

**CHARLIE NIELSEN'S JOURNEY:
WANDERING THROUGH MULTICULTURAL LANDSCAPES**

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Translator's introduction

Flemming Røgilds is a cultural sociologist and poet. He is well-known in Denmark for his work on ethnicity, modernity and identity, and his involvement in the journal *Social Kritik*. In many ways he reminds me of John Berger for his European style. What does that mean? He is concerned with European issues and does not write and research from the perspective of one country only. Often in the field of ethnicity the writer or researcher is a specialist about one country. Røgilds is a specialist about not only Denmark. He has written about the United Kingdom, South Africa and Denmark, and in this book he writes about London and Berlin. There is a second sense in which he reminds me of John Berger. It is in the manner in which he listens to the people he meets and then gives himself the task of retelling their stories. But Berger, when he does this, uses his own words and makes his accounts sound like well-written literary pieces. In contrast, Røgilds records the conversations on tape and transcribes them, making some strictly minor changes in the process. In this storytelling he is like Berger's "clerk of the records", telling the story of a community.

In storytelling he is also like Benjamin's "storyteller" – travelling around to gain an insight into how people live and the issues that interest them. Time and space are central categories for both of these writers. In this book, Røgilds recreates the *flâneur* – a concept developed by Benjamin – as he wanders the streets of London and Berlin. This is the spatial. Time comes into focus as he asks people about how their experiences of racism have changed.

There is an important difference between Benjamin's storyteller and Røgilds'. For the former, the ideal type was the figure of Nikolai Leskov, who actually existed. For Røgilds, on the other hand, the storyteller is an imaginary figure – Charlie Nielsen – who has travelled to London, and then to Berlin, to live in each place for a period of time. Charlie Nielsen is really part of Røgilds's own self – this makes the book in a sense auto-biographical. However, Charlie Nielsen is always distanced from Flemming's own self – it is his alter ego or, should we say, his conscience (*samvittighed* in Danish). With

this self-distancing, the writer also has the deliberate intention of creating a certain Brecht-inspired *verfremdung* – “making things look strange”. This imaginary creation – Charlie Nielsen – is also his companion on his travels. An unkind reviewer might say that Røgilds suffers from a split personality. But the split is not really a split. Is this alter-ego – Charlie Nielsen for Røgilds – not something we all have as an inseparable part of our identities?

The reader follows Charlie Nielsen on his arrival in London in 1997. Charlie Nielsen lives in Finsbury Park, north London, but he spends much of his time in south London, in the area around Greenwich, Lewisham and New Cross. When he is north of the Thames, it is still close to the river, and the focus is then upon Tower Hamlets. Charlie Nielsen conducts interviews with different people – workers in youth clubs, intellectuals, racists, politicians, youth and so on. He asks them to reflect on their life situations. The conversations are therefore retrospective, with 1997 as his year of arrival.

He is interested in investigating the changes taking place in multicultural European metropolises. What kinds of hybrid cultures and new forms of racism can be found and how is this multicultural society to be both represented and explained? To answer these questions he develops –through interviews – a set of concepts. On the one hand, there are the transcultural, translocal and transnational dialogues between different groups as they attempt to overcome racism and their own harsh living conditions. They look to build bridges between different ways of living and understanding. On the other hand, he identifies the mixture of anxiety, terror and violence, which forms the foundation for new forms of racism in Europe in the 90s. In London, it is for example the Bengali people living with whites and Caribbeans, while in Berlin it is two sides of the same country – East and West Germany – learning to live with each other and migrants from different countries after the fall of the Wall. Berlin reveals the transition from a risk society to a society of anxiety in which we now find ourselves. But two thirds of the book – its opening 200 pages – are devoted to his experiences with London.

It is clearly London that forms the major part of his reflections as different groups are immersed in creating and recreating – in a continual manner – their sense of belonging and home. They struggle with their different

conceptions of ethnic and racial signifiers. In what follows, the selection chosen for the translation from the book is restricted to what Charlie Nielsen has found out about racism and London's unsettled multiculturalism. What is lost in the translation is the literary style of the narrative of the book. In this context, it has been more important to present some of Charlie Nielsen's findings to a British audience. Readers interested in what Charlie Nielsen has to say about Berlin must either turn to the book itself or wait until the whole book is translated into English.

Preface by Flemming Røgilds

This is the story of a journey into multicultural Europe. Charlie Nielsen's voyage of discovery takes him in 1997 to London and Berlin. He is a Danish sociologist interested in investigating the changes taking place in multicultural European metropolises and the new forms of racism, which can be encountered there. Charlie Nielsen's journey through conversations with others, meetings and making observations along the way provides him with bits and pieces of this incredibly complex picture. The account highlights both the positive aspects of the multicultural society, with its transcultural, translocal and transnational dialogues between different groups and "races", and its painful opposite, as when Charlie Nielsen is confronted with a mixture of anxiety, terror and violence, which forms the foundation of the new forms of racism witnessed in Europe in the 90s.

It is a journey that begins in one of London's inner cities, where since the middle of the 70s a multicultural laboratory has arisen, which now continues to the outer cities where, since the beginning of the 90s, a growth in racially motivated violence has been experienced by ethnic minorities. Charlie Nielsen is forced to ask himself, how this form of violence can be combated in communities where there are already marginal groups of the population, fighting each other across the boundaries of ethnicity, "race" and territorial belonging. He seeks counsel from a series of intellectuals, cultural commentators, teachers, politicians, social workers and youth about their explanations for this development. And it is indeed still a journey, as Charlie

Nielsen builds bridges between innocence and experience, at a juncture in European history that points to the demise of these countries.

Charlie Nielsen's journey forces him and his partners in conversation to react against the racialisation of nation states, which originates in the great voyages of discovery and the inheritance of imperialism – as if it is a journey, forcing them to deconstruct what it means to be white. Yes, it forces them to search in the inheritance from European fascism for the way in which ethnic minorities are treated at the beginning of a new century. But it is also a journey made with such warmth that a consciousness arises about how we don't necessarily have to internalise this knowledge about the guilt of our forefathers. Charlie Nielsen can recall how, towards the end of his stay in London, he sits and listens to a woman who says: "In this house we have no 'races'." The feeling of liberation that this sober observation gives him completely matches the rhythm of life he acquires when he explores different routes in London's inner and outer cities, where the African diaspora, as a second Robinson, makes him into an Other, and London into a second home. It is a journey where one is confronted with the role the radical right-wing political parties play in Berlin: a place that, despite the fall of the Wall in 1989, has still not found a way of reconciling the earlier East and West. For this reason, Berlin will play a central role in an understanding of the European integration process. It is here that Charlie Nielsen is confronted with debates about the transition from a risk society to a society of anxiety. But, above all else, it is here, in this new metropolis, that he finds a new rhythm of life among the descendants of earlier immigrants, as they reconstruct their homeland in innumerable ways.

Charlie Nielsen's journey deals with both the necessity of multiplying cultures, and the anxiety created in the debates about the loss of, and longing for identity. It deals with the necessity of creating a new consciousness. And the recognition that this cannot arise unless one forms an alliance with the Other, who is already there, at the same time as one overcomes the terror which this potential meeting represents. It is, therefore and accordingly, an appeal to readers to fill the philosophical and political space created by a life without Fascism and how this will enrich the world.

I met Charlie Nielsen during a research visit to London. As it quickly became apparent that we had common interests, we met a few times during this period. I followed his first hesitant attempts to conquer the city, but I lost contact with him because I had my own things to do. One and a half years have passed before I come across him at a meeting to activate long term unemployed academics. I ask him, of course, how his stay went. I am astounded by the wild look he gave to my question. I receive no reply until I suggest to him that we take a Guinness at one of the many Irish pubs that have begun to appear in Copenhagen. On sitting at a small, darkly lit table, the words tumble out of his mouth: stories, questions, people he has met in his wanderings around London and Berlin.

He has been especially interested in the conflict over ethnic and racial signifiers taking place at the bottom of society because it will be decisive for the future of European society. A fight is taking place, with racist undertones, between those who have relatively little and those who have nothing, about distribution of resources. It is a struggle taking place in white suburbia to make sure that it remains white. It is striking, he continues, where phenomena such as ethnicity, culture and "race" play a serious role, they are precisely those places where no immigrants live at all. It is in these areas that the migrant as a symbol of something else looms in the imagination of white people. I am reminded of the disgraceful manner in which we discuss the rights and duties of immigrants in this country. I accept his assertion that one ought to begin using such an old sociological concept as resentment. It will help us understand the weak foundations of social solidarity in a welfare state that is being put to the test. There is no longer talk of a residual category on the shelves of the Royal Library. On the contrary, it denotes a phenomenon steadily giving rise to more explosive political forms of expression, as people attempt to make sense of their everyday life. As I am in a period in my life where I am employed and consequently have time and energy for others, I propose that we meet regularly and that I take on the role of the writer. This

will provide the opportunity for recreating the vitality of our first meeting, and at the same time founding a journey within a journey.

Arrival

On the day of Charlie Nielsen's arrival the cherry trees are in full blossom. They form a red glow against the blue sky and make Charlie Nielsen reflect whether it is possible to create a synthesis between the blossoming cherry trees and the concrete from which they sprout. Especially when the goal is to describe the life in the city in a way that transcends sociology's current concepts for the deterioration of the quality of life in London's inner cities. Charlie Nielsen sweats for a moment with the thought that he must find the soul of the city, lifts his shoulder bag and begins to look for the stop on Stapleton Road in the direction of Florence Road. He is excited to see the flat that is to be his home for the next three months. A random house in one of England's typical streets with endless rows of houses, one after the other. He straightens himself up to get his breath back and notes with pleasure that the main door is painted in his favourite colour, copper blue. He sees a movement at the window of one of the rooms, a hand waving, and in a moment the door opens. Charlie Nielsen meets for the first time his landlady, Karen Alexander. He learns that, together with David Bailey, Sonia Boyce, Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall, Isaac Julien and a number of other black artists and intellectuals, she has been part of the cultural renaissance that, from the beginning of the 80s, has left its visible mark on Britain. She now works as a video artist for Peter Gabriel's "Real World" in Bath. She is a beautiful black woman, about 40 years old, with a soft voice surrounding a tight body. She bids him welcome and invites him into a linguistic universe rooted in British Guyana and a childhood in Acton, in the west part of London. Charlie Nielsen soon feels at home in her company. The same applies to the flat. When she asks him what he thinks of the Spartan, almost puritanical flat, a long discussion begins about what it means to say that one feels at home in a place. "The feeling of coming home doesn't necessarily have anything to do with being on native soil," he replies, and looks at the bookcase where his

eyes meet the names of authors such as James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, bell hooks, Zora Neal Hurston, June Jordan, Audre Lorde, Trin T. Min-ha, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and Richard Wright, together with a number of works on film aesthetics. Nor is a book on how to survive alone as a black woman out of place. A short time after this she gives him a set of keys to his flat.

London, a multicultural laboratory

He decides to draw a map of the area. There isn't necessarily an opposition between order and chaos, Charlie Nielsen says to himself, as he orders 'Plain Omelette and Chips' at the Spring Café on Stroud Green Road. He has already made a habit of having his breakfast at this Turkish Cypriot-owned café. Here he can read the newspapers and follow the life at the service station directly across the street, where they wash cars more quickly than he can drink his coffee. At the same time, he can follow the stream of people on their way to and from Finsbury Park Station. That this is a mixed area is soon apparent, but that the whole world is presented in the form of the African diaspora as you wander up and down Stroud Green Road – this takes a little longer to discover. On Saturdays, when Arsenal play their home matches at nearby Highbury, it is possible to meet their supporters at the Irish pub, The Finsbury Tavern, on the corner of Seven Sisters Road and Stroud Green Road. Immediately opposite, there is a Nigerian restaurant and Yemanjá, a shop selling Afro-centric literature and ethnographica. A little further up the street is the Worlds End pub. Here, there are local bands that, each Thursday, Friday and Saturday, play either reggae or African music. 'Africa in England' is encountered, as well as drug trading and small-scale prostitution, if one believes the rumours that always circulate in connection with such multicultural places.

What is almost of more importance for Charlie Nielsen's own peace of mind is that on the opposite side of the street is the New Beacon Bookshop. This is one of London's best-known bookshops, when it comes to literature from the Third World. Charlie Nielsen regularly visits the bookshop during his stay in London. Here he examines the literature in the market, covering changes in

the social and cultural identities of ethnic minorities in England resulting from the African diaspora. On rare occasions, he eats at the close-by Humming Bird to experience how a Caribbean meal tastes. Normally he orders a pizza, eats it at home, and then goes to the White Lion of Mortimer pub. The front area of the pub is where the older regulars, who seem to come from and identify with the working-class. Here a form of English is spoken that is not easily decipherable to an outsider's ear. This applies not merely to the black men who sit in a section for non-smokers, but also to the white Englishmen, who meet each afternoon to gossip about the latest news and how these might affect the coming election in the spring of 1997. Charlie Nielsen enjoys his daily Guinness and begins after a while to regard the sound of the conversations at the bar and nearest tables as a refreshing form of music. It illustrates that since the end of the 70s, a transformation has occurred in not merely what it means to be black, but also in the normal representations of what is meant by a nation. Specifically, the latter cannot be reduced to a question of "race" and skin colour. It must include the relationship between "race," class, community, gender and identity. Charlie Nielsen recalls having read about the changes following the arrival of blacks in Great Britain in Paul Gilroy's book, *There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack*, where Gilroy discusses the role of Africa, Caribbean and Asia in the formation of Great Britain. The black social movement's ability to survive has transformed the relationship between territory, identity and control of the city's social space in Finsbury Park and in a number of London's other boroughs. These have become multicultural laboratories for a form of bridge-building and peaceful co-existence between the different "races". To the rear of the pub is one of the most middle-class areas along Stroud Green Road, but in the spirit of this mixed area the middle class people coexist with working-class patrons without conflict or friction.

It is without doubt an experience that, like other cultural processes, is marked by ambivalences, contradictions and paradoxes. There are also a number of exceptions to the rule that this inter-racial harmony has actually been created in the inner cities. Charlie Nielsen has travelled to London to examine to what extent Great Britain in the 90s has achieved a form of syncretism between the territorial victories taking place in the multicultural

laboratories of London's inner cities and the new forms of racism evident in other parts of the metropolis' social and cultural space. But, he is also interested in whether it is possible to map the new multicultural Europe in those places where this bridge-building has been rooted or only exists in embryonic forms between different "races" and ethnic groups in Europe. In moments of heightened pessimism it can appear as if ethnic absolutism dominates the debate, so that the so-called mixing of ethnic, cultural and national perspectives in the different European metropolises leads more to a focus upon what separates them, rather than upon what joins them. For this reason it can appear futile to believe in the possibility of developing national states without nationalism. Despite comprehensive globalisation, it seems as if every person needs not only her own family, but also her own nation, so one can ask oneself whether any talk of an identification across ethnic, cultural and national boundaries is indeed a lost cause.

Is there any chance whatsoever of finding political, social and cultural tendencies that reach beyond the vast conglomerate of nations and their administered identities? Are we really forced to accept national identity as our only frame of reference? Does the crisis in social integration make the demand for such a form of mobilisation the only possibility? Are we capable of recognising that we live in a multicultural, multi-racial and multi-racist society and, at the same time, carry out theoretical and empirical analyses of the ambivalences, contradictions and paradoxes connected with such societal developments?

It is these kinds of questions that Charlie Nielsen asks himself as he sits in the Spring Café and eats his breakfast. Here he reflects upon how the growth of the cherry trees in the inner city areas must be compared with the white terror that exists in the surrounding suburban areas.

Charlie Nielsen presents a many-stringed research project

Charlie Nielsen has a number of unanswered questions in his bag. They involve partly the construction of the border areas within European national states, where there is a sharpening of this terror, and partly the interchange

between a globalisation “from above” and a globalisation “from below”, which can further alliances between the different ethnic minorities and “races”.

“In the globalisation debate,” he says, as he presents his thoughts for his new colleagues at the Centre for Urban and Community Research at Goldsmiths College in south London, “a shift is taking place in research, from an interest in globalisation ‘from above’ to an interest in those areas that concentrate on globalisation ‘from below’”. Globalisation ‘from above’ involves an international exchange of ideas, symbols and goods via corporate transnational companies. It is a globalisation that we, to a large extent, understand as an Americanising of world society and the reactions to this development in the different geo-political regions of the world. A globalisation ‘from below’ refers, on the other hand, to the transnational experiences and the travelling cultures and theories that appear in the horizon, where globalisation is seen from this different perspective. It takes as its starting point the actor’s reworking of these experiences. As a consequence there has been an increasing interest in the extent to which the meeting between the First and Third world in certain circumstances can take place in the metropolises and involve a number of transnational experiences connected with changing cultural and social identities. Moreover, to some extent these may result in a number of completely new diaspora movements, cultures and identities. At the same time, the possibility of new political alliances is created. This shift in research interest raises the question of not merely how to create a new homeland, when one belongs to a ‘nation’ without a real homeland, but it also directs attention to the experiences that are marginalised or rejected, and the new experiences that take their place.

“The fruitful aspect of the diaspora concept rests in how it focuses on the contrapuntal movement between the place people originally come from and the place to which they are going. It highlights the different ethnic minorities who, in certain circumstances, rather than merely participate in a number of transnational networks crossing to and fro across national boundaries, live in the border areas between here and there. The diaspora concept thereby transcends the narrower understanding of a community in terms of its connotations of the national state. But it is worth noting that these border areas are without established boundaries and without their own territory. It is

a border area where, on the one hand, attempts are made to discover a mythical, multi-dimensional culture with particular historical roots and, on the other hand, attempts are made to further develop the historical reconstruction of the past into a common heritage, in a series of restless negotiations about where one is coming from and where one is going.

“This shift in the relationship between the global and the local, and thereby the connected interest for a globalisation ‘from below’, leads to another perspective on the relationship between ethnicity, modernity and identity. The relationship between ethnic struggles plays itself out, to a far greater extent, across a series of floating identities and overlapping territories, where strategies are developed for who one is, dependent upon one’s ability, on the one hand, to juggle with the relationship between continuity, change and breaks and, on the other hand, to commute between cultures and identities. This has consequences for other aspects of social life. When one tries to pin down the changes in civil society and the related changes in values, it means that it becomes far more difficult to locate the causes for why there is, on certain occasions, a politicisation of ethnicity in the struggle for political hegemony, while, on other occasions, its aestheticisation rather occurs. Where the weight should rest in the choice between the two can nevertheless be solved by making cultural identity, cultural loyalty and perceptions of community the main questions. If one takes the trouble to delve down into a specific community, one encounters not just the cultural complexity of likenesses and differences in political processes and the re-formulations of cultural and social identities, but also the fact that multicultural and multi-racial changes in the underlying social structures are followed in almost synchronic ways by an outbreak of multi-racist reactions in an explosive manner.

“In such a situation, the political agreements which have existed up until now, and which have been about how to create harmonisation in policies around migration and ethnic minorities, are suggestive of our worst conceptions of the coming Fortress Europe. At the same time they also echo the conceptions of the different nationalist and racist movements we have seen arise in England, France and Germany since the fall of the Wall in Berlin in 1989. These movements, each in their own way, try to maintain the protective walls that the ethnic, cultural and national feelings of belonging

represent. It is therefore important for the transnational networks and cultural institutions and organisations formed by the different ethnic minorities in the diaspora, that they are conscious of the nationalist and racist movements' attempts to freeze this development. Both of these tendencies must be understood in relation to the situation of the underclass in which many find themselves. An investigation of civil society must therefore find both the signs of new collectivities, based upon a form of ethnic bricolage, and analyse the ethnic and racist character of the fight for political hegemony that also arises. It is this complex relationship between de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation, which characterises the cultural battlefield constituting the New Europe today, and which is necessary to analyse.”

Charlie Nielsen presents these ideas to his new colleagues at the Centre, which is housed in what were once the public baths on Laurie Grove. The Centre belongs to Goldsmiths College. The College is situated in New Cross, Deptford, in south London. The main building functioned earlier as a private school for the sons of officers in the Royal Navy and the Royal Marines, and, like many other places in Deptford, it is only a mile or so from the River Thames. Deptford's local culture, therefore, can not be understood if the area's maritime history and the lines of connection created by the ships and local sailors who have sailed upon them are ignored, says one of the participants in the meeting, sociologist Les Back, as they walk along New Cross Road.

The former town hall in Deptford has statues of four prominent British admirals on its façade, just as Joseph Conrad cites Deptford, Greenwich and Erith in his world famous novel *Heart of Darkness*, Back continues, in his narrative about how the tension between the global and the local is not an expression of a dichotomy. Instead it illustrates a relation, which in this case refers to the role the Thames has played as the cradle of the Empire. As a further illustration, he mentions that the West India Company north of and south of the Thames has been responsible for the import of products such as sugar from the Caribbean and tea from China. Without such historical transactions over these commodities it would be almost impossible to imagine what it means to say one is English, he says in a typical understatement and adds the following: “London has a global multicultural past, which has in many

cases been erased from collective memory, and this erasure is one of the reasons why it has been difficult for the children and grandchildren of slavery and Empire to be accepted as full and worthy members of British society. If you want to study the relationship between nation, 'race', identity and inheritance, it is necessary to rediscover this history, and thereby achieve a more complete understanding of the ambivalence and heterogeneous character of this joining of journeys, as much as of its roots. Irrespective of how latent this relation appears to be, global relations are an integral part of the local environment and it is Deptford, with its shift from an imperial past into a postcolonial present, which stands as a striking example of this," he proudly rounds off his description of the route that takes him to and from his daily place of work.

When they reach New Cross Gate, they part. Les Back takes the train south to Brockley Rise where he lives. Charlie Nielsen travels north to Charing Cross, tired after an eventful day. He glances towards Tower Bridge and Canary Wharf on the Isle of Dogs – signs of feudal and postmodern London on the horizon.

The metropolitan paradox

"It is a very old English expression. It says that one has a sense of belonging to the place in which one finds oneself. A feeling of belonging, even though in reality one comes from another place. There is another, completely normal expression one encounters when people say they have had a completely beautiful holiday: it has been a home for them even though they have been a long way away from home," replies Les Back to Charlie Nielsen's question about what is meant by the expression "a home from home".

They are sitting in his office and discuss one of the research projects connected with the Centre. The project is called *Routes of Racism*. It is based on a theoretical and methodological examination of the growth in support for extreme right-wing or proto-fascist organisations among certain sections of white working-class youth, and the rise in racially motivated violence, which, directly or indirectly, has been evident in Great Britain and a number of other

European countries. This development has led to debates about the extent to which national differences of a political and cultural character have become smaller and have been replaced by a form of “Euro-racism”, with all the attendant changes in social and cultural identities that this entails for these groups of youth. According to some commentators, it is possible here to find the reason for the joint planning of immigration in the European national states with the goal of creating “Fortress Europe”. Others are of the opinion that this racism, practiced by certain groups of skinheads, must be understood on the basis of the implosion of working class identity in areas where manual work has been exposed to a number of catastrophic economic transformations. And this means that this form of racism, in the last instance, can be explained in terms of the masculinity of the unemployed. Both these explanations suffer from the weakness that they are both based on essentialist models, where what is to be explained is taken as given beforehand, says Les Back. His view is more that they are better understood as patterns, representing either a convergence or an opposition between different migration narratives and the racism that regularly arises in specific urban localities.

This project’s goal is based on the desire to analyse how young people’s sense of public safety and danger is constructed and racialised in their everyday life. Today the relationship of belonging to a particular place shows greater variation and is more racialised, such that the different negotiations about who and where a person is going are in practice governed by a set of rivaling symbolic demands for the ownership of different parts of the metropolis’ social space, such as housing estates, neighbourhoods and schools. These become some of the most important elements in the constitution of their youth identity. There is therefore talk of a project that can help in gaining a more general understanding of the relationship between ethnicity, identity and youth violence. Furthermore, this is just as much a project, which focuses on the policies for the victims as well as for the practitioners of racially motivated violence. It represents an attempt to work against the different tendencies found in neighbourhood nationalism and metropolises. These neighbourhood nationalisms are, however, only one half of the paradox encountered in the European metropolises. Within Europe’s larger

urban areas there is, according to Les Back, the production of a series of complex and encouraging transcultural alliances and meetings between different ethnic minorities and “races”, at the same time as there are extreme forms of violence and racism. Urban cultures represent a series of incomparable political impulses, which make racism as much as transculturalism into symptomatic expressions of what it means to grow up in post-imperial cities. As a consequence, it is impossible to understand this *metropolitan paradox* from within the framework of a binary logic, where cultural processes are either regarded as fixed and rooted or as varying in a constant movement. What occurs is the production of a series of creative, indeed almost promiscuous possibilities of identification. There is a doubling of the routes that can be followed, instead of a static cultivation of cultural roots. What the deafening debates about essentialism versus anti-essentialism ignore is the complex interaction between these processes.

The different forms of social inclusion or exclusion, of social acceptance or rejection, provide a place where issues relating to ethnic, cultural or national identity are worked through. That these cultural processes take place within a series of overlapping territories and mutually connected historical processes means that it is not possible to predict in advance the outcome of this war of attrition between ethnic absolutism’s persistent reference to the authentic as opposed to the fragmentation of cultures, which arises when there is a break. This is something that is all too often ignored, says Les Back, and the ensuing fight over territory is what the metropolitan paradox is about.

Charlie Nielsen has listened to this description of the theoretical rationale behind the project. He returns to the starting point of the conversation and asks Les Back if concepts such as diaspora movements, cultures and identities can be used to understand the tension between homesickness and homelessness, and whether this makes homelessness an *a priori* category for the constitution of identity in the modern. Les Back thinks for a moment, and then answers:

“The exile cultures you refer to, and the experiences of homelessness, which accompany them, are never completely separated from the specific, local connections, where home is reconstructed. People in a very competent manner make the places where they live into their homes, as they transform

some of the conditions connected to the specific locality or specific place where they live. It is to a high degree these processes that form the basis for the production of the local we normally regard in opposition to the global. It is for this reason that I regard the idea of the crossroads as a fertile metaphor. It refers to both the place where all these homeless cultures and people meet, and to the processes whereby this place is assigned such significance that it entails a sense of belonging. Something almost beyond definition and description occurs at this place, and this makes the crossroads a place where transformation and transcendence takes place. It leads to the awareness that the sum of the meeting is something more than its individual parts. I believe that, even if one lives with the awareness of what can be termed homelessness as home, the situation is transformed in such a manner that one creates a completely new home, even though one is a long way from home, and this is done precisely by giving the local a completely new significance.”

“You mean, in other words, that the experience of ‘a home from home’ refers to the special significance given to the local, without thereby forgetting where one comes from. One just gives it a new meaning in a new context.”

“Yes. The local becomes one of these conditions. My experience is that people quite simply demand the right to specific areas. They talk of ‘my area’ or ‘my place’. They position themselves in a very concrete manner in everyday life, and at the same time demand the right to transform the sense of belonging to these territories. It is a complicated process. But it is also interesting, for in the last instance it involves time and the temporal incorporation of cultural processes. If we apply some of these thoughts to the musician Apache Indian and the role he has played in the development of recent popular culture in Great Britain, it is evident that he has more or less functioned as an organic intellectual for some groups. And it is impossible to understand how he has experienced these processes unless one at the same time examines the role Birmingham has played for the postwar history of immigration with this city’s mixture of African, Afro-Caribbean, South Asian and English history. It is not enough to understand the ways cultural processes are temporally incorporated. One must also understand the pauses that people have taken in the course of this long journey, when, on the one

hand, they reconstruct their lives and, on the other hand, produce a new combination of all possible cultures. This requires a temporal incorporation and a pause in the itineracy, to which this incorporation refers.”

“I am not quite sure that I understand what you are talking about, that people have had pauses.”

“It is like on a journey, people decide to take a break for a while. A place is not created from free flowing movement. To a certain extent, there occur new combinations of the places people inhabit when they move around. The same applies to the exile cultures and the global processes which are affecting greater and greater numbers of people. The global and the local do not function as mutually exclusive categories or scales. Quite the opposite is true because each is inside the other”.

When they later touch upon the British National Party’s victory in the local elections in East London, Charlie Nielsen learns that Tower Hamlets is also a part of the project. The desire to study the differences and similarities in how youth perceive these places as either safe or dangerous, has led them to choose the northern part of Tower Hamlets and Deptford, south of the Thames, as the places they would like to investigate in another project, *Finding the Way Home*. “We attempt to combine,” Les Back adds, “the visual with the aural in their descriptions of the places which they regard as either safe or dangerous. We then try to investigate the cultural roots and the boundaries that youth cross when they explore and wander around their community”.

“When you say that youth cross a number of boundaries in their community, does that mean that they react against a form of incarceration? You have earlier said that in the last ten years there has been a growth in neighbourhood nationalism.”

“Yes indeed, if one looks at the ways in which the residential areas are structured, it is interesting to note the routes used by youth, and how they connect one area with another. Just as it is interesting that some of these were constructed by the LDDC (London Dockland Development Corporation). The last mentioned applies to a higher degree to Tower Hamlets than to Bermondsey, Surrey Docks and Surrey Quays south of the river. With respect to neighbourhood nationalism, it is too early to say anything about the actual

project, but if I was to say something at this preliminary stage, then I would say that it is possible to identify two parallel processes. On the one hand, there are certain corners of London that have become more and more inward looking and exclusionary, so the perversions of neighbourhood nationalism practised there are becoming more entrenched. Not just with respect to youth, but for the whole of social life. And then there are other places where the breaking down of these barriers between the different ethnic minorities and between blacks and whites, have been more and more acknowledged and more and more stabilised”.

“Are there any places where this is particularly evident?”

“South of the Thames are some of the most significant sites for these kinds of encounters, particularly in the area around New Cross in Deptford, as well as in Brixton and to a lesser extent in Clapham. The inner city boroughs in south London have become much safer. Here one can call it a form of bridge building. But I suppose the opposite tendency never totally disappears: divisions, cutting across on a local level. What is however even more important for the production of the locality and the understanding of its inhabitants is the tendency of certain groups to move from the inner city boroughs. People take flight. This concerns first and foremost a certain part of the white working class. They move from inner areas to the suburbs. So the concept of ‘white flight’ has become more and more relevant for the whole of this development.”

“So, which way leads to home?”

“We are there already. We are already home. It is neither a question of arriving or starting. People make the place where they are into their home, and I assume that it is this process which you are interested in. It is neither a question of beginning or finishing. A final point is never reached in a society structured by racism. One is always confronted with this form of restlessness, with this lack of stability. Where there in fact occurs a series of negotiations about who is inside or outside any given setting. Forms of involvement and identity can never be satisfactorily sustained because people are also the victims of outside forces. The demands to be authentic, racially pure or culturally absolute are not unusual. Questions concerning home and belonging are always to do with the temporary, conditional and vulnerable.

This means that any form of bridge-building is dependent upon the things that cause weakness. On this point we are talking about a form of contingency. So it is patently clear that any form of racism will accordingly make the bridge weak. It weakens it.”

Charlie Nielsen ends the evening sitting in his new home in Finsbury Park and reflects over how the unfinished in the cultural and social processes we encounter can incorporate such concepts as the Foreigner and the Other. As a preliminary conclusion, he arrives at the view that the precondition for the achievement of a form of unity or harmony between the different ethnic groups and “races” is that one doesn’t remove “difference”, and instead finds new ways of living with it.

Fairness: a new topic in the racial discourse of the 90s

“Many young whites feel that they are called racists, irrespective of what they do. They are many, and their bitterness can stand in the way of progress towards a shared life. It can stand in the way of a life based upon the motto ‘live and let live’.”

This is the narrator in the opening of the film *Routes of Racism*. After a panoramic view of magnificent Greenwich, with its many historical buildings and the tea clipper *Cutty Sark*, the reverse of this medallion is revealed. Greenwich is not just a small, idyllic village, visited by tourists. It is one of London’s southern suburbs with a number of grave social problems. It is not just a well-stocked market in Greenwich itself, but also a borough with high unemployment among youth in the suburb’s remaining areas: Woolwich, Charlton, Plumstead, Thamesmead, Abbeywood, Eltham, Kidbrook and Blackheath. These youth, along with a quarter of the borough’s population, live under the poverty line, and this makes Greenwich one of the poorest areas in London. These conditions are serious enough in themselves, but it is not these sides of Greenwich’s social life which have attracted attention in recent times. It is the murder of four young blacks, Rolan Adams, Orville Blair, Rohit Duggal and Stephen Lawrence at the beginning of the 90s. After these murders, part of the press labeled Greenwich as Europe’s capital of racism.

This has made residents retreat even more into themselves than normal. They don't want to be called "racists" just because they are white and come from a certain place. The borough, on their side, wished to find out why the overwhelmingly white areas in the borough are regarded as especially dangerous by youth with an ethnic minority background. So even though the proportion of ethnic minorities in these areas is not greater than three to four percent, there has been an interest in finding the social basis of the racist acts and this has led to a path breaking research.

The film's narrator, Roger Hewitt, is one of these researchers. In 1992 he concentrated his research on a particular estate in Greenwich, Thamesmead, after Rolan Adams was murdered there in late 1991. He has tried to discover the stories circulating about this event among the young residents. The reason is that the antiracist work among the youth in Thamesmead must take, as its starting point, how it is often questions about "race" and racism that occupy their minds. Accordingly, the feelings that come to the surface in connection with the murder of Rolan Adams and the expulsion of the black families have given rise to racism and a whole series of sagas about these events. It is through an investigation of this *Sagaland*, with a focus on how youth regard their lives, that Roger Hewitt has become interested in studying the routes followed by racism, rather than being content with studying its roots.

The film and the publication of the same name are the final points in this research. Common to both is that they seek to find what makes people, who are normally extremely polite, become part of a continuum with racist harassment on one end of the pole and racist attacks on the other. According to Roger Hewitt and Les Back, who works with a corresponding project in Birmingham, one best understands this by concentrating on racism's routes rather than focusing on its roots and causes in colonial history, or in the psychological constitution of individuals. The ways in which particular ideas, representations and actions are told by one person to the next in a given community, and thus further elaborated or strengthened or, in the opposite extreme, ignored or tolerated, is the primary topic of this research. What comes into the limelight are not the victims, but the culprits and the manner in

which youth express themselves through racist attitudes and risk transforming these attitudes into racist actions.

The only thing Roger Hewitt could in the first instance offer Charlie Nielsen were some of his contacts in Greenwich, who had been his informants. One of these was Bernie Bristow, leader of the Orchard Youth Club in Kidbrooke. Charlie Nielsen asks Bernie Bristow to characterise the area and tell him about the youth who come to the club. But he soon finds out that the real youth work does not take place in the actual club.

“In recent years I have tried to create a structure to our outreach work among youth in the borough. We have actually put social workers on the streets to work with what we have called disaffected youth, who don't use educational provision, youth clubs, some of them don't go to school on a regular basis and some do. One group was between 18 and 21 years of age, so we actually decided to pick that group up and had them in the centre. We were doing work with CV's, we did some training with them, we did some discussion groups on health education, also on drugs and sexual health because they were all having sex and not really aware of Aids and HIV and nobody using condoms. We did some discussion groups on racism. There was one black lad who was in the group occasionally and although the others weren't being racists towards him, they were still making racist remarks which made him feel that it was difficult to be in the group sometimes. But he said nothing because he wanted to be part of that group. So we talked that through on occasions as well. After six months working with that group most of them have now got jobs and one of them is in college and one of them has just bought a motorcycle because he managed to get a job and is now earning some money. So the work did actually make progress and we did achieve some fine results with that group as well.”

Charlie Nielsen tells Bernie Bristow that it has been a depressing and moving experience reading Roger Hewitt's publications *Sagaland* and *Routes of Racism*. He talked about groups of white youth who attacked young black men when they were alone in the street. It has become the norm. But this is only one side of the problem. Another concerns the way in which the people on the Thamesmead Estate were, on the one hand, against the violence in the area, but, on the other hand, said that they felt the ethnic minorities were

taking over – as if they more or less consciously tried to find an excuse for their actions. It appears as if the general opinion among the whites is that the ethnic minorities are treated far better by the local authorities. In *Sagaland* and *Routes of Racism* one comes across arguments again and again that focus upon what it means to be “fair” and the lack of “fairness”. This topic represents, according to Roger Hewitt, something completely new in the racial discourse of the 90s, with its focus on racially motivated violence.

Bernie Bristow replies: “This is pretty much the attitude one meets in this area when working with youth, not to forget their parents. Certainly young people have said fairly recently that they feel as though different ethnic groups have been treated better than them. They feel they have access to housing, education, employment and benefits, and they don’t. I recently did a residential with them and one of the things we used was a discussion group in the form of the quiz. In one quiz we asked about myths of black culture; in another about immigration. Through the quizzes we were able to take up problems connected with racism. There are lots of exercises that social workers can use to break down some of these attitudes and if you can get them to sit down, which we did on this weekend, then quite a bit of work can be done. They have all these myths in their heads and all these beliefs, which I can only assume come from their peers and parents, who give them most of their information, and they just perpetuate themselves really. They hand it down from one generation to another. And if no one challenges it, if no one makes them think: ‘Well, hang on, it’s not really true, if you look at statistics and hard core information’. But they don’t get provided with that information anywhere else. So part of the work was to give them hard core information through some of these quizzes and to make them think: ‘OK, how many black people are there in the country and the percentage – 5%, 10%, 20%?’ And obviously the figure is quite low and they will think: ‘It seems like more than that’.”

Charlie Nielsen asks Bernie Bristow if the young people are racists, or if they simply lack education, or if it is because they are not used to living together with people from a different cultural background.

“It is a mixture of all three. Yes, they are racists, because they have these attitudes. Definitely they are uneducated. That’s why we call them disaffected, because racism isn’t looked at in schools in an educational sense, so that they can make progress. One of the things I have thought about after the discussion groups is that one is forced to take a stand about what they think and feel. If we are not working with these young people, and we have been fairly lenient with them, inasmuch as that we are not going to jump on them as soon as they say something that is racist, although it might stir something inside me sometimes, when they make me feel angry, then I’ve got to accept the fact that it is the way they have been brought up and that, in the last instance, the cause is that they haven’t received a proper education. If schools allow them to express their racist attitudes, so they know what they are dealing with and to then challenge them, in most cases they will just freak out and say: ‘You are expelled’. Schools will not be able to deal with such a situation, whereas I think we are better equipped as workers to deal with the situation. Our policy is much more flexible – and at the end of the day, if you want to work on attitudes, if you want to positively challenge them and introduce new ways, and if you can’t allow them to express themselves, you don’t know what they are working with. So unless schools make a radical change and introduce different ways of working around racism many will remain racists, at least in these little pockets of estates, where there are very few ethnic minority groups. The white youth will not have the same opportunities of gaining multicultural experiences as people in Hackney or those living down the road in Lewisham. I feel personally it is very short sighted of workers who run youth clubs to only think of their building and the young people that come to their building. They don’t think of the community as a whole and only work with a small percentage of the community, those who come through their doors. And you know, I think it is very short sighted to say: ‘OK, that’s all I am gonna do because my job description says: ‘Run this youth centre’. It doesn’t say: ‘Go down the road half a mile and work with a gang of kids hanging on the corner’. And I just feel that’s very short sighted because it is precisely there that I am prepared to do my job.”

“Isn’t it true that the BNP has had its headquarters in Greenwich?”

“No, it is in Becksley, which is in Kent, three or four miles away.”

“Has it had any effects on the youth?”

“Yes, it must have had some effects. I have just got one of their leaflets. It was posted through the door. The BNP put a candidate on the Page Estate on the other side of the road, which is very strange because they only have a few candidates in the whole of London. Tower Hamlets is the other one.”

“Are they skinheads – some of the kids?”

“No, they are just average kids. But it varies of course and there are differences between them. We have worked with some of the most disaffected and racist youth, who have inherited almost their attitudes from their parents. It is these kinds of youth who were arrested for the murder of Stephen Lawrence”.

The youth Bernie Bristow is referring to are those supposedly connected with one of the most racist murders in recent English history. It is the murder of Stephen Lawrence, a young Afro-Caribbean, on a main street in Greenwich in 1993. There were witnesses to the murder and five were arrested. They all boasted about the crime. Local inhabitants have both known and feared them, and, lastly but not least of all, a racist police force were careless in the collection of the evidence, so that the five of them were able to walk free because there were discrepancies in the proof. Against the five, Stephen Lawrence's parents have since launched the first civil court case in England for a racist crime, without any immediate change in the result.

They receive far better treatment than us

“It is not the blacks who we have anything against. It is the Somalis. It is the Somalis we don't like. They receive better treatment than us, and that is unfair. So if I could have voted, I would have voted for the BNP”, says one of the kids around the pool table, as Charlie Nielsen is presented to the youth by Jeanette Cunningham, leader of the Ferrier Youth Club.

Ferrier Youth Club lies on an estate in Kidbrooke, where a large number of ethnic minorities live. In contrast to the nearby Orchard Youth Club, this club has the reputation for being rougher, since some of its members are the most racist white youth in the area. They live a dreary life with high unemployment

and a tendency to accuse other weak groups for either taking their jobs or sponging benefits. They express a selective racism in their attitudes towards the different ethnic minorities. It is this group of young white youth who feel that it is the ethnic minorities who receive preferential treatment. The bitterness this creates lies behind most of the arguments connected with unfairness and how they are dealt with. In the last instance, it is this perceived or real lack of fairness among these groups that creates a wall of resistance against any form of progressive antiracist work.

When Charlie Nielsen arrives at the Ferrier Youth Club, Jeanette Cunningham says he is lucky because the youth who are the object of discussion are actually present this evening. They have just been released from prison. It is their kind of attitudes that are presented in the film *Routes of Racism*. The film portrays these young white males who live in an ambiguous borderland.

“We have specifically worked with the racist attitudes of a group of seven young white males”, Jeanette Cunningham says. “I think that one is forced to question the way they think and act. At a certain point we discussed the Union Jack, and a number of them were quite irate that they couldn’t wave the Union Jack without being regarded as racists. In such a situation the point is to let them find a way of expressing their feelings, and to then add the comment that it is the BNP who have kidnapped it. To use the Union Jack has almost become tantamount to supporting the BNP, they said. It is not merely the case that they are misinformed. It is more correct to say that they are not informed at all. So one is forced to educate them again with a whole lot of new information”.

After his first visit to Kidbrooke, Charlie Nielsen has seen the film *Routes of Racism* many times. He has become interested in the role played by the concept of culture in several of the interviews and this is why he asks Jeanette Cunningham for her view. But first, here is the background for his question.

“If we return to the concept of culture, there is a woman in the film who asserts that that there is a widespread feeling among whites in the area, both young and old, that the ethnic minority groups actually possess a culture, but whites apparently don’t have one, and are therefore forced to carry out a re-

evaluation. She doesn't say what this involves. One can imagine that the task entails that, as a British person, one must begin to share the culture which one has in common and thereafter go in depth over the differences that naturally exist. Today it is totally normal, for a cultural commentator, that all forms of essentialist cultural perception are criticised and deconstructed, even if one has an Afro-Caribbean or Asian background. There is indeed no clear, unambiguous conception of what it means to be Asian or Afro-Caribbean."

"Yes, this is correct", Jeanette Cunningham answers. "I also agree that we have come to a stage when we are forced to discuss what it means to be English, and what English culture represents, at the same time when we become aware of the fact that we have become enriched by all the other cultures that have become part of our everyday life. They actually enrich our existence. I mean that we should educate people to see things in such a manner. It is the only way forwards. It is for me, at any rate. You meet more and more young blacks who describe themselves as English when they register as club members. However, they won't be registered as white, but as blacks or, more correctly, as Afro-Caribbean or Asian, if that is what they are. They won't be registered as white, and I am forced to say to them that I don't doubt that they are English. But it doesn't mean that they will be registered as white for that is how the system operates when there is talk of ethnic monitoring, because we still use that."

To judge from Jeanette Cunningham's statement on this point, there is no free choice of identity, thereby neither is there a sanctioned place for the hybrid formation of identities, which to an increasing extent has been possible in other urban social spaces. There is no official category for black Britons. The youth she refers to are actually born in England, like their parents, but this doesn't change the fact that one continues to regard Englanders as persons with a cultural and national background in England, Scotland or Wales.

Charlie Nielsen has talked to some of the youth in the club and they have asked him about the party he voted for in the recent election. As a Danish citizen he tells them he cannot vote. They proceed to tell him that one of the few options for them is the BNP, and how they are against the stream of Somali people coming to England as refugees. He thinks about the

conversation he has just had with them. There is no doubt that, on the one hand, they demonstrate a great need to express themselves and, on the other hand, that they are unpredictable. This comes to the surface in their resistance to all forms of antiracist education, unless they incorporate their own experiences of such concepts as “fairness” and justice between the “races”. This is also revealed in their view of the ethnic equality policy practiced by the Borough of Greenwich. If white youth are asked to sympathise with youth from an ethnic minority background, it is not possible to overlook how they will react negatively to such a policy. This is because they come themselves from such poor social conditions that their chances of gaining employment are just as dire as the blacks’. Accordingly, they don’t regard being white as particularly advantageous in such a situation. They say that, even though they are young, they face the same problems as blacks, and say that the policy of ethnic equality results in the preferential treatment of ethnic minority youth, even though both parties in reality are in the same boat. This is an attitude with broad support in the remainder of the community.

Such views are confirmed by a statement by a young girl in *Routes of Racism*, who says: “All should be treated the same. There should not be one set of rules for one ‘race’ and another for others. They should be identical.” A heavy-handed ethnic equality policy can in fact reinforce the already existing latent racism in a community, when it does not involve white youth perceptions of concepts such as “fairness” and justice in the relations between the different ethnic groups and “races”. The tendency to accentuate the Other’s distinctive cultural roots, instead of following different cultural routes, makes it even more difficult for the white youth to see their own cultural background as a cultural, social and political interaction of fragmented, hybrid processes. It is, furthermore, one of the reasons accounting for why white youth, in their attempt to rehabilitate what it means to be English, on certain occasions can turn towards a party such as the BNP. The BNP represents a reductionist view of culture and simplifies the debate on the ambivalences, contradictions and paradoxes of a multicultural society.

If blacks hadn't existed, we would have had to invent them

“There is no place to go, when you have first arrived. Everything stops there. This can be one of the reasons that people never go there. It has a special position in the minds of people when you live in South London. It is a very special place, almost like a state of mind. Like a black hole. At any rate, that is how one sees it in South London. It is terribly depressing. There is nothing there. It is death”, says Franco Rosso to Charlie Nielsen after having been asked to characterise the outer cities that have become the centre of newer research into racism in England.

Charlie Nielsen has given up his attempt to come into contact with the youth from the Ferrier Youth Club. Instead, he has made the decision to make contact with Franco Rosso. Franco Rosso is a short, muscular man in his mid 50s. He has worked in film and has instructed, been the photographer and written the script for several documentaries and movies. He has also been a teacher in this area. He was the photographer for the film *Routes of Racism* and has besides lived for many years in different parts of Greenwich.

How is it that in some areas rather than in others one encounters extreme forms of racism among youth? This is one of the main questions in this research. One of the hypotheses is that these areas are first and foremost white, but what appears to be even more important is that these areas are juxtaposed with ethnically mixed estates and, at the same border, with a more fertile, rural hinterland. There is either talk of a series of white enclaves within a patchwork of more or less mixed housing estates or a frontline, which constitutes a white catchment area. Irrespective of that, in both cases there is talk of a borderland, characterised by a supply of new racist fronts, to such an extent that there is almost talk of a border war. The goal is to keep the outer perimeters free from ethnic minorities. This is one common point. A second is that these youth have a relatively limited social interaction with ethnic minorities. In fact they gain their first contact with this group when they are finished with primary school. Their growing racism is dependent on peer group norms, school rules for what is regarded as racism and—different intergenerational interpretations.

“The racism of white youth is an extremely complicated question,” Franco Rosso says. “In the media the dominant view has been that these kinds of youth are not to be given space. One has primarily concentrated on the victims. There is no kind of concealed agenda. Most people working in the media agree on this. One gives neither fascists nor these kinds of racists the opportunity to express themselves. They are completely ignored. This is the general opinion among left wing radicals, but Roger Hewitt has gone against the grain. His aim has been to create the foundation for a dialogue by presenting the issue in a new manner, and this is where I enter the picture. I have helped him with *Routes of Racism*, the documentary that has come out of Roger Hewitt’s research. However, the culture you meet out there is a culture of violence. You can’t escape it, whether you are black or white. There is talk of a culture of poverty, which gives rise to violence and more violence. People are very violent. It is not straightforward people, living under proper conditions, who you meet out there. My son also lives there, and I am constantly worried about him. It is very, very violent, and he is also becoming more violent than good. When one lives under such conditions, where violence is accepted as one of the means used to resolve disagreements and daily problems, there is not so much that can be done. And I believe, like them, that some get high on it. It gives them a kind of meaning to life. But the most important thing with Roger Hewitt’s work is that we, for the first time, see the young whites the way we see other ethnic groups. This is something nobody else has done. One has regarded them as hooligans, but it is first now that one has slowly begun to see that the whole question of racism is far more complex than first imagined. Indeed, if blacks hadn’t existed wouldn’t we have had to invent them? Apart from this, the white youth have no conception of what can be called a civil society – other than what takes place in the pub on the Ferrier Estate. It is an overwhelming white estate, even though an increasing number of Somalis and other groups of blacks are moving in. However, the blacks are starting to be assimilated. When the young whites talk about blacks in their peer group a key word is respect. If the young blacks respect them, they will respect them and the reverse. There is a mutual respect. This is not the case with the Somalis, although they actually happen to have Somali friends as well. In general, the Somalis won’t defend

themselves, so they become an easy target. So you might ask why we haven't described how they attack the Somalis in the film and I can tell you. The main reason is to do with the personal cost connected with burglaries into a white home. I can tell you that you will get your legs broken if you burgle a white family because the rumour will circulate in the pub. So that is another reason why the Somalis are easy targets."

Charlie Nielsen can to some extent believe that a pub can be part of civil society. Nonetheless, he is surprised by these views, when Franco Rosso continues: "It is in the pub that things are solved, if you have some kind of problems. And if you have stolen something from a white family, you can offload it in the pub and be one hundred percent sure that you won't do it again because you will be punished. On the other hand, if you commit a burglary, and the victim is a Somali family, then you can be sure you won't be given the same treatment, and the probability of them calling the police is quite small. Somalis have said that they hide their money under the mattress or elsewhere at home. This is according to the youth one further reason for persecuting Somalis."

I have tried to put myself in their position

Charlie Nielsen has listened to Roger Hewitt's desire to create a domination-free communication as outlined by Habermas, and the weight that is given to white youth's accounts of the unfairness they experience in their everyday life, when they compare themselves with ethnic minority youth. But he returns to two of the questions that interest-him: how is it possible to practice an antiracist education and whether it is possible to transform them?

"It is not possible to give a simple answer", Roger Hewitt continues. "I don't think it is possible to improve the ones you have met. This is my view after having worked with them. The explanation lies primarily in the brutality which they are increasingly exposed to in their lives. Apart from this, I don't think it is possible to say much beforehand. It is all too easy to place them in the same box. If you look at them as individuals, one slowly realises that there are weak links in the chain of masculine racism. I believe that most youth workers are

capable of finding this out. To be honest, I also think that the groups that make use of racist language are also the easiest group to reach. Unfortunately, they are the group most frequently overlooked, when it comes to transforming their attitudes, because you tend to focus on the fact that this group finds itself in the risk zone.”

“If you want to reach them, what is required is more than a youth club, where you come to play pool and thereafter go onto the street. What is required is an alternative. If we want to transform their attitudes and behavior, we enter the discussion about creating a civil society, where it is possible to develop alternative dialogues to the ones based upon a racist logic, and, as far as I know, there are no such sites in the places that I have visited,” says Charlie Nielsen to Roger Hewitt.

“Yes, that is correct,” he replies. “Facilities for youth are a general problem. It is necessary to seek to restructure things because there exist so many of these kinds of youth. As far as I understand there are some two thousand in Greenwich. The old perception of a youth club with a pool table or a table tennis table and a mini-bar selling coca-cola and chocolate is not enough. In many respects it is a fight for resources and in my opinion it is a much better strategy to educate youth workers so that they have skills in specific areas or are taught how to be outreach workers. If you are simply content with providing a service for youth in a youth club when they appear to be bored, this can’t be called youth work, and definitely not a kind of youth work capable of tackling their racism. In the last instance, the problem is not the youth. It is mostly to do with social ecology. The manner in which they are brought up, and the fact that they are not confronted with opposing arguments in their own milieu, neither from their parents nor in their community. What would be useful would be some criticism of their racism from the side of their girlfriends. In all probability, they would listen to them more than to the antiracists. Especially if it concerns the unfairness they experience from teachers who, when there is a confrontation between black and whites in the school, they accuse the whites of being racists, even though it might have nothing to do with racism.

The problem is that it is extremely difficult to voice these kinds of arguments in the present political climate. Each time I show the film I have to confess

that the police can harass black communities as such, just as I have to confess there is racism in schools based upon the prejudices of teachers and their selective expectations, and that it is necessarily to do something with both these things. But having said this, this is not the whole story. Times are changing and a lot of things are taking place at the same time. It takes a lot of energy to change attitudes in this area. There are still many who think that what we are doing is far too controversial.”

Racial harassment is not accidental

“How many times do I have to say it? Say it as quickly as you can. Niggers are not welcome. Especially when they drive around in flashy cars.”

This was the content of a flyer dealt out by the BNP on the Silwood Estate, situated in Lewisham in south-east London. This is recounted to Charlie Nielsen by David James when they meet in a café close to Lewisham High Street. The racial harassment in boroughs such as these is described by many as a desperate attempt to resist the development of a multicultural society. David James has worked for a local NGO, Lewisham Racial Equality Council. But at the moment he is unemployed.

“A borough such as Lewisham has an extremely ambivalent relationship to the question of racial harassment. One recognises that racial harassment constitutes a serious problem, such behaviour is condemned, and it is said that all conceivable means will be used to prevent its development. Of course one wants to make sure that everything possible is done to support the victims. This is the borough’s policy. At least in theory. But when it is put into practice, they say that racial harassment is carried out by organised fascist groups, who are either neo-nazis or members of BNP. They only consider it to be racial harassment when committed by organised fascist groups attacking others because of their skin colour. There are cases such as this, like the one we have witnessed in Greenwich with the murder of Stephen Lawrence, and it is of course a serious problem, which worries us, and we must take account of it. But then there are all those other cases where the perpetrators pick on families who are either black or handicapped. They steal cars and write racist

graffiti on the roofs. These kinds of racist harassment and general misbehaviour are just as common, it has taken the council a long time to break with their principle: only as a last resort will victims of such kinds of harassment be offered another place to live. The borough says that there aren't some areas where racial harassment is greater. In other words there is no talk of a pattern. It is a completely random event. But this means they can't explain why it is higher on the Silwood Estate and that there are other estates in Lewisham where it is not a problem. When racial harassment is caused by purely random factors, then there is no reason for Lewisham Racial Equality Council to keep a register of it by taking interviews with the victims and documenting what has happened."

"The council doesn't dispute the very existence of racial harassment?"

"No, they aren't that cruel. But they don't like the fact that we keep a register on it. They say that we are exaggerating the problem by documenting it. They say that they would arrive at the same pattern if we investigated estates other than Silwood. This is because in the last instance they consider it to be a random phenomenon, which can be experienced by all blacks, irrespective of where they live. This is the problem. But racial harassment is not random. It has a deeper, fundamental motive, and if one is able to analyse it, then it might be possible to do something about it. But this requires, of course, that one recognises that there are problems in specific areas or in a specific housing estate. The problem is that the dominant view is that racial harassment exists everywhere and there is therefore nothing that can be done about it and, following this logic, there is no point in moving victims to a safer area. The most important thing is that there exist areas where people feel secure. We have managed to re-house families as far away as Forest Hill and Sydenham at the other end of the borough and just around the corner in relation to Silwood, and none of these places has problems."

"How should one work from an educational perspective with these kinds of youth – those who are guilty of racial harassment?"

"I don't know, but one thing I know is that it is possible to successfully transform the youth who have begun to develop fascist attitudes, in an area such as Southwark. I have concentrated on helping the victims, so that they might get to live in safer conditions. I have never worked with these kinds of

youth education. I only know that it doesn't help at all if the youth don't themselves acknowledge that it is a problem. I think that Greenwich has been more conscious of the problems than we have. We have had some serious racist attacks, but not murder. So the problem has been more serious in Greenwich than in Lewisham. Irrespective of how critical I have been of them, in Greenwich and Lewisham they have done many noteworthy things when it comes to re-housing and protecting victims of racist harassment, just as in certain cases court proceedings have been brought against the perpetrators. The problem is that it does not matter how much you do, you can never do enough."

Violence to alleviate the pain created by resentment

"Even though one comes from a Bengali background, one should represent the whole community. This is what I do as a councillor in Tower Hamlets. Seventy percent of my constituency is white, so even though I have a Bengali background, I have to represent the whole community, just as a doctor has to attend to all of the patients, whatever their colour. But since racism is a white problem, expressing how the whites have no respect for Bengalis or blacks, it would have been of great symbolic value if we had managed to elect a person with Bengali background to Parliament in the recently held election. There live in the region of 300,000 Bengalis in the whole country. Because Tower Hamlets is one of the poorest places in the country, and badly needs improvements, the election of an MP with Bengali background would have great symbolic significance for the Bengali people's feeling that they are making progress in society. For me this was one of the goals for putting myself forward. But, apart from this, the work would involve the same things if a white was to tackle the issues of economics, housing, employment, education and social policy," says Rajan Jallal Uddin.

In the letters Charlie Nielsen writes home during his stay in London, it is possible to read about some of the routes that, with time, come to mean so much to him. One of these is bus line 253. It goes from Warren Street to Camden Town, Holloway, Finsbury Park, Stamford Hill, Clapton Pond and

Hackney to Whitechapel in the East End. On this journey the orthodox Jewish community around Stamford Hill is left and a first impression is gained of the somewhat poorer and more run-down, but nonetheless pulsating life around Mare Street in Hackney. This is followed by Bethnal Green and the classical East End approaches. It is not just a journey from the restaurants and cafés in Soho, where businessmen have their lunch meetings, to the multitude of grocers, halal butchers, sari shops, travel agents and cafés one finds in “Little Bangladesh” between Brick Lane and Cannon Street. It is also a journey from wealth, where questions such as ethnicity, nationalism and racism are immediately absent, to poverty, where these problems are so much an integrated part of everyday life that at times they appear impossible to resolve. It is a journey from white England’s dominant culture to one of the areas in London where, from the end of the 70s to the mid 80s, a series of bridges have been constructed between young blacks and whites, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, between the different ethnic groups formed in the mixed culture around the BYM (Bangladesh Youth Movement) in this part of London.

The BYM was formed in 1976 at a time when the support for the then called NF (National Front) and organised racism in the East End was at its highest. In the beginning of the 80s a new generation of Bengalis grew up. At the time, voter support for the NF declined, but racist attacks on Bengali youth, in the form of fire bombs and stabbings, continued to live their own life. Under such conditions the BYM became one of the most important attempts to position the racism experienced on the street in relation to the institutional racism encountered in housing policy, social policy, health policy and treatment by the police. At the same time, the BYM became more political and several of its members travelled to the continent to discuss the development of the far right and racist attacks in the communities where a large number of children of migrants now live. It is in the mid 80s that the BYM experienced its golden age. It is in this period that a conscious rising occurred among young Bengalis in the Bengali community, where a lot of talented activists from different organisations were working in Tower Hamlets. And it was in this period that Rajan Jallal Uddin received his political education.

“Isn’t there talk of resentment among the whites, who use Bengalis and other ethnic groups as scapegoats?” Charlie Nielsen asks.

“Indeed. But among whites there is also an element of white supremacy. With whites resentment is connected with a feeling of knowing better. If I’m white, I’m supposed to be better and, therefore, I’m also supposed to be accepted as such”.

“In Europe, there are more and more groups who are marginalised, and this creates, in my opinion, a conflict between the different groups, as they increasingly find themselves at the bottom of society. It is, first and foremost, under such conditions that ethnicity today plays a role as a signifier in the formation of identities. It comes to play a role in the resentment created in the different groups. Whites have historically been accustomed to blacks occupying a position at the bottom of society, but when they themselves approach this position, they are confronted with a situation when they will live on the same level as blacks.”

Jallal takes a pause and then adds:

“That’s the situation for an increasing number of whites. Resentment originates under such conditions, when more and more whites find themselves in such a position. In Tower Hamlets whites don’t occupy the dominant position. It is the Asians who drive around in big cars. It is the Asians who have economic power and possess capital. The whole of Commercial Road, with its selection of warehouses and wholesalers, is not owned by Bengalis, but by Asians and Indians. But those from outside don’t see the difference. This can be one of the reasons that whites believe that it is the Bengalis who control the economy, when it is absolutely not the case. However, this doesn’t necessarily change the resentment that many whites feel.”

“Isn’t it the Indians and Pakistanis who own the warehouses? Do they use the Bengalis as home workers?”

“Commercial Road is famous for supplying the rest of Europe with clothes. The whole of Europe makes their purchases here. Salim & Salim and the rest of the large firms in Commercial Road own giant businesses with turnovers in the million class, and they import their products from lands in the Far East such as India, Taiwan and Korea, where they make use of cheap labour. So,

it is not Bengalis who benefit from the work. This is how it was before in time, but it is not the case any more. This part of the industry has been moved to Taiwan. This is why, more and more unemployed Bengali families have arrived in Tower Hamlets. People move from the north of England to the south, because industry in the north is no longer of importance. They come here for cultural reasons. They want to be near their own kind and also dream of creating a better life in the south.”

“How large is the unemployment in the Bengali community?”

“It depends upon how you count. But in certain parts of Tower Hamlets it is between thirty and forty percent.”

“Where do Bengalis work then, if they have work at all?”

“Most of them work in the restaurant business.”

Jallal tells about his education. He has studied English in evening classes and taken some courses in politics, economics and leadership, but at the moment he is unemployed. The advantage with this is that he can use all his energy on developing the community through his work as a local councillor. He is of the opinion that there has been some progress in this area since the BYM’s golden era in the mid 80s.

“The situation has actually improved. Fifteen years ago it was quite realistic to be worried about a racist attack in different parts of Tower Hamlets, but today we don’t experience this in the same manner. At least not to the same extent.”

“I have heard that the pub where we recently celebrated the election victory on the first of May and, at the same time had a beer to mourn that you hadn’t been nominated as a candidate for Parliament, might be invaded by white racists because they know that it is a place where both blacks and whites can meet. I can’t remember what it is called?”

“That is correct. The pub is called, The Swan and the Cuckoo.”

“Does this mean you are in danger?”

“The risk is always there, but I think a lot has to happen before they attack me. They know we have friends. We would be in a position to take revenge. This wasn’t the case before. Then it went just one way. Today the white racists, if they plan to attack anybody, must think twice before they do it. This does not mean we support the Bengali gangs who attack elderly white

women. There is no way we can accept this. This doesn't change the fact that it is now sometimes the young Bengalis who attack young whites, and this was not the case how it was earlier. Before things went in only one direction. Today there is a far greater degree of balance on this point."

"So things have improved in a positive manner?"

"Absolutely".

"Fifteen years ago the political struggle took place on the streets. It was a struggle, on the one hand, to gain acceptance and recognition and, on the other hand, to organise a defense against racist attacks. Today this struggle has been transformed and takes place in the different community organisations and the council. Is that correct?"

"Yes. Earlier it took place on the streets, and it still does to a certain extent, but for us it is now about changing institutions. This follows from the fact that a new Bengali middle class has now been created, just as more and more now ask the question: What is the new middle class doing? There are more and more Bengalis in the community who feel resentment towards this new upwardly mobile class because they mean that they have too much power and don't do enough for them."

Such is the situation in Tower Hamlets today. Racism has been controlled to a certain extent, so racist harassment is primarily limited to certain parts of this large borough. The violent confrontations that still exist between the different groups with ethnic, nationalist and racist motives are an expression of these groups' attempt to exert an influence in the different housing estates. It is as if they are attempting to find a temporary way of alleviating the pain created by resentment. Whether the former pioneers in the BYM will be successful in reaching solutions to some of the problems found in this part of London through their strategic choice of the long march through the institutions is still an open question.

Routes as opposed to roots

“I would absolutely like to live in a mixed area with all possible kinds of ethnic groups. It is the same for me if they are lilac, blue or green. It is the same for me whichever colour it is. It doesn’t matter to me,” says Sam, a young white girl, about sixteen years of age, when Charlie Nielsen asks her if she would feel safer living in an area of mainly white people.

Charlie Nielsen, shortly after arriving in London, talked with Les Back about the purpose behind the *Finding the Way Home* project. The project is based upon the desire to look at the consequences that the different migration stories and the racism that exists in specific urban areas have for the everyday life of young people, and how they feel safe or vulnerable in public. It is a joint project between the Centre for Urban and Community Research at Goldsmiths College and the New Ethnicities Unit at the University of East London. The project focuses on different areas on both sides of the Thames. North of the river, the Isle of Dogs in Tower Hamlets has been selected. It became famous in 1993 for its election of the first BNP local councillor in England. South of the river, the area around Deptford has been selected because of its multicultural harmony between the different ethnic groups and “races”. Charlie Nielsen, however, has become more and more irritated for not having yet met some of the youth who are, after all, the subject of the conversations. He mentions this to Sarah Newlands, who is the research assistant for the part of the project looking at the Deptford area. He is therefore pleased to accept her offer to meet some of the youth who are involved in the project. In early 1997 he is sitting together with Sarah Newlands and some of her young friends in a classroom at Deptford Green School in Lewisham.

Charlie Nielsen is interested to hear about their view of home, homeland, homelessness and homesickness. To begin with, he tells Sam, Theodora from Sierra Leone and Lisa from Jamaica that he regards England as the most multicultural country in Europe and Deptford as one of the most multicultural inner cities in London. This gives rise to wild protests from Theodora. She argues that France is more multicultural than England, and with this the conversation with the three girlfriends begins.

“France is racist,” protests Sam.

“No it isn’t,” says Lisa

"Yes it is," maintains Sam.

"There is a right-wing party in France. They have more strict laws on immigration than we have and immigrants from North Africa are exposed to a powerful racism," intervenes Sarah Newlands.

"My grandparents live in another country. They live in Jamaica," answers Lisa.

"Have you been to visit them?" asks Charlie Nielsen.

"Yes, lots of times," she replies.

"What's it like there?"

"It is nice, but there are also areas where it is dangerous, and I had no desire to visit such places," answers Lisa.

"In Kingston?"

"Yes," says Lisa.

Charlie Nielsen now turns to Theodora and asks:

"You come from Africa?"

"Yes, my parents come from Africa. They come from Sierra Leone in West Africa, and if you were to ask if I have been there, then I would say that I was in fact born there," she replies and laughs.

"In your opinion, does a black English culture exist?" asks Sarah Newlands.

"Yes," answers Lisa.

"Does it make you into a black British?" continues Sarah Newlands and takes the words right out of Charlie Nielsen's mouth.

"No, I am not a black British. I am an Afro-Caribbean," answers Lisa.

"Afro-Caribbean? Is that what you would call yourself?" asks Sarah Newlands.

"Yes, that is what I am," she replies.

"So you take an African culture from the Caribbean to Great Britain without becoming British?" continues Sarah Newlands.

Lisa doesn't however have a chance to reply because Charlie Nielsen adds:

"Do you mean that there is a difference between being Afro-Caribbean and being black British?"

"Yes, because I don't have any British blood in my veins," she replies.

"You have mixed blood. You are African and Caribbean," adds Sam.

“Yes, they are my parents’ cultures, and it is them that I am a product of,” confirms Lisa.

“What about you?” asks Charlie Nielsen as he turns to Sam. “Do you talk with Theodora and Lisa about the history of slavery?”

“Yes, in social studies, even though it mainly deals with Parliament and other such boring topics. But apart from this, I don’t mean that it is just the whites who are racists; there are different forms of racism in the world,” she replies.

“If we want to learn something, then we have to learn more history,” adds Lisa.

“But this area is known for its black history, which goes back to the 1600s,” says Charlie Nielsen.

It is perhaps a sign of the paradoxical situation that it is he who tells them of Joan Anin-Addo’s book, *Longest Journey: A black History of Lewisham*. But he then adds:

“I have heard that there is a certain tension between the Nigerians who have recently arrived and the Afro-Caribbeans who have lived here for many years. Is this correct?”

“Yes, there are of course West Indians who don’t like Africans, just as the opposite is also the case. It is completely natural, just as it is completely natural that there are blacks who don’t like whites, and Indians who don’t like the Chinese,” answers Lisa

“But when you say that the area is decidedly a multicultural area, does this mean that there is no racism?” asks Charlie Nielsen.

“Yes, of course there is racism,” they reply in unison.

“But are there areas where it is more prevalent?”

“Yes, in Surrey Quays. There, the whole area is racist,” answers Lisa.

“We have heard a whole lot about it, but we don’t know about the actual details,” adds Sam.

“Which areas do you regard as safe?” asks Charlie Nielsen after this.

“There aren’t actually any safe places. Criminality can be found everywhere. And racism,” answers Sam.

“Is it primarily the blacks who are vulnerable to racism, or is it the Asians and the whites as well?” asks Sarah Newlands in an attempt to get the problem presented more clearly.

“It is the Asians and Asian businesses who are first and foremost exposed to racism,” answers Lisa who then continues, “when one enters a business owned by an Asian, the Pakistani, or whatever he is, soon stares in a strange way, even if one has a skin colour, which is only a little different than his, because he is afraid that we will steal something.”

“Would you feel unsafe if you were alone in a white area?” asks Charlie Nielsen.

“No,” she answers, but adds that she would at any time prefer to live in an area with all possible kinds of people because of the experiences and cultural exchanges, which can occur in a mixed area such as Deptford. The participants in the project have had the task of speaking into a tape recorder and constructing a diary for a week. Charlie Nielsen has heard some of the tapes and one of the topics gaining their attention is naturally music. And when he asks them which music they prefer, Lisa answers: “Any kind of music that gets me to dance. Garage, swing, reggae, soul and disco.” Sam also wants music to make her dance, but prefers black music because it is different. Slightly mystified on being confronted with these distinctions Charlie Nielsen is content to ask them where they feel at home.

“My home is where I come from,” answers Theodora.

“Do you mean Sierra Leone?” asks Sarah Newlands.

“Yes”, answers Theodora.

“I am not entirely sure, but I would say Jamaica,” adds Lisa.

“You should really mention your roots, wherever they are,” corrects Sam, thinking of the African continent.

“My home is Jamaica,” decides Lisa after pausing to think for a little while.

“I am British. I have in fact South American, Scottish and Spanish blood in me, but I am first and foremost British,” says the white Sam.

“It is strange that in a project with the main title *Finding the Way Home* the participants, in their description of home, to a higher degree turn towards their roots, rather than towards the place in which they actually find themselves. And it is just as paradoxical that Lisa doesn't regard herself as a black British,

but as an Afro-Caribbean, because that is in her blood,” says Charlie Nielsen to Sarah Newlands, when they reflect on the young girls’ responses back at the Centre.

“Yes, the distinction between roots and the routes they follow is what they are actually suggesting. But that is what we are confronted with when we actually listen to the youth. Personally, I believe, however, that Lisa sooner or later will begin to incorporate elements of something British in her self-conception. That she hasn’t done it yet is mainly because she identifies the British with being white and English. As a point of law we have not yet reached the situation where being British includes everybody, but culturally blacks, in London at least, have had a huge influence on the development of youth culture. So how is it possible to say that black culture is not British? It is simply more than that. I think she will come to have a completely different understanding when she is a bit older,” answers Sarah Newlands.

Hereafter Sarah Newlands points out how youth are forced by circumstances to make the street corners into their self-created homes and homeland. They are transformed by the restless longing of youth and become the source of an indefinable homelessness and homesickness. On these corners, a series of cultural routes for different cultural languages and rhythms are created. Here they are mixed together in such a way that they cannot be reduced to their independent parts. On these street corners, a completely new meeting place is created for a culture that can neither be reduced to their parent’s original culture, nor to the dominant national culture, because in one and the same moment it is both global and local. Here youth create completely new dialogues and stories when they enter into a number of mutual negotiations about where they come from and where they are going. So, in this way they feel safe as they participate in the process of coming to terms with a dangerous and threatening environment.

Hybridity as critical difference or multicultural masquerade

For years Phil Cohen has worked with cultural studies, pedagogy and educational questions. He is regarded by many as a member of the first generation of researchers to come out of the so-called "Birmingham School". In the beginning of the 70s he held a lecture at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham. It was about subcultural conflicts and rituals of resistance among youth from the working class. This lecture has since been regarded as one of the central texts produced by the Centre. But he was never formally part of the Centre. He worked primarily as a youth worker in different parts of London until 1978. He then became a senior researcher at the Institute of Education, University of London, for 10 years. After a short period as a free intellectual he became the leader of the New Ethnicities Unit at the University of East London. In the whole of this period, whenever possible, he has made it a habit of using the library at the British Museum, in order to delve deeply into whatever topics interested him at the time. They have decided to follow this habit and arrange to meet at a café close to the British Museum.

It is well known that the diaspora can lead to a form of regressive homesickness, and thereby to all kinds of nationalism. But, it is a different kind of diaspora and diasporic identity that has the reconstruction of the homeland as their focus. They are constantly reconstructed when abroad, forcing migrants and their descendents to live with the manifold of identities and overlapping territories created by the diaspora. It is with this kind of diaspora identity in mind that Charlie Nielsen asks Phil Cohen if he regards its restless centre as the possible source of a series of hybrid identities and cultures. However, the question gives rise to an aggressive answer:

"I am tired of all the talk about hybridity and the whole debate it has generated. I know that originally the debate on hybrid identities and cultures focused on new identities and also contained a certain hope. But since then it has developed into a giant cliché. It has created an unfruitful opposition between healthy, happy hybrid cultures on the one hand, and pathological, pure culture on the other hand. The belief that people can learn to combine

conflict-laden histories, and praising them for this, is in my opinion problematic. I am not thinking of the way Homi Bhabha uses the concept. This is because his concept of identification in the colonial context refers, firstly, to the post-colonial situation and, secondly, to different forms of representation. One is mimesis and the other, masquerade. If one transfers this distinction to racial representation, it is necessary to differentiate between these two different orders to be able to understand its articulation in the process of identification. This has a number of implications. One of these is that when we talk of hybridity, in many cases it is identical with a performance where one adds the culture differences. So hybridity becomes a kind of multicultural masquerade. However, what the masquerade conceals is the pain these people experience when they are ripped up from the roots of their different identifications and histories. All of these kinds of things are lost in the normal manner in which hybridity is discussed. This is one of the reasons explaining why I am a little on my guard. As a concept it has an aura of something that is to be celebrated, and, as a consequence, it has received the status of a cultural or multicultural resource. All have reminiscences of this, at least to the extent that a process of integration is taking place. In a way, the concept refers to what we all do when we try to create a dialogue or conversation between the different stories that constitute our life and the Inner Other and, since this is an unceasing struggle, there is at the same time talk of a process of reconciliation. This is something we are all forced to address, even though the postmodern wave has set a question mark against all attempts to create a connected narrative from our lives. But in my opinion we have a tremendous need to create meaning in our lives and to join the fragments together into a whole, even if this results as a collage or montage or cubist reconstruction. The desire to give it an aesthetic and, therefore, also a formal connection will always be present, irrespective of how much people talk of a decentred identity.”

“Isn’t one forced to think more of the process of giving the product a form than of the final result, in the desire to create a hybrid identity or culture? Isn’t one forced to find a particular fixed point as the starting point for the process of working through the hybrid identities and cultures of which they are an expression? Not each and every form of mixing results in a hybrid culture. So,

it must be the degree of working it through that decides if there is a hybrid culture.”

“Yes, that is correct, there is a question of weighting the different elements, where the decisive criterion determining if there is a hybrid culture is the change in the power relation between the dominant culture and the subordinate culture. If one transfers this question to the difference between collage and montage, then the elements in the collage are given a certain weighting. This creates a passive relationship between them, which, in the last instance, is dependent on an aesthetic decision. In montage, on the other hand, there is a dialectal relationship between the different images, and this creates a third, completely different meaning. In this case, a question mark is placed against the dominant commonsense opinion. A so-called critical understanding results from that.”

“Is it not precisely this that we attempt to capture with concepts such as hybridity, creolising and syncretism?”

“Indeed, but it is never specified. One refers to only the mixing. When people talk of hybrid cultures, they refer to people of mixed ‘race’, which is the case when one has an Irish father and a Nigerian mother. A form of mixed ‘race’ or a multiracial inheritance is what people have in mind in such cases. What is forgotten is that the different categories have been racialised, and a whole series of essentialist definitions of the different ethnic identities are used. A struggle then occurs between representatives for the opinions founded upon these definitions. According to such views, blacks should marry other blacks, if they are not to be ‘traitors’ to their ‘race’, and this applies to all other ‘races’ that are opponents of mixed marriages. They don’t of course say that they are renegades to their racial inheritance, but that they are traitors to their cultural inheritance. However, they have in mind the same opposition to mixed marriages. At the same time, both here and in the U.S.A. there are more and more mixed marriages among African-Caribbeans and white Englanders, as well as among Asians and white Englanders, even though there are fewer with an Asian background involved in such relations. Ironically enough, resistance to such developments are to be found among racists as well as antiracists, because both parties want to hold onto their essentialist views of the ‘race problem’. So, in precisely this version, you are of course

correct in saying that hybridity, in spite of the opposition, functions in practice.”

Charlie Nielsen has noticed that in the course of the conversation he has had to fight against an increasing feeling of disappointment and disillusionment. Over time he has acquired the belief that new ethnicities and new hybrid identities and cultures are formed on the borders of the European metropolises, where there exists both a multicultural harmony between the different ethnic groups and “races” and, at the same time, where a reconstruction of diasporic identities is taking place. He therefore attempts to ask Phil Cohen, once again, if he is of the opinion that the potential for resistance can arise in these border areas:

“Is it not possible to conceive of a dialectic between homeland and homelessness in the diaspora, such that it gives rise to a whole series of new ethnicities and a new composition of the working class based upon a nonracial ideology? Will this not lead to a change in the conception we have had up until now about what it means to be English?”

“I would hope so. But I am afraid that, to a high degree, it is wishful thinking. When it comes to exploring what it means to be English, there is a widespread tendency to identify a series of contradictory connections and linguistic articulations between racism, nationalism and imperialism. They all contain some of the characteristics we today associate with being English. In my opinion, such a construction of Englishness lacks all sense of reality. It lacks an understanding of concrete history, apart from its ability to continually reconstruct itself. It has basically a nonexistent centre. This is why English authors have used so much time to fill this empty space. This is why they have tried to cover the space in the heart of what it means to be English. So, for the same reasons, I have asked myself if there are other ways of tackling this question that are not connected with the post-colonial maneuver. The postcolonial position attacks the English for what they have done and considers itself to be outside this. In my opinion the most interesting work is to be found among those authors who can live neither with nor without the English, and this applies to some extent to me. They recognize, each in their own way, the role played by the constitutive absence or empty space in what

it means to be English, and the apocalypse it has given rise to in contemporary times.”

After making these comments, Phil Cohen sets the concept of home and all that it is associated with it at the centre. There is a general view that the loss of empire, together with the rising number of ethnic minorities who now live in the heart of the former empire, has led to a crisis in what it means to be English. This is where the postcolonial position gains its energy. The truth is that the English, with their inward looking view of things, have not built their own thatched cottages and imported tea from the colonies, but have used these things to sooth their personal as well as national crises. These things also functioned as architects behind the phrase “My home is my castle”. They made it possible for popular consciousness to place the home alongside the familiar and everyday, the local pub, local society within the nation. It is not just the entitlement to the territory, and who can be barred from society, but also what it means to be English, which are constantly exposed to changes, negotiations and struggle when one talks about the concepts of “home” and “homeland”. The new shift is that England with the presence of ethnic minorities has also gained the opportunity to liberate itself from the straightjacket and fill the empty mental space with a new ethnicity. This is dependent upon how they come to terms with the racialising process that is connected with these phenomena, concludes Charlie Nielsen as he and Phil Cohen go their separate ways outside the British Museum.

During the short meeting, people are enjoying the summer on the pavements of cafés, in pubs and in the parks. Those who are unfamiliar with London would be pleasantly surprised by how many green areas there are, despite the at times overwhelming stone constructions that appear, some sometimes in the most surprising places. This is also true of the area around the British Museum. As Phil Cohen retreats into the silence of the reading room, Charlie Nielsen, after a short visit to the Museum Tavern pub and the nearby bookshops, is sitting in the park in Russell Square. He meditates over how Phil Cohen has problematised the theoretical and methodological approaches that he had until then identified himself with, such that the complexity in the “race problem” is constantly kept in view. It might appear wearisome, but it is also healthy. Charlie is Nielsen is confronted once again

with the question: should he adopt an almost panoptican theoretical perspective on the information he has obtained, rather than following his intuition, as he has done up until now, letting the different conversations enrich each other? In spite of the risk of sitting with only undigested stumps, that are incapable of becoming a connected whole, he decides to continue his investigation and wander in the multicultural landscapes. The alternative would be to either immerse himself in interpretation from an ivory tower, or let himself be wrapped up in his role as a sociological *flanêur* in the outer city areas, situated as far away as possible from Bloomsbury, where he now finds himself. He observes a group of young blacks and whites on the grass, deep in discussion, and the single older ladies, who are sitting undisturbed, sun bathing, without realizing that they are the objects of his research. A short while after this he gets up.

The narrative structure and political territory of the streets

“I find myself like a pendulum going from one audience to another audience. In one being called an obscure theoretician and in the next an empiricist, and now and again it almost drives me mad. In my opinion this says a lot about the academy and working intellectually, and I am interested in why there is no longer a generation of politically committed academics including people like Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall. They were very much involved in the tradition of workers’ education and the role culture played in society, and let this become an inspiration in their academic work. The concept of culture and cultural politics was for them the sphere where they could combine academic work with political practice. It is for this reason that I have been so fascinated with what goes on on the streets and the implications this has for politics.”

This is how Michael Keith gives an account of a personal and general societal dilemma, when Charlie Nielsen meets him in a Bengali restaurant close to Cannon Street at the beginning of 1997. Michael Keith is the head of the Centre for Community and Urban Research at Goldsmiths College and is interested in theoretically investigating urban space and urban cultures. At the

same time he is a local councillor in Tower Hamlets looking for practical solutions to political problems in one of London's most socially deprived boroughs.

"Today there is a tendency of talking about the state and civil society as almost opposed and separate territories. After post-apartheid South Africa, the collapse of communist Eastern Europe and the post-political Western Europe and United States there is a tendency to valorize civil society as being almost a territory of pure political activity, which is outside the determination of the state. This is a sloppy, romantic and incorrect position. First of all it completely ignores how government and power is not just a question of belonging to the domain of the state, and secondly, a lot of organisations that supposedly reside in civil society have traces and interrelationships and interdependencies with the structures and affiliations of the state itself. So if you actually talk about some of the things like the school and other agencies of socialisation there is a long-standing critique of their relationship to the structures of power. But if you look at this network of community associations, they are almost never independent of the state. On this point they can in no way be regarded as innocent. So if you look around here the organisations that have had power, created and politicised East End Bengali civil society, were intimately connected with both the form of the local state at the time and the way in which particularly the Greater London Council in the early 1980s were funding a lot of these organisations. This led to the generation of some autonomous Bengali associations and organisations, but they were to some extent dependent on the funding they received from the state. This must not be forgotten. So the notion that the civil society is kind of outside the state is nonsense."

By working, living and researching in Tower Hamlets in the East End Michael Keith has in the last couple of years come to the realisation that politics and political forms of expression, in the last instance, are about authenticity and the role played by the authentic. On this point, Tower Hamlets is in principle no different from other parts of the city. The right to voice demands for one or several communities, as well as the right to articulate the need for more jobs, housing and welfare services, and thereby also the right to be represented as genuine political subjects is the kernel of

what political action means. These demands according to Michael Keith contain an explicit or implicit reference to place and among these spatial references the street has historically had a privileged position. To a greater degree than other sides of civil society, it is connected with conceptions of the authentic. The culture of the streets comes to stand for the place where things really take place, he says:

“The street constitutes a form of narrative that articulates people’s own life histories in such a manner that it becomes a graphical expression, an organising theme that joins the stories together. It is for this reason that the street plays such an important role for racist and antiracist mobilising. This is why it gains a special role in connection with mobilisation processes and makes it identical with authenticity. In this way, the street comes to symbolise a form of essence or purity which can be used to defend, advance and create certain arguments about place and the sense of belonging. When the streets are given such a rhetorical role, it means that certain streets become more empirically important than others, with respect to the authentic as well as the subjective. This is the case not merely for Tower Hamlets, where Brick Lane and Cable Street have historically played quite a special role, but also for London as a whole. In connection with the riots in 1981 it was Railton Road in Brixton, All Saints Road in Notting Hill and Sandringham Road in Hackney, that were considered by the then chief of the Metropolitan Police, not merely as the front lines in the resistance against the authorities, but as particularly problematic black communities. I have in this connection attempted to unpack these histories and the reasons while exactly these streets gained such a reputation among the police and in the minds of people and their recollections. But even though events take place on the streets, they can in certain circumstances become powerful both symbolically and politically.”

Charlie Nielsen listens to Michael Keith’s description of how some of the central black communities have been criminalised during the riots in 1981, and how he today considers the direct link between the streets and the authentic potential of resistance as problematic and then says:

“Irrespective of the way in which you put it, the impression is still that you have remained fascinated by the streets and what takes place on them and what they symbolise. I have also noticed that, like many others, you refer to

the *flâneur* as one of the central figures in the study of the city's social space. Personally I have a problem with this concept, since it more or less implies that one can wander freely around and look people in their eyes, as if they were nothing more than objects, and that is not the case. Especially if one wants to avoid problems. I think the concept is misleading.”

“I often think that the discussion about the *flâneur* is turned into an adornment”, Michael Keith replies. “In many cases it is not useful and even becomes boring. But you are correct, I am fascinated by the phenomena that crystallise on the street. Especially the order, which lies behind them, based upon social inequality and injustice in the political territory.”

“But also the territory of the political, which I suppose is what you refer to, when you talk about the real as being part of the political work in a council,” says Charlie Nielsen.

“Yes. The oscillation is also between continually wanting to take part in some naive kinds of politics and at the same time respecting the force of populism.”

“I don't understand.”

“Well, almost all populist politics is simplistic. And the intellectual response to simplicity is to kind of juxtapose it with complexity. Complexity becomes an excuse for inaction and noninvolvement and just not taking part and doing nothing, which becomes very nihilistic. So if you look for the equivalent of Stuart Hall and, to a certain degree, people like E.P. Thompson, it is in fact quite difficult to imagine who might occupy such a position today. Even if it is possible to criticise the influence of a great sway of people on the left who were involved in politics at the end of the 50s and beginning of the 60s, it is hard to find people who are today trying to create a corresponding relation between the academy and political work. If you look at Britain in the 90s, who would these intellectuals be, who are organically involved in the political debate? You end up with the same people. Stuart Hall in his seventies and still more engaged.”

Charlie Nielsen objects and suggests that surely an intellectual and cultural commentator such as Paul Gilroy can be regarded as Stuart Hall's successor. His analysis of the issue of “race” has - in Charlie Nielsen's opinion - been especially important in the public debate on the relationship between cultural

politics, “race” and nation in the 80s. Michael Keith agrees, but thinks it is somewhat paradoxical that Paul Gilroy has been more welcome in an anti-intellectual country such as the USA than in the more traditional, but intellectually richer Great Britain. This is also connected to the fact that, in addition to the American tendency to have celebratory intellectuals, the Institute of Race Relations has to a great extent monopolised debate in Britain. It has prevented analysis developing away from a simplified class and “race” framework to a more complex one based upon the relationship between “race,” nation, class and culture, on the one hand and the relationship between ethnicity, modernity and identity on the other hand, concludes a slightly pessimistic Michael Keith.

Charlie Nielsen returns to the topic he is interested in and asks Michael Keith to describe the relationship between belonging to a place like Tower Hamlets and the political struggle for work, housing and welfare services.

“The political struggle for jobs as well as houses is almost always about a movement from the street to somewhere else. On this point it is always a movement from simplicity to complexity. If you look at all the campaigns around all these issues, almost all of them begin on the street and end up somewhere else, and I think that it is interesting and important that it started with demonstrations about homelessness in Tower Hamlets. The Tower Hamlets Homeless Families Campaign started as a big protest campaign and became a very effective campaign agency located in the interstices of the state. With respect to jobs and welfare, all of the welfare rights associations became ways in which the community mobilised itself as social movements to take over the local state. That’s almost true of all the social movements the community organisations have been involved in; the welfare of the community becomes itself part of the power base of the community. So those campaigning organisations become the launching platform for political careers, and if you look at the profile of the people who are now major politicians, such as the 15 Bengali politicians in the council, almost all of them came through the welfare organisations here: Bangladeshi Welfare Association Organization, Bangladeshi Youth Movement and Spitalfields Housing and Public Rights Service to name a few. So these campaigns become the focus of political actors. All the people that you have met have

tended to come from these organisations. If you look at somebody like Jalal and his career, he has been involved in the formation of almost every single one of these organisations. There has been a move from campaigns on the street to more organised and political activities and that says a lot about how strong the Bengali community has been in the last 25 years. The overall population in the borough of Tower Hamlets is somewhere around 140,000. There are around 35,000 Bengalis in this number. Then the next largest minority is the Somali group. But it is hard to be sure of their number because the presence of a lot of them is undocumented, and then it depends upon who you believe. The lowest figure is about 2000, the highest is about 10-12,000, so it depends again on who you trust.

“I regard the Bengali community in Tower Hamlets as an enclave compared with other ethnic minorities and their gender relations are far more traditional. I am aware that a change has occurred on this point but, nonetheless, the construction of a public sphere is extremely gendered in Tower Hamlets and in some cases you can't get away from this. There is no doubt that the Islamic tradition is gendered differently from Afro-Caribbean traditions and a whole series of other groups. By far, the greatest number of Bengali people in the Tower Hamlets comes from Sylhet in Bangladesh, and they have a very traditional background, while at the same time belonging to the last wave of migration to Great Britain. When the *Empire Windrush* came to London in 1948 with the first migrants from the Caribbean, it was the beginning of the migration wave from the Caribbean. It reached its peak in 1958-1959. The Bengali migration effectively occurred almost 15-20 years later. So it is naturally important when the first break with tradition takes place. There is something in Les Back's work that is very important in the British context, when he talks about understanding the metropolitan paradox. The metropolitan paradox refers to the places where you find not only a huge amount of intolerance, but also strongly developed hybrid cultures and a kind of multicultural translation supportive of change. I think that part and parcel of this is the ways in which the popular representation of the hybrid assume a mixing of different forms of purity, and these forms of purity are themselves distorted understandings. Something that interests me is if it is possible to talk of something I call *synchronic authenticity*. I can remember a discussion with

a filmmaker who I was helping to make a film about Bengali men in the East End. She was reading Stuart Hall's work about new ethnicities and was offended by it. She thought he kind of devalued original cultural forms and the depth of genuine feeling in the communities. So, for her, it was far more important where you came from than where you are going. When I use the concept synchronic authenticity it is in line with Stuart Hall's strategic choice when he talks of an arbitrary closure and when Gayatri Spivak uses the concept of strategic essentialism. There is, in all three cases, talk of concepts that seek to capture the complexities through all the hidden histories, the consciousnesses, the rationalities and the pluralities, when at a certain moment, you have to acknowledge identity per se. Where one is forced to operate with a given identity at a certain point in time and in a certain place, just in order to make progress, and it is this which I call synchronic authenticity."

The forms of consciousness, feelings and actions that exist in the multicultural field as ambivalences, contradictions and paradoxes can have a synchronic character and authenticity, which is transferred from the traditional to the modern. If one wants to find out what it means to play with fluid identities, positions, references and territories in the present condition of non-modern modernity, which characterises the metropolitan paradox with its tension between hybrid identities and cultures, on the one hand, and racist enclosures, on the other hand, it is not merely fertile but also a "must" to find out exactly what constitutes this synchronic authenticity, concludes Charlie Nielsen on behalf of Michael Keith.

After he has finished talking with Michael Keith, Charlie Nielsen decides to go north to Islington to spend the rest of the evening at one of his old haunts, the Kings Head on Upper Street. He listens to the evening's band and this helps him to sort out his thoughts. While they are playing Ewan McColl's "Sweet Thames Flow Softly", and the other guests are humming to this celebration of the Thames, he looks forwards to his meeting tomorrow with ADF (Asian Dub Foundation). This is one of the newer music groups created by young Asian Britons since the end of the 80s, with the goal of directing attention to specific positions within this diaspora. He presumes that they will have a far more offensive interpretation of the relationship between

authenticity, ethnicity, diaspora cultures, hybridity, politics, aesthetics and identity than the more analytical and philosophical approach of Michael Keith, as he comes to terms with the anchoring of these things in urban space. It is their intention to use cultural production, especially the musical, as one of the ways of rebelling against the manner in which young Asians up until now have been interpreted by the dominant culture as representatives of the second and third generation. It is this kind of resistance against tradition that Charlie Nieslen has been seeking.

Asian Dub Foundation

“We need to reflect over what it means to be Asian in such a manner that it moves beyond the existence of ethnic absolutism and cultural and orientalist categories. These categories reduce the possibility of discussing what it means to be Asian today. So we fight against these forms of essentialism and reductionism when it comes to the relationship between ethnicity, culture and identity. Instead we attempt to highlight how there is a manifold of different ways in which one can be a British Asian. The Asian formation of identity is not a finished process. In this process music plays a special role, irrespective of whether it is Indie, Qawwali, Bhangra or Hip-Hop. Music expresses how identity can never remain satisfied with being British. It must always be transnational, and at the same time reveal that there are some marginalised borderlands. So, what we are interested in is the politicisation of everyday life, and the questions we are interested in are: where do we come from and what does it mean for the music we dance to? These kinds of questions provide us with the opportunity for creating new kinds of solidarity. This is one of the reasons why we have so many variations of the black expressive culture as we have today. At the same time, this is another reason why I believe that through popular culture it is possible to create the possibility of overcoming conflict-laden relations between Asians and blacks that all too often exist today, and establish a new form of antiracist politics based upon rediscovering what it means to be a black as a political category. One example in this respect is the group that calls itself ADF (Asian Dub

Foundation). This group uses music to promote new forms of antiracist politics and create new political alliances at a point in time when people otherwise talk and celebrate the multicultural manifold. They are against multiculturalism. They call it liberal.”

Sanjay Sharma offers this description of the purpose of the book *Dis-Orienting Rhythm: The Politics of the New Asian Dance Music*. Charlie Nielsen heard him talk at the beginning of his stay in London at a launch of the book. As the issue of alliances interests him, he has since tried to arrange a meeting with ADF. It is only at the end of May that he is successful. So one afternoon he finds himself sitting in the canteen of what was once a school, and is now used for rehearsals by a number of different music groups. It is in Faringdon, between Islington and the East End. The group’s spokesman, John Pandit, tells that the group has been on tour in France for most of the spring. At this moment it is in France; one is most conscious of the necessity of an antiracist struggle among youth because of the influence of the NF (National Front), at least upon until now, he says. John Pandit is a veteran of the antiracist scene. Since the 70s he has been active in CAPA (Community for Police Accountability) in Tower Hamlets and he has followed the underground music scene for a long time. He has an intimate knowledge of conditions in Tower Hamlets and describes the mutual relationship of youth in the following manner:

“An intensification of racially motivated attacks has occurred, irrespective of the location, such as the white Edmonton area in one of the northern suburbs, or in particular pockets of Tower Hamlets where it is possible to find, in some of the white council blocks of flats, young whites and blacks who attack young Bengalis and vice-versa. There is a lot of violence between Caribbeans and Somalis, and between Carribeans and Asians. This is the normal state of affairs. It is in this direction that the development is going.”

Charlie Nielsen tries to use John Pandit as a sparring partner for the insights he has gained in the course of his wandering through the city’s different areas and says:

“As far as I can see, there is talk of two different tendencies. The one deals with a defence of the white areas bordering multicultural inner cities, and the adjacent outer cities, where there is an over-weighing white population. The

second deals with the pockets in the inner cities, where whites defend the over-weighing white housing complexes against the black invasion through different forms of racial harassment. But, this is not what we are here to talk about. It has nothing to do with Asian dub.”

“Yes, it does in a way because we have always been interested in the necessity of involving ourselves locally in the different community organisations. ADF originally came out of the work we did with a workshop for young Asians about the music industry and the difficulties associated with gaining access to it. This was in the summer of 1993, and we had not really thought of making more out of it. But then there was all the commotion around the election of Derek Beacon as a counselor in the Isle of Dogs and the racist attack on Quddus Ali. This led to Didar our rapper, proposing that we hold a support concert for him. This was the first time that we appeared as a band. Steve, our guitarist, arrived in 1995, followed, a little later, by Sun-J, our programmer. So, in reality it was a rap-based sound system that was slowly transformed into a band.”

“Are you all based in London?”

“Yes.”

“But you are not a Bengali are you?”

“No, I am half Irish. My father is from Delhi. Deeder is from Bangladesh. And the others are just as mixed: Ani’s parents come from the west part of Bengal, Steve’s father come from the area south of Madras, and Sun-J is Gujarati from the upper west, so it is a mixture of all things that we represent.”

“Does your music influence the Bengali youth?”

“It does, but only when we perform. You have to understand that within Asian society, and then I am ignoring all the subdivisions, the music industry has never interested minority groups. They have always concentrated on the music produced in the homeland. It is so to speak the music that becomes mainstream. A person such as Bally Sagoo started by making film music, but has since developed his own form of Bhangra, which has sold in the millions over the whole world.”

Charlie Nielsen’s knowledge of this music stems primarily from his interest in one of Bhangra’s pioneers, the musician Apache Indian from Birmingham. Apache Indian, in the course of the 90s, has become known for mixing a

particular form of folk music from the Punjab, known as Bhangra, with reggae, such that a completely new style has arisen with the name Bhangra-muffin. Apache Indian was the first to be appropriated by the music industry and become mainstream. This happened in the beginning of the 90s. But there has also been a pair of other groups, Fun^Da^Mental and Cornershop, who have had the same experience, John Pandit adds, and these artists provide the historical background for the disorienting rhythms that have developed inside the Asian community. Suki a young Asian woman and a coming DJ in the group, has until now been listening to the conversation between John Pandit and Charlie Nielsen. She says:

“I have always dreamt of becoming a DJ, but in Asian society it is regarded as incorrect for a woman to work within the music industry. This is why until now we have had only one female DJ. This is Sanjit Kaur, known as Radical Sista. But if I am allowed to appear on stage as a DJ with ADF, I will play the music that I like and that is Drum’n’Bas, Dub, Acid Funk, Acid Jazz and a touch of Hip-hop. I will not play traditional Bhangra, since I have heard it so many times before and there is not so much that is new with it. It is the same as Hindu music. Being a DJ is not regarded as a serious profession for women. My mother has always wanted me to be either a doctor or lawyer, even though I know I never shall be. More and more young Asians are discovering that something new is happening on stage. This is what I describe in my poems; I have also written poems. They deal first and foremost with the Asian history of the struggle we had to participate in, when we came to this country and didn’t want to lose our roots. I am mainly interested in expressing myself in a personal manner. So people collect the expressions they like, which say something to them, and use them in their own way.”

Charlie Nielsen has listened to the dreams of this young girl, but now turns to John Pandit again and asks him:

“You say you have always been involved in antiracist work, but it seems that you are in practice more abroad than here?”

“At this moment in time we are in the position of working on both sides of the channel. We went to France a couple of years ago and played in a number of rock arrangements. We played dance music and other forms of

Jungle live, which people hadn't experienced before. So, this was the start of it all, and when you reach a certain level in France you get to play with good equipment and proper sound systems and stages. It is only now that this is happening to us in this country. We give a lot of concerts and are well received by the public, but we have never had any particular support from record companies with respect to distribution and that kind of thing. We have lacked an adequate profile to secure us support here in this country, unlike in France."

"However, you are on the verge of becoming famous. You are quoted in *Dis-Orienting Rhythms* and in different university dissertations. I am thinking of a dissertation that criticises world music for being an Euro-centric project. To support its argument it uses your critique of multiculturalism in a song entitled 'Jericho' on the 1995 album LP *Facts and Fictions*."

"This was one of the first songs we wrote. But it is a touch worrying that people are willing to create an academic mountain in the form of a larger sociological dissertation on the basis of a song like this. It is necessary to take note of everyday realities, in order to understand what we mean when we criticise liberal multiculturalists for patronising our culture. In most instances we talk of quite local events."

"But when you talk of the local, is Tower Hamlets the local or is it London in general?"

"It can be anywhere, but for us it is primarily London and the developments we have seen in the last 15 years."

John Pandit and Deeder (who has come up from the rehearsal room, to take part in the last part of the conversation) call them armchair multiculturalists. These are the intellectuals who like Drum'n'Bass and jungle, but they don't get up from the armchair to go out and dance to it. ADF regard themselves first and foremost as a political group, who mix their rebellious texts with elements of dub, jungle, punk-rock and hip-hop in such a manner that support for an antiracist politics doesn't necessarily have to be anchored in a narrow British connection. It can just as easily take its starting point in a colonial past in India, and at the same time place a question mark around what it means to be Asian and British, so that the code joining the intimate connection between ethnicity, identity and nationality is revealed. "On *Rafi's*

Revenge, the CD we are working on now, there is a track, 'Assassin', based upon the story of Mohammed Singh Azad, known as Udham Singh, who murdered the former governor, Michael O'Dwyer, in 1939 for his part in the massacre in Amritsar in 1919," says John Pandit. For them it is therefore just as important to tell these kinds of stories as functioning as teachers for young Asians in schools and youth clubs in Tower Hamlets through the organisation "Community Music". They are also going to perform in Toulon in France in connection with a support concert for the French rap group NTM (Nick ta Mere), whose members have been imprisoned for insulting the police and inciting rebellion at one of their concerts. This is a further indication of the kind of political profile that they have acquired and that a different kind of Europe is taking shape. It will need their particular kind of energy and courage to resist.

Cos it's part of my mission
To break down divisions
Mental compartments
Psychological prisons
I'll be sowing seeds of community
Accommodating every colour, every need
So listen to my message
And heed my warning
I'm telling you now
How a new age is dawning.

The question of alliances, binary contradictions and racial discourses

"There are periods of history when people, quite simply, change their way of looking at things. When one looks back, it appears as if a sudden jump occurs, which is actually not the case, but the important thing is that things actually change. The question is if this can be true of our racial thinking, so that we can move beyond binary oppositions between black and white and a reductionist essentialism, so characteristic of our thinking. There are people

who see themselves as polarized without recognizing that there isn't a necessary binary relation, so there's a great backlash in the sense that they have invested in maintaining these essentialist notions."

Charlie Nielsen has come to the world as a figure who has taken upon himself the task of listening and telling about his meetings with remarkable people during his travels in multicultural landscapes. He has heard about how modern society loses its ability to act as a source of solidarity. As a result, more and more people risk being pushed into a life on the absolute level of subsistence. The different ethnic and social groups at the bottom of society are forced to create their own conflict-solving mechanisms if they want to survive with the hope of a future. This is normally explained by the fact that ethnicity will come to play a steadily increasing role in the struggle for political hegemony. But this should perhaps be translated into a number of descriptions of how ethnic minorities, on a daily basis, try to discover a magical solution to the dilemma between assimilation and marginalisation in such a way that they don't end up in a permanent underclass situation. On the contrary, they attempt to become entrepreneurs of a plural world. It is with such awareness that Charlie Nielsen gives his voice to the people who either work with or are the victims of such processes. Similarly, with such a consciousness, Charlie Nielsen incarnates the role of storyteller, portraying the difficulties faced by members from different ethnic minorities when they don't simply tear up their roots, but also try to re-plant them in the shadow of a new racism.

Charlie Nielsen met Ann Phoenix at the "Rethinking Ethnic and Racial Studies" conference held by the Journal of Ethnic and Racial Studies in 1997. This topic has been chosen partly to mark the 20th anniversary of the journal and partly because the theoretical study of ethnic and racial studies has changed so much in the course of this period. This is taken up by the first speaker, the cultural sociologist and commentator Paul Gilroy, who in his lecture "Race Ends Here", asks himself and other conference participants if they have strengthened and reinforced racial difference instead of working towards a multiethnic utopia, where skin colour has no more significance than the colour of one's eyes. Charlie Nielsen begins his conversation with Ann Phoenix by commenting on a meeting he had had in 1985 with some school

pupils in Tottenham, when one of the girls told him that she had a white mother who defined herself as black because her partner was black, and because the area in which she lived was black. At this point one of the pupils protested and said she would be forced to keep away if there were 'race riots' in the area. This would be because she wouldn't any longer belong ethnically or racially. This paradoxical situation has made Charlie Nielsen reflect over how it is precisely these kinds of experiences of self-identity that encourages the building of bridges between youth from different ethnic and racial groups. Especially if the relation between the different ethnic groups and "races" is to be based upon the slogan: "freedom, difference and tolerance."

Ann Phoenix listens to Charlie Nielsen's reflection and says:

"One of the things Barbara Tizard and myself found in *Black, White or Mixed Race?* was that there are actually a lot of children born into mixed marriages who defined themselves as mixed. Defining themselves as neither black nor white, but instead as mixed, they were happy about it. We asked them: if there was a confrontation, and you had to choose, which side would you choose? This was a question they didn't like. But it was quite a useful question for us, because it showed whether in fact they saw themselves as polarized and having to choose between black or white, or if this wasn't necessarily the case. Some of them said they would go with the white and it was partly how they looked because some looked white and some looked more black, but it wasn't only that. It was also dependent on whom they got on with in their family. So if they didn't get on with their father and their father was black, and they did get on with their mother, then they would say: 'well, I couldn't leave my mother'. Some said it would depend on who was at fault, who was wrong. So if they saw black people having started it, you know, for bad reasons, they would choose the white parent. And if it was white people having started it due to racism, they would go with the black parent. Some said: 'well, I'll have to be with the black because people see me in that way', so it was very varied, what they had to say in answer to that question. But it was not a question they liked, even though it was quite productive."

"That must have been a terrible question to answer. It goes to the heart of the matter and touches the emotions of these youth. In a recent conversation with Phil Cohen, he mentioned that there were more and more children with a

multi-racial background, and it was therefore even more necessary to discuss what it means to say that one is black and also white. What do you think?" Charlie Nielsen continues.

"There are proportionally more Afro-Caribbeans who have white partners than there are Asians who have white partners, but that's proportionally. In terms of numbers there are more Asians who have white partners because there are more Asians in Britain than there are Afro-Caribbeans. It has been calculated that today one third of black Britains with an Afro-Caribbean background have white partners, and this has consequences for their children. If, for example, one forces them to identify themselves as black, this forces them onto one side of the binary. There are a number of understandable and contextual reasons for this. One of them is racism. If people say they experience racism, it is almost per definition the case that they must be black, and this is a very simplistic way of thinking about racism. It fails to recognise the plurality of racism and the fact that we actually have to include white-on-white racism, for example like anti-Semitism and anti-Irish racism. Nevertheless, it is this form of racism that is more or less explicitly identified if they have a problematic identity and don't define themselves as black. There is no reason why they should necessarily identify themselves as black rather than white or something in-between. It's the binary that has some very negative effects. And I think we really have to disrupt the black-white binary. It tortures the people who are caught in-between. There is also no such thing as pure black or pure white in the first place. There are no opposites because what does that mean? They are the object of renegotiation, even though on both sides there is a certain resistance to this. It is not just the whites who don't want to accept commonalities with black people. There are also some blacks who don't want the binary disrupted because the racism they experience will be ignored, or because they really want to keep themselves separate from white people. On this point there are a number of variations to complicate the picture. But irrespective of the theoretical framework selected there is still an increasing number of mixed marriages and children from these marriages. This has happened since the end of the 70s."

“The question is, where do they turn to when they want to create and develop their cultural and political alliances and network? Especially if the so-called border crossings between ethnic and racial groups are becoming more difficult to realise, because of more and more preconceived notions of what it means to have a black or white identity.”

“Yes, that is correct.”

“I understand, from your lecture at the conference, that you regard the work carried out by Roger Hewitt in Greenwich as important. But didn't he talk of the necessity of acknowledging the pride white kids in the suburbs have for their white identity?”

“As a concept, pride in being white is highly problematic.”

“But isn't that what he is trying to do?”

“I am not sure whether it's pride in “whiteness” *per se* or trying to get rid of the feeling of disaffection that they have nothing, which I think is something different. As a concept, pride in whiteness is so loaded that it actually would be a very odd thing to sort of encourage because it moves so far into right-wing discourses. At the moment they have what seems to be an absence of pride or feeling that they have anything, and that is a totally different thing.”

“The young whites say that the problem is that the others have identities and cultures, and they don't. At least that is how some white people experience the multicultural debate. They also experience it as a problem that cultural and national symbols such as the Union Jack have apparently been taken over by the extreme right. So, referring to them is not without its problems. You have earlier said that being white has been emptied of all connotations of the concept of 'race', and instead has been taken over by associations with power. It is the Others who have ethnicity and 'race'. This is the main difference, and I think that in a country like Denmark it would be difficult to introduce a concept such as whiteness.”

“So, the resistance to doing it works well for particular groups of whites, but certainly not for the young white males Roger Hewitt has focused on. They experience young black men as more privileged because they have an identity and are therefore appreciated by British society; unlike themselves who don't have anything at all. They can't show that they are white because the symbols they have to their disposition are relatively limited and have been

increasingly taken over by the extreme right. The white working classes have relatively limited identity symbols. It is not quite the same for the white middle-classes. For them, they are taken for granted as routinised forms of cultural expression.”

“Does it mean that it is necessary to reintroduce the concept of class?”, Charlie Nielsen says.

“Yes. However, there are other ways in which the situation has changed since the mid-80s. There are many more black groups in British society. So an important difference is that to even try to maintain unity within black groups is bound to be disrupted by the actions of the different ethnic groups. They are from many different countries and don’t necessarily have anything in common with black people of Afro-Caribbean descent. A differentiation has therefore taken place within black culture, so it is even more difficult to determine what it means to be black.”

“Is that what you are talking about in your references to the possibility of creating alliances between different groups? Or is it first and foremost with respect to feminist alliances?”

“I think it is a general problem, even though feminists have for a long time argued for it. Under our first meeting you mentioned the poet and musician Linton Kwesi Johnson, who played an influential role in the 80s. He was a part of the Race Today Collective, and even though this organisation is no longer in existence, it always argued for the formation of political alliances. It was never against whites; they were always involved. But it never had a consciousness of gender politics. So, no roses on this point. Nevertheless, the collective was always interested in forming political alliances with other ‘races’. So I don’t think only of feminism. I believe that alliances are possible, but one of the preconditions is that one is conscious of and acknowledges the differences. One cannot make alliances with people whom you insist are exactly the same as you. In such a case, one sees instead a series of politics based upon exaggeration. Nor can one make alliances when you recognise differences, which obviously exist between blacks and whites, but refuse to recognise and understand their meaning in terms of the different positions one has historically been forced to adopt.”

“I am well aware that it can appear somewhat paradoxical, but isn't there a risk of a return of a reductive essentialism, such as the one evident today in identity politics, with its focus on the small differences that, despite everything, separate us? When politically magnified, they give rise to a narcissistic cultivation of the smaller differences.”

“Indeed.”

“How would you explain this?”

“The cause is first and foremost a fear of assimilation, and that small differences will be used to make huge divisions. There is a risk of a form of solipsism, where everybody is alone when it really comes down to it. That's true. But that's partly why one is forced to have shifting allegiances, just as it is necessary to break down binary ways of thinking. If you don't recognise that there are equally commonalities across these binaries it means not only that you maintain these binaries, but that you multiply and reinforce them. Men will automatically be different from women, blacks will automatically be different from whites, and the working class will be different from the middle class, with—no possibility for their meeting, only the possibility of isolated positions, which can lead to assimilation or fanaticism. It is for such reasons that we are forced to develop a completely new view on the relationship between sameness and difference. This doesn't of course mean differences aren't recognised, but that they aren't regarded all the time as polar opposites.”

Charlie Nielsen asks Ann Phoenix about her attitude towards the relationship between gender, nationalism and racism in the coming Europe, since this is one of things that have been on his mind during his travels in different parts of London. She thinks for a moment before answering:

“Several studies have been carried out, and they show that youth in Great Britain are not oriented towards Europe as somewhere they would like to go. If they have notions of living anywhere else it is usually in the USA or Canada. It doesn't matter if they are black or white. Young whites as a rule because of reasons of lifestyle; they see it as the ultimate place to make money, and black young people too, for the same reasons and, additionally, because they see it as less racist. They see it that way. Of course we know that it isn't. But, they see that there are more black people who make it in

American society. What they ignore is the large number of blacks, who are either murdered, spend their lives in prison or live in segregated ghettos. This is not a part of their discourses. Their discourses are about money. So they don't orient towards Europe at all. It can be the case that the Scots do it for strategic reasons because membership in Europe will get them out of their relationship of dependency towards England. But when it comes to the intersection between 'race' and gender in Europe, it wasn't a discourse that interested them as an alternative. And that is very interesting."

It is only in certain situations that we are made white

"I am interested in what it means to be white because I want to undermine the view that the issue of 'race' is only about blacks. There is a widespread belief that it is only the blacks who have a 'race' and that whites don't have one. When I say white, I am thinking first and foremost about the whites who don't regard themselves as either blacks or ethnic minorities, or the whites who are so white that they support white supremacy. In the one case there is talk of a group who doesn't necessarily have an interest invested in being white, while on the other hand there is precisely a group who has an interest invested in white supremacy. Accordingly, I am interested in emphasising that the representation of 'race' is something that involves us all."

It is Vron Ware who says this. She is a lecturer in cultural geography at the University of Greenwich. She teaches about how cities, such as London, can be both formally and informally segregated in such a way that they steadily become a reminder of the history of colonialism as one wanders around. In a city like London, it becomes interesting to deconstruct what it means to be white, and this is connected with the desire to highlight how it is not just whites who represent the human norm, but that "whiteness" is just one version of it:

"What interests me are the ways in which white is represented, and the power that it possesses in such media as advertisements, television programs and film. Whether you like it or not, you have been ascribed an identity, and whiteness is one part of it. It is beyond your control. Apart from

that, I find it incredibly boring to listen to people who discuss whether they are white, and if they aren't what they are then. It is only in certain situations that we are made white. Of course this doesn't mean we can't free ourselves from perceptions of white supremacy, which we have learnt in the course of our childhood. On this point each person has to struggle with their own upbringing to find out how they will treat other people. This concerns gender as much as 'race', so one must be oneself and conscious of the manner in which other people are treated. In other words, it is not about being *per se*, but about the ways in which we relate to being white. I am not interested in the form of 'passing', where blacks and Afro-Americans are so light in skin colour that they can, in the eyes of others, be taken for white. There is a whole lot of literature on this at the moment. I have been interested in the methodological questions connected with the deconstruction of whiteness and what it means that identity is, in a certain sense, both marginal and shifting, at the same time that on a completely different level it is both assigned and beyond control. So if you are trying to deconstruct the whole category of 'race', in which direction should you look? This was the question I asked, and I began to think about it from the point that there are people who have tried to think about it from a different position. Take for example John Howard Griffin who wanted to know if racism existed in America. He had been told by black people that the only way he could find out was to be black himself and to wake up as a black man. So he took this advice absolutely literally. He was a journalist and probably an exhibitionist, so he decided to change his skin colour. When I began to look at different readings of this experience I found that in the 40s there was another journalist who tried to collect similar material, but without changing his skin colour. The only thing he did was to go around with his black friend. He was completely accepted by the Afro-Americans he met, whether or not he told them about his family background. People were used to those who were black, but light in skin colour. Of course, he had some behavioural patterns that stood out, but he soon corrected them. In the eyes of whites he wasn't regarded as white. The fact that he was going around with black people was enough to make him black. His name was Ray Sprigle and he wrote for the Pittsburgh Post. There were others who used the same technique as John Howard Griffin and changed their skin colour. Grace Halsell was a journalist

who carried out a similar racial shift as John Howard Griffin some ten years after him. In addition, she gained some very interesting information about what it means to be a woman in such a situation. What interests me is what happened to them and their view of the world when they attempted to adopt a different position in the world through changing their skin colour. They were actually forced to change the whole of their view about how the world functioned, and they hadn't expected this. They were completely shocked."

"Let me be sure that I have understood you correctly. They had to change their skin colour in order to find out how blacks experienced the world?"

"Yes, they thought it would be easy, but in reality it was actually devastating. They were all doing it to get a book out of it. I am not saying that they represent any kind of general model of antiracism in any way. I just think that when you compare them you get some interesting perspectives on how 'race' works. Each, in their own way deconstruct the way 'race' appears natural and thus de-naturalises it, at the same time keeping the category of 'race' intact. There is talk of the so-called whites, pretending to be so-called black, and later becoming white again, and giving an account of their experiences. In this manner it seems paradoxical I suppose, that they preserve the categories and keep them intact."

"I thought you would say that it's not the only way of doing it – to try and change one's skin. But the general lesson, I suppose, is the desire to communicate some of the experiences from other groups in society and thereby create a greater empathy for them."

"Yes, it's about empathy and education, on the one hand, and about the need to find out what it is really like, on the other. Of course, this is not the only way of doing it. I became interested in what these people dreamed about when they wanted to change their skin colour and how these dreams began to haunt them. At the same time I think it is fruitful to compare them."

Seen in perspective, these accounts are thus accounts of oppression based upon skin colour and culture, which white power, white supremacy and white racism represent. First and foremost, they say something about where the boundaries go between racially segregated groups in a society, and how the real knowledge about the mutual relationship between these groups, on the basis of the racialising of social and economic structures, becomes

increasingly smaller. At the same time, they say something about the possibilities of softening these boundaries, such that new political alliances can take shape. Thereafter, they raise some questions of principle about the limits to the application of classical fieldwork in anthropologically inspired modern cultural analyses. There are parallels between these kinds of anthropological analysis and the colonial mixture of discovery and oppression of other cultures. The anthropologist presupposes a certain measure of oppression in order to arrive at the desired mixture of empathy and knowledge about how the world really looks for the chosen group. In Charlie Nielsen's opinion, in the moment when a deconstruction takes place of what it means to be white, which Vron Ware wants to realise in order to suspend the binary opposition between blacks and whites, a question mark is placed against this methodology. Vron Ware interrupts his line of thought and says that, in spite of everything, these accounts document a subjective element in the process of gaining knowledge. This is something that indicates that it doesn't deal so much with finding new facts, but describing how they are experienced and lived. It is, therefore, this element of self-experience that can give antiracist politics a completely necessary existential dimension, and it should be described in such a manner that it gives rise to a double view of the structures supporting racism.

The camp as metaphor

Charlie Nielsen is in love with bridges. When he crosses the banks of the Thames from Charring Cross to the South Bank on the Hungerford Bridge, he feels a rush of adrenalin. The same occurs when he crosses the small bridge that leads him from Mountpleasant Crescent, over one of the many railway lines in north London, to the small, somewhat hidden The Grove, on the boundary between Finsbury Park and Crouch End. On such occasions, he stops up for a moment and takes a deep breath. He notes that he is on the way into another time dimension and with joy he tells of this little ritual to the

inhabitants of the house he is on the way to. They are Vron Ware, her husband Paul Gilroy, their two children, as well as their cat Quincy. Paul Gilroy is professor in sociology and cultural studies at Goldsmiths College. Since the beginning of the 80s he has developed into one of Britain's foremost black intellectuals. He possesses both a great knowledge of the historical place of blacks in the diaspora, and a corresponding knowledge about Europe's traumatic history. He is therefore the master of a double perspective on the development of western civilization, covering both areas of knowledge.

As Charlie Nielsen makes his way over the bridge to meet Paul Gilroy, he is in the process of putting the last touches to yet another work, which he has appropriately called *Between Camps*. On the one hand, it confronts the inheritance from fascism, by looking at the significance blacks have had for the struggle with this traumatic side of European history. On the other hand, it underlines the need to come to terms with all kinds of camp thinking. Charlie Nielsen has used the previous evening to read Gilroy's inaugural lecture when he took his professorship at Goldsmiths in March 1997. In the lecture he says that it is perhaps difficult for an outsider to find a common denominator in his work up until this point, nor is it the case that a single project sums up his work. However, he has partly been guided by an antipathy against nationalism in all its forms and partly by a desire to pressure other intellectuals into finding an adequate ethical answer to the challenges that nationalism continues to represent.

Paul Gilroy adds that the interest in nationalism, which he regards today as the red thread in his intellectual work, in reality started with the collective work that was invested in *The Empire Strikes Back*, from the beginning of the 80s. The books that followed were so positively received that he could continue writing the books on music, which he wants to write without compromising with his sociological conscience. But he hasn't felt that the time has arrived. Instead, with his latest work he has explored how modernity has transformed the ways in which we understand and react to the concept of "race". Our understanding of this concept, according to Paul Gilroy, stems from the end of the 19th century. Even though it is presented as an almost eternal principle of differentiation beyond historical determination, there is nothing natural or

spontaneous in the differentiations created and established by the concept of “race”. They are the result of the ways in which modernity has created a completely distinct set of regimes and truths. Paul Gilroy has called them raciology. This raciology, paradoxically enough, has found its foundation in European philosophy and science, while at the same time the struggle against racial slavery has been won, adds Paul Gilroy. He has therefore felt forced to study European philosophers such as Kant and Hegel, in order to find out how they theorized the concept of “race” in a manner that led to such a racialising of the European nation state, that camp thinking today occupies the whole area. This interpretation of national states as camps prepared for struggle is traceable first and foremost to the point in modernity when nation and “race” were connected to serve authoritarian political goals. It is no surprise that the rise of fascism as a distinct political culture is regarded as its most visible proof. It is at this point in modernity’s development that this connection is most apparent. On the basis of the regime of violence in fascism, heterogeneity in the population is transformed into homogeneity, internally as well as externally. Moreover, there exist a number of other moments in this process that, each in their own manner, show how camp thinking follows fixed codes and rules, and how politics, again and again, is reconstituted in a dualistic conflict between friends and enemies of the national community. Citizenship becomes an identity card, which can be transformed in lightning fashion into a militarized identity with its starting point in phenomena such as relations of belonging and collective solidarity. It crystallises into a celebration of war and spontaneity, youth violence, an explicit but antimodern colonialisation, and a sacralisation of the political sphere with the assistance of such a civil religion as nationalism. Uniforms, the flag and mass, public processions become, each in their own way, phenomena that show how camp thinking is a militarised phenomenon, sustained by repeated appeals to the significance of ethnic difference, nation and “race”. It is therefore of little surprise that Paul Gilroy regards the racialisation of the nation state, upon which camp thinking is based, as a negation of diaspora movements and diaspora cultures, which in his opinion ought to be the guiding thread in a modern analysis of culture.

The camp is a metaphor for the pathological joining of nation with “race”, and it refers to a particular interpretation and control of phenomena, such as identity, kinship, solidarity and belonging. It is based upon an understanding of an absolute ethnic, cultural or national identity, and stands, therefore, in opposition to diasporic identities based upon the historically experienced rupture between the place in which one lives and the place to which one feels connected. Diaspora demands that one recognises the intercultural. The ambivalent and complex patterns of identification produced by diaspora exist both outside and in opposition to modern political forms of citizenship, where the national form of camp thinking is to be regarded as the institutional means to bring about the end of diasporic distributions of populations with the same cultural background. This is attempted by, on the one hand, demanding that people who find themselves in places they don’t belong should nevertheless be assimilated and, on the other hand, by constructing an even better camp in the places from which they come. Diaspora’s ambivalence and restless longing to construct an appeasement or reconciliation between the place from which one comes and the place in which one inhabits, through a symbolic reconstruction of the tension between homeland and homelessness, is transformed instead into a simple exile. This, in the last instance, is overdetermined by the dilemma between assimilation and marginalisation. At the same time, it is this dilemma that cultural commentators risk being submerged by, if they submit to this form of camp thinking, adds Paul Gilroy. He emphasises, like Charlie Nielsen’s other conversation partners, the significance of dissolving the binary oppositions that cultural commentators have inherited, and wishing instead to find a form of political analysis that maintains a living relationship to the fluid and contingent in a situation, which is in reality without precedence because there are more and more travelling cultures around.

Paul Gilroy is not merely interested in a general analysis of how national states have historically become racialised and thereby incarnated in a particular form of camp thinking around phenomena such as identity, a special kind of camp thinking based on kinship, solidarity and belonging. He is also interested in actually existing camps that have been historically established as labour camps, refugee camps, concentration camps and

punishment camps, to mention some of the most obvious examples. He regards these camps as institutions, where modern suffering, meaningless torments and radical evil have been systematised. Each in their own way show how evil has become both more bureaucratic and modernized, in those cases where, unlike Nazism, there hasn't been talk of the actual murder of populations. At the same time, he says that, with the establishment of these camps, the preconditions for a whole series of philosophical discussions have been created. They deal in different ways with what in a modern society is connected with morality and justice. As a critical intellectual he is especially interested in the testimony of the Italian author Primo Lévi and the Austrian-Belgium author Jean Améry because, as survivors of Nazi concentration camps, they have each in their own way captured some of the experiences connected with the camps.

Charlie Nielsen does of course know of Primo Lévi. On the other hand, he has never heard of Jean Améry, and learns from Paul Gilroy that he was born in Vienna in 1912 and was called Hans Maier. Under this name he is especially known for having been active in the cultural and literary scene in Vienna and was cofounder in 1934 of the journal *Die Brücke*. He took flight at the end of the 30s to Belgium, where in 1940 he was arrested and interned by the Germans as a "dangerous foreigner". He managed, however, to take flight, only to be arrested once more and sent to Auschwitz. He survived and returned to Belgium, taking the name Jean Améry in the 50s in connection with his work as a correspondent for a Swiss newspaper in London. Like Primo Lévi, who also survived Auschwitz, Jean Améry chose to commit suicide in 1978. So these authors share this destiny in common, along with a testimony of life in Auschwitz and in unthinkable situations represented by persecution and torture. And it is these things that have caused Paul Gilroy to be interested in their accounts. It is not the interest in the ethnic and cultural definitions that determine what it means to be Jewish. Instead, it is those experiences that make Jean Améry adopt a Jewish identity. Nor is he interested in Jewish cultural or spiritual dimensions, which leads Charlie Nielsen to ask:

“You once said, with reference to Jean Améry, that ‘one as a Jew must accept the judgment the world has given’. Is this what you mean, that as a Jew one must accept the terror one is exposed to?”

“Yes. It is not Jewishness he is interested in, but the identity Jews have achieved on the basis of the persecution they have experienced for hundreds of years in Europe. I am first and foremost interested in the view of identity and humanity that is revealed by those who have experienced such extreme situations, and not in the particularly noteworthy forms of moral behaviour sometimes found in concentration camps. It is an intersubjective element that can arise in these kinds of extreme situations, and it can be used to provide insight into what it means to be a human. All those who have survived these situations say that there are no limits to how people can behave towards each other. So, the question is, what is achieved through such confrontations with the extreme? I am not able to answer this question fully, but I assume that one of the things is an insight into a particular form of human contact and human rationality. It cannot be compared with anything else, and nor are there other ways in which this contact can be compared with the limits that are otherwise set by ethnicity, culture or ‘race’. I wouldn’t use the word transcendence because that is not the correct word in this context. But in those situations when other people are in the process of killing or threatening to kill somebody there is no longer any reference to ethnicity, culture or ‘race’. The situation gives the Other absolutely no opportunity to express any sign of humanity. Morality no longer exists. So, this is one of the things one can learn by looking at the extreme situation represented by torture.”

“I am not sure if I follow you. The image I have is of the rapport that can arise between the persecutor and the victim in such situations. We have all heard of the feeling of community that can arise after a time between the hostage and kidnapper. However, what you are talking about shocks me because it also deals with physical and psychic terror, but it gives me nonetheless a feeling that even in such an extreme situation there can arise a particular human quality. Is this what you mean?”

“Yes, but the question is: what can be done to make sure this quality doesn’t arise? This is the second reason why these extreme situations are interesting because racism enters the picture at this point. To resist this

kind of response, to block it, one is forced to look at these people as if they weren't human. Here we find the motive for the unnecessary violence, which forms the foundation of the fascist regime's use of violence. Why is it necessary to humiliate these people in order to kill them? Why not just kill them? Why is one forced to do these things? The answer is that one does it just to do it. One does it in order just to keep going. This discussion deals, once again, with the role played by racial difference in a person's view of the world. So, this is one of the reasons I became interested in the necessary conditions for one person to kill another. Normally, people kill people they know. But, what must happen to make them kill others, who they don't even know? I am not religious or a believer in mysticism, but it appears to me that there exists a strong need to kill others. I have therefore looked at the role played by racial differences in this connection. I have examined the role of 'race' when a person is to be persuaded to kill another. Those who do it drink until they are drunk, but they become accustomed to it. They obviously don't like it, so they begin to drink, and then they become used to it. The point is that everybody is capable of becoming accustomed to it. It is part of being a human and the moral discussions that must necessarily follow. So, the point I want to make is that it is not necessarily a question of the significance connected respectively with ethnicity and 'race'."

Charlie Nielsen is not entirely sure if he understands the real reasons for Paul Gilroy's interest in such situations. He asks him, therefore, if this is why he calls his philosophical position misanthropic humanism. The reply he receives is that humanism is normally not connected with the view that humans are capable of evil, but he had been forced to reckon with this possibility in his interest in the racialisation of national states and the high point in this development represented by the exceptional fascist state. Charlie Nielsen, however, decides to return to some of the questions he has earlier asked Paul Gilroy, about why it is steadily necessary to regard the development of Europe as a duality between civilization and barbarism, why racism has played quite a special role in this development, at the same time as the modern cannot alone be regarded as a period, but a region spread across the globe.

One of the questions occupying Paul Gilroy is about where the limits of modernity go. There is talk of both a region spread over the globe and a period, with limited victories in the battle against anti-Semitism and racism. They are today so powerfully surrounded that it is possible to confirm that modernity is steadily put to test, just as the continued existence of fascism and its imitators are, at best, held in check. There is talk of needing to be prepared because its appeal and attraction can easily be mobilized. Fascism is capable of creating an ethnic, national and racial hierarchy and putting it in relation to an absolute cultural difference organized along national lines. It is one of the main reasons why it has created its own culture and has become a culture in itself. In opposition to earlier times, European fascism and its international descendents function in a way that can best be described as an imitation of the silent Nazi diaspora, says Paul Gilroy. After this he once again emphasizes that this is one of the reasons for him not being a supporter of an understanding of fascism, which identifies with the conservative, ultranational and violent political forms of expression found in the German version of fascism. Instead, he attempts to widen the perspective in this diaspora by keeping hold of the concept of modernity's focus upon the relationship between democratic forms of government, racial nationalism and historic rationality, on the one side, and the relationship between otherness, the formation of identity and self-perception on the other, and asks the following necessary questions upon this background:

Can we proceed confident that modernity is not a handy and exclusive code word for social relations in certain favoured parts of Europe? More controversially, how do we keep the duality of modernity as progress and catastrophe, civilization and barbarism, at the forefront of our deliberations? How does placing racism at the centre of our thinking transform our command of those dualities? Does it help to address enlightenment through its vernacular codes as an ethnohistorical phenomenon? Should it become nothing more than the distinctive burden of particular groups, which, though it points beyond their particularity to an emergent universalism, have grave difficulties in making this desirable adjustment?

Answering these questions will put us in a better position to understand how they mark our time. They are both dependent on atrocities in the past and

form an integrated component of camp thinking. They are periodically mobilized in the racism created by raciology. It is only by answering these questions that we can find out what we stand for as antiracists, says Paul Gilroy. He gives a preliminary answer to these questions by saying that one of the goals of *Between Camps* is to create the preconditions for a new humanism by showing how the concept of “race” has been historically applied. He then concludes the conversation by saying:

“I am interested in the role that authoritarian violence might play in Europe’s future union. It is one of the reasons why fascism, not just the fascist state, but to an equally high degree, how we, as ethical, responsible human beings adopt a position towards it, is such an important question.”

Alexandra Palace

Charlie Nielsen uses the remaining days to say farewell to the city. For the first time since his arrival he takes the time to wander along the disused railway line from Finsbury Park to Alexandra Palace. From its hilltop he can see all the way to Canary Wharf on the Isle of Dogs, and far on the horizon he can make out the lines of south London. He sits and lets the breeze rinse his tired body, while he collects together the pieces from all his conversations in London. They form an alternative map of this city – which has given him so many fine experiences. It is first and foremost a city where the mixed cultures must be seen in the light of new forms of ethnicity, nationalism and racism that constitute the multicultural inner cities’ less respectable side. He is usually proud of presenting an analytical slice of reality governed by the dictum: intelligence’s pessimism, optimism of the will. But, at the end of the 20th century, the dialectical relation between the new rhythms, represented by the mixed cultures, and the new forms of racism, which again and again work against the formation of new roots, is of such a character that cultural commentators still have few grounds for post-pessimistic predictions for the future.

An empirical account of the metropolitan paradox encountered in a metropolis such as London can, however, change things a little, he thinks

while sitting and looking out over the city. He recalls his first conversations with young white racists in the suburbs and their support of the racism represented by the territorial defence of the utopian dream of a white England. These thoughts are thereafter replaced by thoughts of the modern activists, who in their local contexts struggle against racial harassment in housing areas in such different parts of London as Greenwich, Lewisham and Tower Hamlets. He is convinced that it is in such areas that Europe's future possibilities of integrating Others will be decided. He is increasingly aware of the need to find educational ways of changing the relationship between white racists and ethnic minorities, if the goal is to bring social solidarity onto the political agenda. However, it is only when he first goes to Tower Hamlets and listens to the discouraging accounts about how young whites and Afro-Caribbeans have formed an alliance in this area to fight against young Bengalis, that he realises that the struggle at the bottom of society is not just a suburban phenomenon. Even in such a historically old area of immigration as Tower Hamlets, young whites feel that, compared with them, Bengali youth have received preferential treatment. This gives the struggle over territory and other political issues such as cultural belonging and the entitlement to the area a new meaning. In such a situation, selective racism might mark the ethnic hierarchy, forming the foundation of the metropolitan paradox in such a manner that its rhythm inevitably changes its character and its significance according to where one finds oneself in the city, and how the relationship of strength between the remains of the white working class and the different ethnic minorities developed historically.

It is this rhythm he has tried to reveal in small narratives crafted on the basis of his wandering in London's inner and outer cities, Charlie Nielsen says to himself, while he takes his farewell with the city. He uses the last couple of days to buy an all-too-youthful jacket in Covent Garden and to purchase some books from Compendium in Camden Town. London has become his second home.