The first Arab boarding house in South Shields was established in early 1909 by Ali Said<sup>123</sup> and as the population of Arab seamen increased and declined so did the number of Arab boarding houses peaking at approximately 65 licensed Arab Boarding Houses in the late 1920s and decreasing to approximately 45 in 1939, following the slum clearance of much of the Holborn Ward.<sup>124</sup> As the economic depression of the 1920s set in, the demand for maritime labour declined and the housing of Arab seafarers became an increasing source of debate and consternation among the white community and local authorities in South Shields.

In terms of employment, Arab boarding houses were represented as problematic in that they sustained BAME seamen – who were portrayed and perceived to be an economic burden on the town – increasing competition for already scarce housing and employment opportunities as well as being represented as a threat to moral and social order.<sup>125</sup> These attitudes were presented habitually in local newspapers which regularly argued a position that:

‘Arab boarding houses are not essential to British industrial welfare as they only exist to supply what displaces our own seamen and this adds to the burden of our town and country.’ (*Shields Gazette*, 11 February 1929)

These views were not confined to the working people of the town but also prevalent among those in bureaucratic positions, such as members of the Town Council. Throughout the 1920s, clear attempts were made by renowned racist Councillors, such as Cheeseman and Linney (Byrne, 1994), to restrict the settlement

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<sup>123</sup> South Shields Corporation. Minutes of proceedings. Watch Committee Report. Vol.28, July - December 1909, p.257. Application for an Arab Seamen’s Boarding House on Nile Street made by Ali Said. 18 August 1909.

<sup>124</sup> South Shields Corporation. Minutes of proceedings. Watch Committee Report. Vol.28, July - December 1909 to Vol.89, January - June 1940.

<sup>125</sup> See Chapter 4 (4.2) and 5 (3.3)

of the Arab community in the town. One way this was attempted in the 1920s, was through challenging and politicising applications for Arab Boarding House licenses. Certain councillors were especially zealous regarding the ‘danger’ that Arab boarding houses could potentially have on the township and that controlling and limiting Arab Boarding Houses was a means of controlling the population itself. In the late 1920s, Councillor Linney and Councillor Cheeseman were two of the most impassioned advocates for using boarding house licences to limit and spatially manipulate the Arab population in the borough. In a town council meeting in February 1929, which was discussing applications for the issuing of new Arab Boarding House licenses, both Linney and Cheeseman spoke out against the granting of the licenses as they:

‘Did not regard them (Arabs) as desirable neighbours, and they should not be encouraged. The more licenses granted to them, the more they encouraged their importation in this borough.’ (Quote from Councillor Linney, *Shields Gazette*, 07 February 1929)

Cheeseman went even further to explicitly racialize the community, incorporating hierarchical imperial ideologies to reiterate his point stating that:

‘It was not fit and proper for them to live amongst white people no matter how thick the veneer of civilisation might be. They would find that sort of civilisation more in the dress they wore than in anything else. Take that away and they would find the real Asiatic.’ (*Shields Gazette*, 07 February 1929)

The racist views expressed by councillors and the restrictive conditions they sought to impose, did not go unchallenged by those whom they sought to marginalise. In direct response to a comment made by Cheeseman, Hassan Mohamed, Arab Boarding House Keeper and the local secretary of the Western Islamic Association, wrote to the *Shields Gazette* to protest the community’s indignation. He wrote:

‘According to the Councillors Cheeseman and Linney the Arabs in South Shields appear to be the most undesirable people in the world... Yet we owe allegiance to the British government and claim

its protection. We have tried to live together in South Shields without annoying others and have restricted ourselves to the 'slums'... We invite any councillor to inspect our houses (which are also subject to strict police supervision) and see himself if they are not clean and properly conducted... The British nation boasts of Freedom and Justice to all. We only ask for this, and it is only the narrow-minded or selfish people who refuse it.' (*Shields Gazette*, 09 February 1929)

As Mohamed demonstrates, the BAME community was aware of the racist beliefs of those in positions of bureaucratic power in the town and strongly affirms an awareness of the rights that they are entitled to as British Colonial Subjects, regardless of the 'narrow-minded' views of certain councillors. Furthermore, Mohamed states that the community has 'restricted themselves to the slums', which made up most of the Holborn, Shields and Mill Dam Wards along the waterfront of the town. The consequences of the Arab Boarding Houses largely being located in wards with poor quality dwellings, overcrowded conditions and poor sanitation had led to these lodgings being represented as overtly dirty and directly a consequence of the Arab community. The association of BAME individuals and communities as 'filthy' and 'unclean' can be linked with wider representations of the civilising mission of Empire which developed clear distinctions between civilised Western culture and the uncivilised nature of those whom were colonised (Said, 1978).<sup>126</sup> Although such circulating representations corresponded with prevailing belief systems for much of the interwar period, and indeed originated long before then, as Tyler (2013) suggests, the imagination or perception of a group as being 'filthy' or a 'public health threat' involves complicity and action at a community-wide level. In this regard, it is not only how these representations were articulated from across all levels of the white community that provides the most insight into the everyday experience, but also how

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<sup>126</sup> See Chapter 4

such representations were confronted and contested by those whom they sought to exclude.

Since the increased arrival and settlement of BAME seafarers in South Shields during the First World War, the Arab community was often blamed for making living conditions in the town 'worse than ever before' (*Shields Gazette*, 07 February 1929). This popular opinion was often capitalised upon by those in positions of power and used to refuse the granting of Arab Boarding House licenses on the grounds of vague 'sanitary deficiencies'.<sup>127</sup> Prospective Arab Boarding House Keepers were well aware that they were consistently scrutinised to a higher standard than what was expected from their white counterparts and sought not only to resist the imposed conditions but rather, through everyday actions, rework the options available to them under the current bureaucratic regime to secure the granting of their licences. Paying such attention to how Arab Boarding House Keepers negotiated and reworked these complex conditions of exclusion, highlights the way in which reworking can be understood as an everyday form of agency (Katz, 2004).

For example, in South Shields, there are several examples of those who were refused Arab Boarding House licenses on sanitary grounds, undertaking extensive work to refute the stated reason for their application being denied. This reworking of conditions can be seen from as early as 1914 when Mary Ellen Said, wife of Ali Said, was denied an application for a Boarding House licence for a property adjacent to their

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<sup>127</sup> There are 17 cases from 1909-1939 where Arab boarding house licences were refused due to 'sanitary defects' which was largely due to vague observations such as 'damp in the property' or 'insufficient ventilation'. Such comments rarely appear on applications for white Seamen's Boarding House Licenses although they were situated in similar buildings and often on the same streets. Data regarding both white and Arab Boarding House license applications has been collated from South Shields Corporation. Minutes of proceedings. Watch Committee Report. Vol.28, July - December 1909 to Vol.87, January - June 1939.



current business due to ‘the poor condition of the premises’.<sup>128</sup> Not willing to abandon the prospective business opportunity, she reapplied for a licence for the same property three months later, after undertaking the necessary renovations and was granted a license to accommodate seventeen men.<sup>129</sup> This not only demonstrates persistence but also a complex interaction of working within seemingly unchangeable conditions whilst simultaneously reworking a pragmatic response to the situation (Katz, 2004). This practice enacted by prospective Arab Boarding House Keepers continued throughout the interwar period but was not always met with immediate success.

In 1929, Abdulla Hamid was denied a licence to operate an International Boarding House from a building which used to be a public house on Coronation Street. In order to meet the sanitary requirements insisted upon by the Chief Medical Officer he spent £200 refurbishing the property (*Shields Gazette*, 2 May 1929). At a Town Council Meeting to discuss the reapplication for his license, Councillor Cheeseman publicly criticised Hamid for the investment he had made in his prospective business stating that:

‘He (Cheeseman) wondered what boarding house keeper, other than an Arab, could afford to spend £200 on furnishing a building... he would like to see an English lodging-house keeper with £200 to spend; some of them could not even pay their rates.’ (*Shields Gazette*, 2 May 1929)

Cheeseman, in this explicit statement, was implying that Arab Boarding House Keepers were becoming wealthy through the bribery and corruption that they participated in to obtain work for their lodgers, while white boarding house keepers were in financial distress (*Shields Gazette*, 2 May 1929). Having pre-empted that there

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<sup>128</sup> South Shields Corporation. Minutes of proceedings. Watch Committee Report. Vol.37, January - June 1914, p.224.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p.755.

would be contention over his second application, Hamid employed a solicitor to act on his behalf at the license hearing. His solicitor gave evidence of his client's excellent character, exceptional condition of the house and the positive reports from both the Chief Constable and the Chief Medical Officer and after some deliberation, Hamid was then granted his license.<sup>130</sup> Arab Boarding House Keepers were significant figures in the BAME community, many of them being retired seafarers who married and settled in the town to open businesses. They were in a privileged financial and social position compared to their lodgers and their role in developing boarding houses as platforms from which community agency could be developed is demonstrative of the complex intersection of race and class in interwar Britain.

As demonstrated in Figure 6.3, following the riot on the Mill Dam in February 1919 the number of successful applications for Arab Boarding House licenses, extensions and transferral of licenses declined rapidly and did not begin to increase again until 1923.<sup>131</sup> A similar pattern can be seen in the early 1930s following the riot in August 1930, where licences were not granted until the commencement of the slum clearance program in 1934.<sup>132</sup>

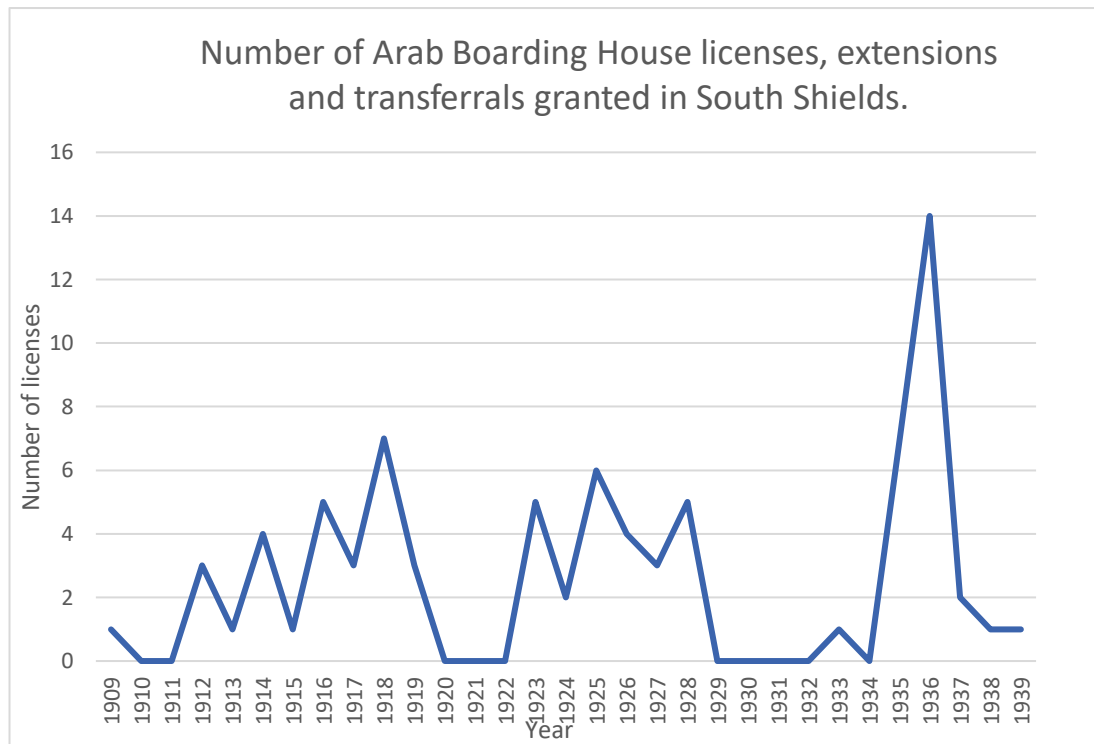
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<sup>130</sup> South Shields Corporation. Minutes of proceedings. Watch Committee Report. Vol.68, July - December 1929, p.859

<sup>131</sup> Data collected from South Shields Corporation. Minutes of proceedings. Watch Committee Report. Vol.47, January - June 1919 to Vol.57, January - June 1924.

<sup>132</sup> Data collected from South Shields Corporation. Minutes of proceedings. Watch Committee Report. Vol.69, January - June 1930 to Vol.78, July - December 1934.

**Figure 6.3** – Number of Arab Boarding House licenses, extensions and transferrals granted in South Shields, 1909-1939



These moments of racialised disorder had a lasting impact on the everyday experience and the development of agency that would be employed to challenge racist bureaucratic approaches to Arab Boarding House licence applications in interwar South Shields, maintaining the boarding house as a key institution and medium through which community agency developed. The persistent and patient practices of Boarding House Keepers to protect their businesses, which were central to the everyday lives of the BAME community, evidences agency through reworking (Katz, 2004). These acts sought to develop practices to improve the conditions of everyday life and create enabling spaces, both socially and politically, without outrightly challenging the inequalities of the system (Katz, 2004). In this regard, as DeVerteuil and Golubchikov (2016) argue, smaller acts of everyday agency, such as challenges made by Arab Boarding House Keepers to the Town Council, often sustained the survival of a community and acted as a precursor for transformative action, and it is

through this lens that the more organised, networked and resistant agency of the 1930s should be understood.

#### **6.4.3 – The role of white working class women**

The significant role of white working class women in supporting and sustaining BAME communities in interwar Britain has been subject to much analysis (Bland, 2005; Brown, 2005; Frost, 2000; Rowe, 2000; Tabili, 1994a). There has perhaps been less focus on how the mundane actions of women connected to BAME communities in this period were connected more widely to agency and resistance within these places. These women complicated social and bureaucratic boundaries of ‘local’, ‘white’ and BAME communities present in the port towns of interwar Britain (Brown, 2005). White women were significant defenders, activists and mediators for minority communities, which through marriage they were now often part of, but they also experienced personal challenges and a precarious position within these ethnically diverse working class communities.

Askins (2016) in her work on the everyday geographies of befriending, stresses that inter-ethnic encounters are far from simplistically positive or easy, but are situated in intricate negotiations of emotional geographies enacted in both private and public spaces. This section argues that the everyday actions of white women connected to BAME communities should be conceived as agency. Although, as Horton and Kraftl (2009, p.15) note, these acts are agentic, they are ‘a sort expressed in non-traditional, multiple styles that are quite different from the ostensibly more spectacular practices’ that have commonly been associated with agency and activism. This relaxes the

boundaries between agency and everyday life and uncovers the co-constitutive nature of the distinct socioeconomic and political conditions white women faced which sought to marginalise and racialize them, their families and their community through their association with BAME men.

The involvement of white working class women with BAME men proved to be a significant source of tensions in inter-war port communities and there has been work which suggests these tensions were linked to the racialised disorder in 1919 (Jenkinson, 2009; May and Cohen, 1974; Rowe, 2000). The nature of available archival material, or rather lack thereof, which brings attention to the experiences and perspectives of working class women means that it can be challenging to develop an account which centres their everyday experiences of agency. In order to overcome such challenges, this section draws upon the limited material available regarding the North East and triangulates it with available scholarship regarding larger port cities such as Liverpool, to develop an account which is indicative of the everyday experience of white working class women connected to the South Shields Arab Community.

White women who had relationships with or were married to BAME men in the North East had a complex identity which was, as McDowell (2008, p.491) argues, 'multiple and fluid, continuously (re)produced and performed in different arenas of everyday life'. Although their 'whiteness' and 'Britishness' allowed them privilege in certain situations and spaces, they often had unpredictable experiences within the ethnically diverse communities in the region. Frost (2000, p.206), in her work on the Kru community in early twentieth century Liverpool, argues that white Liverpoolian women often 'belonged to two parallel communities in which their status as white-British was obscured by their associations and identifications with the black

community'. White women who married BAME men often faced ostracization from their white family and friends and this rejection 'served to strengthen their identity with and loyalty to the black community' (Frost, 2000, p.207). Including the perspectives and experiences of white women who were connected to BAME communities demonstrates the diversity prevalent in working class settlements in the North East and contributes to the development of an inclusive history where marginalised voices are central to the narrative. It also speaks back to the discussion of everyday life and intersectionality as explored in the early literature review.

The ostracization faced by white women married to BAME men can be seen in many instances across the port towns of the North East in the interwar period. For example, in the 1921 boarding house 'scandal' in South Shields, that was discussed in detail in Chapter 5 (3.3), the young white woman who was found with her Arab partner and baby residing in an Arab Boarding House, turned to the Arab community for support after she had been, to quote the defence solicitor:

'Ostracised by her own family and English friends. According to her own story she had been put out. Where was she to go to get a night's rest for herself and her baby.' (*Shields Gazette*, 09 December 1921)

This demonstrates how women who were married to or in a relationship with BAME men, turned to the Arab community and its institutions for support and became to identify with, 'belong' to and participate within community life.

Furthermore, the nature of seafaring work meant that women who were married to seafarers often lived alone onshore with their children while their husbands were away working. A significant part of working class domestic life was the reliance on kinship and family support (Frost, 2000). For those white women who had been distanced from their white families for marrying a BAME man, participation in the

kinship network within the Arab community could have reduced the social and familial isolation they faced and increased them in embracing the community as their own. Their feelings of inclusion in these communities strengthened their sense of belonging and shaped how some women would articulate community challenges to those in positions of power and confront and resist racist attitudes in everyday life.

A consistent way that many white women confronted and challenged racist representations and exclusionary conditions was through letter writing to the local press and national institutions. These letters provide a glimpse into how white women negotiated the contentious politics and racist opinions of white members of the community who overtly condemned the morals of white women married to BAME individuals and also their children. In 1923, 'A white mother of six' wrote to the *Shields Gazette* to challenge the popular assumption that they were unhappy and inadequately provided for by their Arab husbands stating that:

'They are kind and gentle to their wives and children. Even if the coloured gentlemen of Holborn had to resort to sell oranges they would do it willingly to support the white wife they chose to share their lives and their kiddies; they look after their own and take care of what they have.' (*Shields Gazette*, 23 March 1923)

This letter responded directly to one that had been published a few days prior which drew from orientalist representations of BAME men, suggesting that members of the Arab community should be deported 'back to their native land to eat rice, sell oranges and the other things the lord put them on earth for' (*Shields Gazette*, 17 March 1923). Such letters implicitly challenged racialised and orientalist representations of the community whilst simultaneously rebutting common negative assumptions about mixed-race relationships. Including the resistant voices, as documented here, is crucial for any characterisation of social history during these times.

Similarly in 1929, the local press published a racist report given by Councillor's Linney and Cheeseman on the South Shields Arab community at a town council meeting where they reported issues of overcrowding and the medical threat of tubercular Arabs in the town. The report also described the financial cost of the community on the ratepayers, including a child whose white mother had died and Arab father was away at sea, thus further condemning mixed-race families (*Shields Gazette*, 07 February 1929). These remarks fuelled many angry and hostile letters from white members of the community who called for drastic actions to be taking against the Arab Community, such as demolishing all Arab Boarding Houses and even deporting unemployed BAME men, for the supposed benefit of the town.<sup>133</sup> In response, 'An Arab's Wife', wrote a detailed response stating that Arab children are looked after as well as, if not better than, some white children in the borough (*Shields Gazette*, 14 February 1929). Another 'white woman' married to an Arab reinforced the significance of kinship and charity within the community as they 'have not to send them to the school for tickets, nor yet apply to the police station for boots for our kiddies' thus asserting that they were not in receipt of financial support from the township (*Shields Gazette*, 15 February 1929).

Although such letters may seem banal and of little consequence, they are indicative of some of the everyday actions made by white women who were part of the Arab community through marriage. These acts included contesting racist assumptions, derogatory remarks and acting in defence of their community in the face of popular

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<sup>133</sup> Many angry letters were received by the *Shields Gazette* by white members of the community following the publication of Linney and Cheeseman's report to the town council. For examples see: *Shields Gazette*, 08 February 1929, 09 February 1929, 11 February 1929, 14 February 1929, 15 February 1929.



racism. The archive records are suggestive of a resilience to these conditions but also a desire to resist attempts at diminishing their lives, community and family.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, in 1930 many Arab Boarding House Keepers in South Shields wrote directly to the Colonial Office and India Office to protest exclusionary conditions in the industry and seek financial support for their unemployed boarders. The white wives of Arab Boarding House Keepers were significant figures in defending the key institution through a variety of bureaucratic and more direct means. As argued by Tabili (1994a), the white wives of Arab Boarding House Keepers were more likely to be literate in English and also familiar with local culture and bureaucratic processes thus in a privileged position to assist their husbands negotiate onshore politics.

From as early as 1912, Mary Ellen Said, the wife of the prominent Arab Boarding House Keeper Ali Said, was granted licenses for boarding houses in East Holborn which were adjacent to those licensed to her husband.<sup>134</sup> Lawless (1995) suggests that women applied for licenses as because of their whiteness and established social networks in the town they had a higher likelihood of success, yet from analysis of these records it is apparent that women had a similar acceptance and refusal rate as BAME male applicants for Arab Boarding Houses.<sup>135</sup> Throughout the first half of the twentieth century many other wives of Arab Boarding House Keepers applied for these licenses (Figure 6.4) both independently and to take over the business when their husbands passed away. This implies that these women were acting independently and were respected figures of the community, willing to support their lodgers and must be

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<sup>134</sup> South Shields Corporation. Minutes of proceedings. Watch Committee Report. Vol.34, July - December 1912, p.61.

<sup>135</sup> Data was collected on all applications for 'Coloured Seamen's Boarding House License Applications' from 1909-1948 from South Shields Corporation. Minutes of proceedings. Watch Committee Report. Vol.28, July - December 1909 – Vol.106, July - December 1948.

considered as more than mediators or simply, because of their whiteness, as a facade for their husband's businesses.

**Figure 6.4 – Applications for Arab Boarding Houses made by white women in South Shields, 1912-1941**

Date	Name	Address	Outcome
17 July 1912	Mary Ellen Said	79a East Holborn	Granted
20 May 1914	Mary Ellen Said	77-79 East Holborn	Granted
21 June 1916	Elizabeth Said	83 East Holborn	Granted
23 January 1918	Josephine Hassan	20 East Holborn	Denied – Sanitary Defects
20 November 1918	Catherine Hassen	1 Nile Street	Granted
21 January 1920	Mary Hamid	20 East Holborn	Denied – Premises not suitable
19 May 1926	Catherine Hassen	39 East Holborn	Granted
03 October 1928	Elizabeth (Elsie) Cassim	41 East Holborn	Denied – Premises not suitable
11 February 1930	Gwendoline May Abdul	85 West Holborn	Denied transfer from deceased Mohamed Abdul
18 November 1931	Elizabeth (Elsie) Cassim	79a East Holborn	Denied transfer from Ali Said (deported)
13 September 1933	Florence Ahmed	39 East Holborn	Denied transfer from Mrs Catherine Hassan
22 May 1935	Josephine Hassan	10 Chapter Row	Granted
20 November 1935	Phillis Khan	23 Ocean Road	Denied
11 February 1940	Mrs K. Rasul Kahn	11 Market Place	Denied
17 April 1940	Gladys Mary Hamid	142 Commercial Road and 67 Coronation Street	Granted transfer from deceased Abdul Hamid
23 April 1941	Hilda May Majali	42 Wilson Street	Granted

Providing financial relief for unemployed boarders was a significant practice in Arab Boarding houses and has already been discussed in detail in this chapter, yet female Arab Boarding House Keepers were also taking part in this community practice. In October 1930, Mrs Josephine Said Hassan, licensed boarding house keeper, wrote to the Colonial Office along with other prominent Arab Boarding House Keepers in South Shields to petition the government for financial relief for their boarders.<sup>136</sup> Mrs Hassan details that in 1929 and 1930 she had amassed £672.00 of debt in maintaining her unemployed lodgers. Although evidence surrounding the organisation of Arab Boarding House Keepers in South Shields is scant, the collective nature of this petition and the inclusion of Mrs Hassan, suggests that white women in the Arab community were respected, valued and should be seen as active agents in contesting exclusionary conditions that impacted the everyday life of the community.

Not only did women mediate for and defend their community at the bureaucratic level, there were also cases where this was acted upon publicly at the street level. Following the riot in South Shields in February 1919, conflict erupted outside of an Arab Boarding House in Holborn between three white women. It was reported in the local press that Dora Sharp, who was employed as a domestic assistant in an Arab Boarding House, appeared in the police court for reportedly ‘having caused a disturbance in East Holborn’ and ‘using threatening language’ towards two other women (*Shields Gazette*, 08 February 1919). At the police court, it was ascertained that the confrontation had arisen when two women had reportedly provoked Sharp by making remarks about the Arab community and questioning her morals for associating with the community (*Shields Gazette*, 08 February 1919). It appears that an argument

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<sup>136</sup> TNA CO 725/21/9 - Collective Letter to the Under Secretary of State for India and individual petitions from M Muckble, Abdul Sophie, Mrs Josephine Hassan, Abdo Osman and Abdulla Hassan – 1st October 1930.

broke out and the police were summoned where they arrested, and later fined, Dora Sharp for ‘using threatening language and acting in a disorderly manner’ (*Shields Gazette*, 08 February 1919). As she was being arrested, it was reported that she shouted out in protest, ‘I wouldn’t leave the Arab house for twenty of you... I’m probably going to marry one tomorrow. Happy Days!’ (*Shields Gazette*, 08 February 1919). Three weeks later she married Saleh Raga, an Arab seafarer.<sup>137</sup> Dora was just one of many women who, in the interwar period, publicly defended the community that through marriage they were now part of.

The experience of Dora Sharp is demonstrative of the complexities of racialisation in ethnically diverse working class communities in the interwar period and complicates a binary understanding of ‘race’. As Carby (2019) argues, ‘race’ is not biological but rather a series of complex practices which assigns difference to people under particular historical and spatial conditions. Carby (2019) draws upon the memories of her white mother being ostracised for dancing with her Jamaican father and how, in being brave and proud of her relationship, she must have been aware of how her body was being racialised and ‘that her whiteness had a value and she was willing to risk her worth’ (Carby, 2019, p.71). Although impossible to say with absolute certainty, due to the limitations of the archive, it can be inferred that white women in the North East who were married to BAME men could have been aware of the ways in which their bodies were now being racialised by white society and how this shaped their everyday experiences of navigating life in an ethnically diverse working class community. The actions of Dora Sharp suggest she was not ashamed of

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<sup>137</sup> South Tyneside Council Registry Office, Register of marriages, Register, R116, Entry 117.

being associated with the Arab community and although aware of the antagonisms such an association caused, she chose to become a part of that community.

The agency of working class women connected to BAME communities across the North East often receives superficial or fleeting attention in the regional historiography (Jenkinson, 2009; Lawless, 1995; Tabili, 2011). Yet these women, through their everyday actions, became significant members, defenders, advocates and mediators of the BAME communities which they were part of and therefore contributes to an evolving understanding of agency beyond the worker, the workplace and the working day. These women petitioned local and national institutions both on behalf of their community and as independent businesswomen, they defended racist slurs made against them, their husbands and children in the press, and they spoke out against exclusionary conditions in the street and in judicial and bureaucratic spaces. I argue that their actions should not go unnoticed or be diminished in the historical record and are indicative of the ‘the real, banal, messy, faltering ways in which activism happens’ (Horton and Kraftl, 2009, p.17) in everyday life.

This section has demonstrated how less visible and non-traditional forms of agency are embedded into the everyday life of a multi-ethnic working class. It was accessed and expressed in multiple, if not always consistent or successful, ways. The resilient actions of Arab Boarding House Keepers and their wives and how they sought to rework and confront exclusionary conditions demonstrates how agency can reshape racialised dynamics and structures of power to maintain communities socially, economically and politically. This highlights the relevance of bringing together labour and historical geographies of the everyday to develop an account which centres minority perspectives and agency.

## 6.5 – Conclusion

This chapter has built upon the key themes discussed throughout this thesis to articulate how representations and exclusionary conditions were contested in everyday encounters between BAME and white communities. In continuing to employ a lens of the everyday it has been possible to outline the significance that the intersecting dynamics of power, ‘race’, gender and class had on the expression of agency and contestation among BAME communities in the port towns of the North East throughout the interwar period. Understanding less visible or subtle acts contributes to a relational understanding of resistance/ domination as a lived experience, especially through acts of resilience, reworking and resistance. This supports the furthering of an inclusive history of the working class in the region, situated at the intersection of labour and historical geography.

Spaces of (un)employment became some of the most contentious spaces within port towns as the depressed economic situation in interwar period played out in racialised terms. Nevertheless, this chapter stresses the unstable and unpredictable nature of inter-ethnic encounters in these spaces and argues against the association of expected violence in moment of confrontation over employment. Through foregrounding more banal and alternatively negotiated moments of workplace dispute, which are rarely part of the historiography (Jenkinson, 2009; Tabili, 1994a), it can be argued that riots, or violent outbreaks, were only one of many potential outcomes following moments of racialised employment conflict yet were still significant in furthering racialised exclusions for some time within and beyond the volatile spaces of (un)employment. Including these moments has furthered an understanding of racial difference as a lived experience which is sensitive to a variety of socioeconomic, temporal and spatial conditions which are inherently unpredictable, thus detracting

from the simplistic association of BAME seafarers with particular moments of violence.

This chapter has also demonstrated the importance of thinking within and beyond exceptional episodes of racialised disorder and unpacking the complexities and locally specific conditions, to allow smaller, less visible and everyday acts of exclusion and dissent to be recognised as significant and constitutive of longer trajectories of unrest and the development of agency (DeVerteuil and Golubchikov, 2016). By shifting analysis of the 1930 riot in South Shields away from the violence to the moments in which agency and solidarity was constructed and experienced in the everyday, it becomes apparent that there were multiple connections between disparate but marginalised groups within the working class demonstrating how agency and intersectional alliances developed within a multi-ethnic working class (Kelliher, 2017). This not only demonstrates the temporalities of violence (Kelliher, 2020) but also the prevalent atmospheres of racialised exclusion present in interwar Britain (Closs Stephens, 2016). This atmosphere of exclusion can be seen in the implicit and explicit structures of institutional racism, large moments of racialised disorder and the everyday inter-ethnic encounters which were experienced within these ethnically diverse communities in interwar Britain.

The chapter culminated with discussions expanding an analysis of agency and contestation away from the seafarer, the NUS and the shipping industry, and brought attention to smaller, less visible and not always successful acts which were purposeful and developed in opposition to specific attempts and policies of exclusion. The significance of the acts of resilience and reworking enacted by Arab Boarding House Keepers and white women connected to BAME communities, should not be

diminished but rather seen as purposeful and central in sustaining the community and being enacted alongside more transformative and collective acts of resistant agency.

In conclusion, this chapter has brought together key themes from throughout this thesis to develop an account which outlines some of the ways in which representations and conditions of exclusion were actively confronted, resisted and contested in the everyday lives of BAME communities across the North East throughout the interwar period. It has argued that agency is a lived experience which should not be understood by confining analysis to exceptional or successful moments of collective action, but rather highlight how more mundane and less visible acts were purposefully enacted on behalf of a cause, which was more apparent at certain times than others (Horton and Kraftl, 2009; Hughes, 2020). The everyday acts discussed in this chapter should be understood as part of broader regional working class moments of contestation and appreciated not only as part of a racially inclusive history of the North East but as reflective of the uneven and contested development of a multi-ethnic working class in the early twentieth century.



## Chapter 7 – Conclusion

### 7.1 – Introduction

This thesis has explored the presence of ‘race’ across the North East of England through three related lenses – representations, conditions and agency. This approach has allowed the presence of ‘race’ – both visible and invisible – within working class communities to become central to, rather than on the periphery of, the labour history of the region. The empirical examples, uncovered through archival research, used throughout this thesis are indicative of the wider everyday experiences of BAME people in interwar Britain. The 1931 deportations, the ‘African Village’ at the 1929 North East Coast Exhibition and the multiple workplace contestations, for example, suggest both a material and atmospheric presence of ‘race’ in the everyday lives of the ethnically diverse communities in the region. These ‘forgotten moments’ should be brought forward and included in the regional history. Including these moments in understanding North East history allows us to rethink and reshape working class histories and be attentive to the diversity present.

Even though the mobility of migrant members of the working class were often constituted in subordinate ways, framed in racial hierarchical theories and rooted in colonialist practices (Davies, 2013), as Featherstone (2012, p.43) argues, ‘they were active in the formation of the working class consciousness as they contested and challenged the socio-economic and political conditions that were imposed on them’. Asserting the presence of such acts and ‘turning up the volume’ of these experiences is crucial for a more inclusive historical geography of the North East. Inclusivity has not been deployed in this thesis as an aim for quantitative balance, but instead utilised

as a call to foreground actors and experiences, particularly those reflecting the ethnic diversity of early twentieth century Britain, which have previously been marginalised in regional histories.

Uncovering and accessing the presence of ‘race’ and the everyday experiences it shaped was not an easy or straightforward task. When I began this thesis, I assumed that once I found BAME experiences and perspectives in the archival record, a coherent narrative which was distinct from the wider historiography (Lawless, 1995; Tabili, 2011) would be traceable. In actuality, the everyday moments and experiences I uncovered in the archive were, as Carby (2019, p.2) has similarly outlined in her recently published *Imperial Intimacies*, often in juxtaposition and ‘revealed the shards of conflict and contradiction that familial, national and imperial ideologies work to conceal’. Throughout this thesis, I have argued for an enhanced understanding of the everyday experience of ethnically diverse working class communities and as this work has developed, it has become clear that the everyday is not just banal moments of obscurity in daily life, it can also be found within the wider atmosphere within the spaces. My account of circulating influences and knowledge includes sensationalised riots, the racialised arrests, the deportations, the exhibitions – which affirms the inextricable links between the presence of ‘race’ in everyday, local moments, and the broader national and international structures of colonialism and Empire which constructed and sustained this presence. The connection between the atmospheric presence of ‘race’ and the everyday experience can be seen in moments such as when a reporter from the *Shields Gazette*, recalled his experience of interviewing an Arab Boarding House Master as ‘harmless but hair raising’ and evoked his knowledge of

Hali Baba and Arabian Nights as a lens through which he understood what should have been a mundane and banal experience (*Shields Gazette*, 20 April 1936).<sup>138</sup>

This thesis has demonstrated that characterising the everyday must avoid a binary understanding of the exceptional and the mundane. In order to create more inclusive histories, we need to rethink the relationship between intimate and broad structures of racism. In doing so, the thesis has drawn out the connected nature of experience through the relational lenses of representations, conditions and agency. Representations of BAME communities as violent and dangerous (see Chapter 4), for instance, informed everyday encounters and the conditions of everyday life (see Chapter 5) which were consistently contested by BAME communities who challenged these restrictive conditions and representations through collective and individual action (see Chapter 6). It is the circulating and aggregative influence of these relations that shaped how minority communities were present within multiple scales of representation. The presence of ‘race’ in everyday life is not neatly bounded but all-encompassing, fluid and often contradictory, and it is these narratives of heterogeneity that histories of the working class in Britain should foreground and question. This final chapter begins with a summary of the key contributions of this thesis and concludes with a discussion on the practicalities of this type of research and calls for further research to be taken to develop usable pasts and inclusive histories.

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<sup>138</sup> Detailed in Chapter 4 (2.1).

## 7.2 – Thesis contributions

This thesis is the result of extensive archival research and engagement with varied conceptual works across the humanities and social sciences. In this regard, the research contributes to several established fields of research through a historical geography approach. As demonstrated, there is much to be gained in uncovering an intersectional and everyday historical presence of marginalised groups in Britain, a presence which is material and atmospheric and has been enhanced through contributing to current debates in representations, conditions and agency. As outlined in the introductory chapter, this thesis sought to address three key research questions:

1. How were representations of racial difference experienced and negotiated within and through everyday encounters in the North East of England?
2. To what extent did ‘exceptional episodes’ of racialised disorder intersect with the geographies and conditions of everyday life within ethnically diverse working class communities in interwar Britain?
3. How did everyday moments of resistance and agency contribute to the lives of ethnically diverse communities across the North East of England in the early twentieth century?

These questions have been addressed throughout the empirical chapters which have been centred thematically around representations, conditions and agency. Although there are multiple contributions which have been outlined throughout the thesis in response to the research questions, this conclusion will outline in detail three key contributions which have been made methodologically, empirically and conceptually in this work.

The first key argument of this thesis is conceptual and methodological. This thesis has considered diverse bodies of literature in conversation with each other in order to revisit archival material and narrative histories to contribute to understandings of the geographies of everyday life. The way that this thesis brings literatures of ‘race’, racialisation, encounter, representation, conditions and agency together has supported

the analysis of the empirical materials, some of which have been used in the wider historiography and some previously unused sources, to produce a valuable addition to inclusive histories and geographies of race and labour, especially regarding the North East of England. The material which has been revisited is many of the press articles in the *Shields Gazette*, which have been extensively employed in the wider historiography (Jenkinson, 2009; Lawless, 1995; Tabili, 2011). Although these sources are familiar to those researching BAME histories in the region, there are few, if any, examples of the articles in the *Shields Gazette* being read in conversation with wider regional, national and seafaring union newspapers. This triangulation has in part been possible due to the enhanced digitisation of material on The British Newspaper Archive, but it has also been significantly driven by the central motivation of this thesis to move beyond ‘exceptional events’ and uncover moments which are indicative of the wider everyday experience. This supports an argument which is sensitive to the limits of historical research but actively searches beyond the known remit of the archival record to uncover underused sources to revisit what can be assumed as ‘known’ histories. Methodologically, as demonstrated through the extensive use of archival material, this thesis has called for the acknowledgement of conceptual underpinnings when undertaking archival research. By exploring the practicalities of integrating intersectional theory into archival research, it has been shown that this thesis builds upon and is complimentary to not only methodological enquiry in historical geography, but the wider humanities and social sciences.

Employing the lens of intersectionality and the geographies of everyday life in a historical context has been challenging. Everyday actions of marginalised groups are not always immediately visible in the archival record. This thesis has argued that through employing the lens of the everyday, moments which have been considered

banal or mundane can be foregrounded and therefore create a historical geography not solely of exceptional moments, but one which is about the everyday experience and presence of 'race' within an ethnically diverse working class. Situating the archival record against its historical conditions allows further awareness to be gained of the marginalised position of BAME individuals in society and thus can help to overcome absences in the archival record. This method has proved useful when searching the archive of the NSFU/NUS for a BAME presence. When searching the catalogue at Warwick Modern Records Centre, due to the way the collections have been catalogued, and indeed organised at the time of their creation, there appears to be little evidence of BAME seafarers. Having an awareness of the exclusionary conditions prevalent in the shipping industry in the early twentieth century and a knowledge of the everyday nature of some of the contestation in the industry, searching in more mundane records proved insightful. Local Branch Meeting Minutes, for instance, contained white sailors' everyday opinions on the employment of BAME seafarers. Similarly, through using the index of *The Seaman* union newspaper, with an awareness of the racialised, and racist, nature of employment contestation, it became possible to uncover an insight into the BAME everyday experience in this industry, albeit with a distinct awareness of the bias in the reportage of such moments. That said, the absences and power relations of the archive are in many ways revealing in themselves, reflecting longer histories of exclusion within the official archival record (Bressey, 2011; Duncan, 1999; Moore, 2010; Ogborn, 2019).

This theoretically informed approach has sought to open discussion for how we can consider integrating specific theoretical approaches when undertaking archival research of marginalised groups; changing the way we perceive, address and experience the limitations of the archive and its absences, partiality and fragmentation.

Central to this reflection has been a move towards developing practices where we can centre subdued or constrained voices and ‘turn up the volume’ of their testimony. ‘Turning up the volume’ of BAME experiences is not simply about including difference in the narrative as a means of balance. Rather, ‘turning up the volume’ of marginalised perspectives, stresses that these voices and experiences have always been present in the archival record, and it is through an awareness of the aggregational nature of the banal and mundane alongside the notable and exceptional, that these moments are central to the regional and national history.

A second contribution of this thesis is the foregrounding of the aggregational nature of representations, encounters and conditions in everyday life. Thinking atmospherically about everyday processes and the relational nature of their construction and then employing this framework to historical records is a novel approach. This supports a better understanding of the less tangible and immaterial experiences of the presence of ‘race’ in ethnically diverse working class communities. Reading Hall’s (2013) understanding of representations as inter-textual, that their meaning is informed and conditioned by being read in conversation with other representations, alongside wider atmospheric work such as Closs Stephens (2016) and Pavoni and Tulumello (2020) suggests that the inter-relationship between representations, atmospheric conditions and encounters is one which is worthy of further attention. This contributes to current and prominent debates in human geography on geographies of everyday life and encounter and looks to develop analysis beyond the event itself to include marginalised actors, materialities and wider atmospheres.

As detailed throughout the thesis, and especially in Chapter 4, representations of Empire and BAME people were socially accessible. They were present in everyday

life through visual, material and less-tangible mediums and became ingrained into everyday encounters and shaped everyday conditions. Tracing the independent influence of specific representations – in imperial advertising, colonial exhibitions and in the media, for example – on everyday life is impossible due to the constraints of the archive. Yet I argue that it is the aggregating influence of such representations that shaped embodied everyday inter-ethnic encounters. This thesis has demonstrated that the language of encounter can be inclusive of more atmospheric, immaterial and affectual engagements, with representations for example, as well as the more physical, material and embodied encounters of the ‘other’ in everyday life. This perspective is indicative of how encounters include, and are affected by, wider processes and circulating ideologies which operate across various temporalities – drawing from past experiences whilst synchronously accumulating and informing future encounters (Wilson, 2017). In interwar Britain, and among the ethnically diverse working class communities across the North East, I suggest that there was a circulating body of representations present which was not spatially or temporally bounded, but rather served as an invisible repository which was drawn from and added to simultaneously throughout the period. In this regard, the inter-relationship between representations, conditions and encounters is one way through which the presence of ‘race’ in everyday life can be accessed through a historic perspective.

For example, representations in the media of BAME communities as violent and a threat to social and political order, shaped wider experiences within the communities in which they lived. The presence of such violent representations can be linked to how BAME communities faced increased racialised arrests and biased judiciary proceedings. These racialised encounters then shaped the everyday conditions BAME communities experienced through policy changes, restrictions to



BAME Boarding House applications, for example, which then shaped their capacity to contest and challenge these conditions through everyday acts. This agency would then lead for BAME communities to be further represented as violent and unreasonable, and the cycle of racialisation in everyday life, through representation, conditions and agency, would emerge. That being said, this cycle should not be conceived of as a closed loop as in certain instances, agency and contestation provided an opportunity for a route out, or at least around and through, some of these challenging conditions. Understanding the aggregational nature of representations, and acknowledging them as a form of encounter, is, as this thesis has demonstrated, integral in developing inclusive histories and geographies at the intersection of race and class.

The third contribution of this thesis is the revisiting of agency, resistance and domination through the lens of the everyday. This thesis has stressed the importance of conceptualising agency beyond the worker, the workplace and the working day to contribute to understandings of agency as smaller, less visible and not always successful acts experienced in everyday life. Uncovering everyday acts in the archive is a challenging process. Rather than searching for grand moments of successful collective action, this thesis has engaged with more mundane and ‘quiet’ everyday actions in order to contribute to evolving debates on agency at the intersection of labour and historical geography (Emery, 2018; Hastings and Cumbers, 2019; Martin, 2021; McFarland, 2017; Newbery, 2013; Peck, 2018). The everyday acts of Arab Boarding House Masters, through letter writing, petitioning the Colonial Office for financial relief and reworking restrictive practices of boarding house license applications, created physical and immaterial spaces within BAME communities where individual acts and collective action could develop to confront exclusionary and

challenging conditions in everyday life. Essentially, this thesis argues for thinking beyond a simplistic combination of labour and race histories with a more nuanced approach to stress the plurality within place-based events and the intersection of race and class (Massey, 2005). This plurality must include contestation and resistance so not to overly privilege a relational account.

The significance of the diversity of place and the various platforms and arenas through which everyday acts of contestation are developed and gain meaning has been a central contribution of this thesis and contributes to a temporally and spatially fluid definition of agency. Understandings of encounter, representations and conditions have been re-considered through the lens of agency and resistance to complement the relational and aggregational nature of the conceptualisation of these practices throughout the thesis. It has been argued, most significantly in Chapter 6, that agency is a lived experience which should not be understood by confining analysis to exceptional or successful moments of collective action. Rather, focus should be placed on how more mundane and less visible acts were purposefully enacted on behalf of a cause, which was more apparent at certain times than others (Horton and Kraftl, 2009; Hughes, 2020). For instance, the mundane act of consistently turning up to present oneself to be considered for work was an everyday and implicit form of agency among BAME seafaring communities in the interwar period. Despite BAME seafarers being consistently excluded from work due to racist hiring practices, many of these men maintained their union membership and continued to present themselves for work as both a form of protest and out of economic necessity. It is therefore clear that the everyday acts and experiences discussed throughout this thesis should be understood as part of broader regional working class moments of contestation and appreciated not only as part of a racially inclusive history of the North East but as reflective of the

uneven and contested development of a multi-ethnic working class in the early twentieth century.

These contributions stress the salience of producing inclusive histories at the intersection of race and class explicitly through the lens of the everyday. While these contributions advance research across disciplines, a central effort and contribution has been made throughout this thesis to produce accessible and usable pasts, and this thesis will now conclude with some personal reflections on the contributions and impact that producing inclusive, usable histories can have beyond the realm of academia. Creating usable pasts, through increasing the accessibility and relevance of the narratives of history that is presented in heritage institutions for example, changes the way we think about and understand the past in the present. This can be done through a variety of methods and platforms but essentially, as Griffin (2018b, p.502) argues, it is centrally focussed on linking ‘experiences, documents and materials of the past with contemporary issues and experiences’.

### **7.3 – Towards accessible and inclusive place-based histories**

As has been outlined in the introduction and throughout this thesis, a central aim of this work has been to produce an inclusive history of the everyday experiences of an ethnically diverse working class in early twentieth century Britain. There have been wider recent developments targeted towards the creation of inclusive public histories of belonging which argue that histories have a pertinent role in the production of contemporary sentiments of belonging and inclusion (Eddo-Lodge, 2019; Olusoga, 2016). Black British history is central to diversifying the dominant narrative present

in British History and needs to be asserted and positioned as politically and historically powerful. Centenaries of exceptional episodes of racialised disorder, such as the 1919 seaport riots, have both revived and reshaped public perceptions of histories which have been historically understood as challenging to remember (Quinault, 1998). Although previously rare, everyday experiences of racialisation, police and judiciary bias have begun to be foregrounded through the film industry, such as the *Small Axe* films recently aired on the BBC.<sup>139</sup> These exceptional, and simultaneously everyday for certain groups within the population, moments of violence and disorder should be situated within the wider everyday experience and celebrated as anniversaries of resistance and solidarity, rather than as instances of violence and oppression. There is also a need to move beyond the singular association of Black British History with Afro-Caribbean communities in London (Bakare, 2020) to provide more inclusive and wide-ranging representations of BAME British histories.

As Olusoga (2016) argues, we often live with the myth that racial prejudice continuously declined over the centuries, but that is certainly not the case. Prejudices, exclusions and processes of othering are not a linear or polar experience, but rather dynamically embedded into British history and as such peak, trough, become visible, disappear and re-emerge contingent on wider social, political, temporal, spatial and historical contexts (Hall, 1996b). Developing inclusive histories is more than writing distinct narratives which position ‘race history’ as a separate field, it is about revisiting and reimagining what counts as British history and how best to include difficult and uncomfortable moments into the national narrative. This would allow attention to be

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<sup>139</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episodes/p08vxt33/small-axe> [date accessed: 15 December 2020]

placed on the contributions and experiences of marginalised groups and place them central to, rather than on the periphery of, national memory.

Throughout the past three and a half years, I have actively sought to create an inclusive history which is meaningful, relevant and most importantly accessible to those living in the region today. I have participated in several national and international conferences sharing my work with academic audiences, but I have also made a sustained effort for my work to be engaged with beyond the academy. It is these moments of outreach that I wish to conclude the thesis as they speak most pertinently to the usability of such histories and the continued relevance and challenges of disseminating such works.

One way in which I have sought to ensure my research is engaged with is through education. As outlined in the Royal Historical Society's 2018 *Race, Ethnicity & Equality in UK History: A Report and Resource for Change* (Atkinson et al., 2018, p.26), 'failing to engage BME students with the study of History at school poses a genuine threat to our ability to maintain strong university History departments and to train up new generations of high-calibre historians in them'. I believe that early interventions, in schools, can have a significant and lasting impact on developing History as a more inclusive discipline. Professor Kehinde Andrews (2020) argues that BAME histories often do not receive attention as they either do not fit the narrative that we are comfortable with, or, they have not been exposed to the same level of academic research that white histories have. This framing compliments an understanding of the 'whiteness' of working class histories in the North East and further justifies the significance of revisiting established historical narratives, of the white working class miner as the only significant actor in labour history, for example, to uncover the visible and invisible materialities of race in the region.

Since 2018, I have been working with the widening participation charity The Brilliant Club, whose mission is to increase the number of pupils from underrepresented backgrounds progressing to highly selective universities.<sup>140</sup> I have completed over fifteen placements working with pupils from KS2 to KS5. I developed a super-curricular module based on my own thesis research titled ‘Riot, rebellion and the racialisation of disorder’ which was centred on challenging narrative histories of the 1919 Seaport Riots by focussing on temporal, spatial, political and socioeconomic contexts to re-think how minority histories are understood and remembered.

Working with pupils across the North East, and one virtual placement at a Sixth Form College in Liverpool, my course has been widely engaged with and the majority of the pupils have commented on not only the interesting and relevant content of the course, but also how it has diversified their opinions on British history. My first placement teaching this course was in a school in South Shields. Although I was initially nervous about teaching sensitive and difficult histories in the place where the riot took place, the pupils were wonderful and very surprised that they did not know of this history that was, as one student put it, ‘on their doorstep’. The celebration of South Shields maritime heritage is well known across much of the region and the port and shipyards provide a material landscape today from which this history is often remembered. While the heritage of the maritime industry is visible in South Shields, such heritage representations struggle to acknowledge the more difficult histories associated with moments of racialised contestation and exclusion in the industry and in the township itself.

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<sup>140</sup> <https://thebrilliantclub.org/about/> [date accessed: 10 February 2021]

This lack of local knowledge of the difficult histories and heritages that are present in the region is something that I have encountered throughout my research, as family, friends, teachers and members of the public who I spoke to were unaware of this history. Even I, who had researched North East labour history at undergraduate and master's level, was unaware of the central and significant presence of 'race' in the region's working class history, as I had predominantly focussed on nineteenth century coal mining communities.

Increasing awareness of BAME history in the North East and developing an inclusive account has been a conscious effort during the last three years. Working with local schools, heritage groups and Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums has enabled me to develop usable pasts and simultaneously challenge the narrative of North East history which we are comfortable with while affirming the longstanding embeddedness of the presence of 'race' in the region. The presence of 'race' in the region refers to both the presence of BAME communities but also the wider processes of racialisation and power relations present. In this regard, the presence of 'race' in the North East must include the actions of both BAME and white members of the community. A key contribution of the thesis has been to include white women as negotiators and protestors as part of the communities central to this thesis. This supports an approach which does not containerise history and experiences but acknowledges the diversity present within everyday life.

Many of the empirical vignettes used throughout the thesis will be unfamiliar to most of those living across the region today. Here, I argue, that uncovering and foregrounding these 'forgotten moments', or as Nayak (2016, p.41) suggests, the 'residue of migrant history', is a contribution in its own right. While sensationalised

moments such as the 1930 ‘riot’ in South Shields has received some local attention,<sup>141</sup> the more uncomfortable everyday histories – the deportations, the racialised arrests, the actions of white women who were part of the BAME communities in the region – often remain unknown. For example, although Newcastle’s North East Coast Exhibition in 1929 is familiar to those who have visited the local Discovery Museum, there is little information on the ‘African Village’ or the wider representations and encounters it facilitated. Publicly disseminating the research and ‘forgotten histories’ which have been uncovered throughout this thesis is a significant personal objective going forward. I am working with Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums to support them in diversifying and decolonising the exhibitions they have available and I hope to continue with outreach in local schools and colleges.

Despite this thesis being of contemporary public relevance, it has synchronously contributed to the advancement of the reconceptualization of representations, conditions and agency across various subfields and further contributed to an inclusive history of the ethnically diverse working class in the North East of Britain in the early twentieth century. While undertaking this thesis, it became apparent that there was a distinct gap in the historiography regarding BAME experiences in the early twentieth century. While some work has been done which brings together the experiences of slave trade abolitionists in the nineteenth century with the civil rights movement of the 1960s and Martin Luther King’s visit to Newcastle (Ward, 2017), there is little which covers the period 1939-1960. Uncovering the presence of ‘race’ across the region during the Second World War and in the immediate decades following, through a similar approach that has been taken in

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<sup>141</sup> A play, *Riot* written by Peter Mortimer (2008), based on the ‘true events’ of ‘Britain’s First Race Riot’ was performed at the South Shields Customs House Theatre, on the Mill Dam in South Shields in 2005.



this thesis, would allow for a significant contribution. Such work would contribute not only to regional history, but historically contextualise and underpin recent work which has been done on ‘race’ and multiculturalism in the North East from the 1990s onwards (Hackett, 2009; Nayak, 2012, 2016, 2017).

Creating usable pasts is about making history relevant, accessible and demonstrating how historic documents and experiences can be pertinent when thinking about modern experiences and issues (Griffin, 2018b). Through highlighting the historical experiences of BAME communities in the region, a deepened understanding of the experiences of ‘race’ in both the past and present can be developed. I wish to conclude this thesis with an excerpt of a letter written in 1929 by Hassan Mohamed, South Shields Arab Boarding House Keeper, to the *Shields Gazette*. Despite having been written over ninety years ago, its contents still remain salient today. Mohamed’s letter was written as a response to the publication of racist comments from a Town Council Meeting which refused a license for a new Arab Boarding House whilst simultaneously condemning the Arab Community and labelling it a ‘menace to the town’ (*Shields Gazette*, 07 February 1929). Whilst being contemporarily relevant and significant in its own right, it speaks to the three lenses – representations, conditions and agency – which have been employed throughout this thesis to explore the presence and experience of ‘race’ in the North East of England throughout the interwar period. Mohamed powerfully captures both the material and atmospheric consequences of racism and racialisation in everyday life. He brings attention to the material and structural consequences of representing the Arab Community as a menace and ‘the most undesirable people in the world’. He comments on the exclusionary conditions which led for the community to ‘restrict themselves to the slums’, the strict police supervision and the commodification of colonial labour

during the First World War. Yet this letter is not passive and accepting of these exclusionary conditions and racist representations. It is a challenge, an implicit activism embedded into everyday life. The author confronts and contests such banal racisms and explicitly reaffirms his rights as a British Colonial Subject and implicitly reiterates his, and his community's, rights to belong in South Shields.

‘According to the Councillors Cheeseman and Linney the Arabs in South Shields appear to be the most undesirable people in the world. Yet we owe allegiance to the British government and claim its protection. In the Great War Arab seamen from the port of South Shields lost their lives in hundreds...

We have tried to live together in South Shields without annoying others and have restricted ourselves to the ‘slums’. We invite any councillor to inspect our houses (which are also subject to strict police supervision) and see himself if they are not clean and properly conducted.

We pay our rents and rates and no Arab has a pauper's funeral. A Britisher is welcomed and honoured in our country, and we may be more loyal to the Crown than many who seem to despise us. Surely because the sun has baked us brown we are not to be disowned.

The British nation boasts of Freedom and Justice to all. We only ask for this, and it is only the narrow-minded or selfish people who refuse it.’

Hassan Mohamed, 132 Commercial Road, South Shields. (*Shields Gazette*, 09 February 1929).

## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Number of BAME Seafarers registered in North East port towns, 1930-1938.

	1930 <sup>1</sup>	1931 <sup>2</sup>	1932 <sup>3</sup>	1933 <sup>3</sup>	1934 <sup>3</sup>	1935 <sup>3</sup>	1936 <sup>3</sup>	1937 <sup>3</sup>	1938 <sup>3</sup>
Tynemouth (North Shields)	79	37	50	87	62	72	55	49	43
South Shields	390	392	423	772	698	797	630	391	295
Newcastle	21	17	14	14	11	9	13	11	11
Sunderland	27	37	29	39	42	36	27	20	14
Middlesbrough	14	18	14	19	16	16	16	12	10

(1) TNA HO 45/14299 – Numbers of Coloured Alien Seamen registered under the Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order, 1925.

(2) BL IOR L/E/9/954 – Return of the number of coloured alien seamen in the United Kingdom as on 1st July 1931.

(3) TNA CO 725/54/9 – Numbers of Coloured Alien Seamen registered under the Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order, 1925.

**Appendix 2:** Table of information regarding North East Newspapers available on the British Newspaper Archive (BNA).

Publication	Date	Ownership	Details
<i>Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette</i>	1873	Founded by Samuel Storey, Liberal MP for Sunderland 1881-1895, and six other businessmen who viewed the newspaper as a means of furthering their political aims.	It was an evening daily paper which by 1878 was circulating 50,000-60,000 copies per week in Sunderland alone. <sup>1</sup> The BNA has digitised editions from 1908-1923, 1926, 1929, 1931-1943.
<i>Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail</i>	1877	Initially established as the Northern Evening Mail for Durham and North Yorkshire in 1877 and was published in Hartlepool by influential industrialists in the area.	It was bought in 1884 by Samuel Storey, also the founder of the Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette who shifted the politics of the paper from Conservative to Liberal. The BNA has the entire collection across the period 1878-1954 digitised and available. <sup>2</sup>
<i>Shields Daily News</i>	1864	Ownership not known, published by Johnson Press in Tynemouth, North Shields.	The BNA digitisation of this newspaper is fragmentary and the periods 1890-1925, 1927, 1931-1935, 1938-1959 are available on the database. <sup>3</sup>

(1) <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/titles/sunderland-daily-echo-and-shipping-gazette> [date accessed: 20 January 2021]

(2) <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/titles/hartlepool-northern-daily-mail> [date accessed: 20 January 2021]

(3) <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/titles/shields-daily-news> [date accessed: 20 January 2021]

**Appendix 3:** Table of information regarding events which took place in South Shields in 1919.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Selected Source(s)</b>
09 January 1919	Attack on shop owned by an Arab businessman on Waterloo Vale.	<i>Shields Gazette</i> : 13 January 1919, 15 January 1919.
10 January 1919	Attack on the largest Arab Boarding House in the town on Chapter Row.	<i>Shields Gazette</i> : 13 January 1919, 15 January 1919.
17 January 1919	Soldiers clash with police on Ocean Road.	<i>Shields Gazette</i> : 18 January 1919, 23 January 1919.
04 February 1919	Mill Dam Riot	<i>Shields Gazette</i> , 05 February 1919, 11 March 1919. <i>Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail</i> , 05 February 1919.
05 February 1919	Arrest of Indian fireman on the Mill Dam.	<i>Shields Gazette</i> , 07 February 1919.
08 March 1919	Altercation between soldiers and Arabs on Coronation Street.	<i>Shields Gazette</i> , 10 March 1919.
June or July 1919	Nigerian Seaman arrested on Mill Dam	<i>The Seaman</i> , 04 July 1919.
20 July 1919	The Hebburn Beer riot.	<i>Newcastle Daily Chronicle</i> , 20 August 1919. House of Commons Hansard, Volume 117, Column 505, 27 June 1919.
17 August 1919	Attack on Arab business, the ‘Continental Café’ in the Market Place.	<i>Shields Daily News</i> , 18 August 1919. <i>Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette</i> , 22 August 1919.

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