

NEWHAM MONITORING PROJECT

Fighting For
Independent
Anti-Racism

**ANNUAL
REPORT
1997**

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Management Committee Members 1996/97

Barry Mussenden	Chair
Asad Rehman	Treasurer
Sukhwant Dhaliwal	Secretary (until October 1996)
Anita Bhardwaj	Secretary (from October 1996)
Hossein Zahir	
Tony Deane	
Kenny Pryce	
Kentake Campbell (until February 1997)	
Viv Ahnum (until February 1997)	
Ilona Aronovsky	
Kevin Blowe	

Salim Mahmood

NMP: Still Fighting For Independent Anti-Racism

We are pleased to present our 17th Annual Report which documents our work during the past 18 months and surveys a number of the critical issues facing Newham's black communities. Some of you may be surprised that Newham Monitoring Project (NMP) remains active, let alone is able to produce what has become a yearly testimony to the continued resistance of Newham's black communities against racist violence and police brutality. For this has been the most difficult year of NMP's history, a year in which Newham Council, our principal funders, ignored our significant contribution to the fight against racism and our widespread local support (including hundreds of people picketing East Ham Town Hall and dozens of letters sent to the *Newham Recorder*) by withdrawing our grant in its entirety. Consequently, we were forced to begin operating on a completely voluntary basis without full-time paid workers. Additionally, there was a fire at our offices at the 382 Centre, which destroyed many of the resources that we had been building up over the years and which hampered our ability to campaign at such a crucial time. As a result, we have been unable to return to the 382 Centre, the advice centre where we were based for over a decade. After various interim arrangements, we are happy to report that we have moved into new premises at Systems House in Stratford where we will be based for the foreseeable future and we have appointed a part-time worker.

NMP has survived against all the odds, thanks in large part to the dedication and effort of our workers, members, supporters and volunteers who continue to believe in the importance of **independent**, community-based anti-racism.

In the months since the loss of our funding, we have managed to sustain our emergency service and casework support on a minimal level and to campaign around the deaths in police custody of Shiji Lapite and Ibrahima Sey. We are thrilled that the jury at Ibrahima's inquest found that he had been unlawfully killed by Forest Gate and Ilford police officers, one of whom sprayed him in the face with CS spray. NMP and the Ibrahima Sey Memorial Campaign have now launched a national campaign to ban CS spray and are calling upon the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) to prosecute the officers responsible for Ibrahima's death.

The tragic deaths of Shiji and Ibrahima are clear examples of why there remains a need for independent, community-based organisations like NMP who support people whose cases are deemed too political and controversial by more mainstream agencies. It should be noted that one of the reasons for Newham Council's decision to cut NMP's funding was our support of Ibrahima's family and their demands for justice. In retrospect, we believe that the role we played was entirely justified.

Unfortunately, organisations like NMP are no longer fashionable and are being pushed aside by multi-agency partnerships and private consultancies that purport to be more professional yet in reality are simply more bureaucratic and less accountable to the local community. A classic example of this political shift is Newham Council's recent decision to fund an organisation called Alert to combat racial harassment in

Newham, thereby replacing one of the country's leading black-led community groups with a white-led consultancy. Ironically, Alert's founders include former police officers from the infamous Stoke Newington Police Station, which has been implicated in the unlawful killing of Shiji Lapite and the dealing of crack cocaine. The only way that Newham Council has been able to ensure any significant black involvement in Alert is by the wholesale secondment of its entire race equality team. Even this drastic move will not prevent Alert from being anything other than a bureaucratic initiative. The continued existence of NMP, therefore, is vital in providing an effective and uncompromising response to racist violence and police brutality in east London.

As we rebuild in the months ahead, one of our key objectives is to secure the necessary funds to provide the invaluable services we offered for so many years. In the interim, we are indebted to the tremendous response from our supporters in Newham and across the country who have given so generously. In addition to individuals and organisations in Newham (too numerous to name), we thank the many organisations nationally who have rallied to support us. In particular, we thank Southall Monitoring Group, Southall Black Sisters, West Midlands Anti-Deportation Campaign and Searchlight for backing us when we most needed their help.

Last but not least, our workers who lost their jobs deserve special mention. We thank Gilly Mundy, Piara Powar, Murray Hatcher, Zahir Mumtaz, Ibrahim Jalloh and Yasin Patel. Faced with the obstacles that NMP was forced to cope with, their hard work and commitment went far beyond what any community organisation could reasonably expect from its workers. It is exactly such commitment that has sustained NMP's work since the racist murder of Akthar Ali Baig in 1980, the tragic event that led to our formation.

We are confident that, in the coming year, the energy and enthusiasm that has always surrounded the NMP's activities will provide a concrete and durable basis for a secure and active future.

Newham Monitoring Project Management Committee

November 1997

NMP's Casework and Campaigns

Racial Harassment

Racial harassment continues to plague the lives of black people in Newham and east London, on housing estates, in workplaces, in schools and on the streets. The casework statistics in this report illustrate the scale of racial harassment that black communities face, whether through assaults, abuse, threats, and homes and property being vandalised. The evidence we have collected shows that, in spite of the claims made by statutory agencies (in particular the local council and police) that they are tackling this issue, they are frequently failing to deal with ongoing and rising levels of racism and therefore are failing black communities. Despite this, black people continue to organise themselves at community and street level to assert their right to live free from violence and intimidation. Newham Monitoring Project (NMP) was formed in 1980, in response to the murder of Akhtar Ali Baig in East Ham High Street by skinheads for a £5 bet. In a concerted fightback black people raised the issues of racist violence, police racism, self-defence and far-right activity. These issues are still as pertinent today as they were at our formation.

Assistance to victims of racial and police harassment has been a priority for Newham Monitoring Project throughout its history. Year on year, the extent of the problems of racist attacks, the lack of statutory response to them and oppressive policing has been documented within annual reports. This year has been no different despite the attempt to draw the Project's attentions away from our primary focus.

It is a sad but true that racist attacks in east London remain the highest in Europe and attacks in Newham reflect those statistics. For Newham Council, despite a much-vaunted policy on the issue the problem continues to slide inexorably down its list of priorities. The needs of racial harassment victims are regularly ignored, calls for help unanswered and inadequate action taken.

Potentially the police play a key statutory role in assisting the victims of racist attacks. However, that role continues to be inadequately performed with many emergency calls from the victims of racist attacks either effectively ignored or responded to much later than appropriate (in one case 24 hours after the call was made). The response of officers when at incidents is all too often insensitive or dismissive with an inclination to heap blame on the victim. **The cases in this report illustrate some of the failures of those in positions of authority.**

Mrs. B A single mother living on an estate in Plaistow has in the past six months had the windows of her flat smashed. Her two young children (aged 5 and 7) are regularly bullied and beaten up on the way to and from school. On one occasion her seven year old son needed six stitches. Graffiti has appeared on the front of the flat labelling the family "nigger bastards".

Mrs. B has made an application for a transfer to a safer environment and has been awarded a total of 100 points under the council's points scheme. However, 200 points are required for a transfer. The awarding of the points effectively means that the council does not consider the harassment she is suffering as serious.

Other means of support theoretically available from the council have not been forthcoming. She has received only one visit from a race officer who branded Mrs. B's experience as a 'neighbour problem.'

What our casework reveals is a continuation of trends that we have highlighted in previous reports. Patterns of racial harassment may have changed, with incidents based around the racist activity of individual families and at school rather than with whole areas of the borough. It remains the case, however, that, in predominantly working-class communities, blaming black people for the problems Newham faces is still all too common. This fact sits uneasily with Newham Council's preoccupation with making the borough 'fit for business' and its desire to 'gentrify' the borough rather than work for those who already live here. This perhaps explains why tackling racist violence has been downgraded in priority. As explained in the introduction to this report, the Housing department's Race Equality team is being phased out. Although we have long been critical of Race Equality Officers, who have been restricted in their work by bureaucracy and, with some honourable exceptions, have been largely ineffectual, this move must be seen as a step backwards – the system needs reforming, not abolishing. The appointment of 'consultants,' rightly condemned by Newham UNISON as little more than privatisation, is an even greater step away from involving black people on their own terms in the struggle against racial harassment.

Refugees and Asylum seekers

Refugees and asylum-seekers across Europe have come under increasing and widespread attack in recent years with the introduction of racist anti-immigration legislation in many countries. Those who gain access to Britain are often unaware of the racism in this country, and the situation is made worse by the lack of information on where to go for help and the lack of resources to generally assist them. Worse, refugee families are often housed in areas with high levels of racial harassment. In last year's annual report, we highlighted the council's reluctance to take action in a case involving a refugee family in south Newham although it had known of attacks for 12 months. NMP's intervention resulted in the family being rehoused. Unfortunately, the council has been willing to speak out when refugees are housed in Newham, as their condemnation of the transfer of homeless refugees from Westminster Council has shown. In the months approaching borough-wide elections, where the fascist British National Party hope to repeat their

Singh family The Singh's have lived in East Ham all of their lives and were recently given a transfer to a larger Housing Association property in Beckton. From the moment they moved in, the Singhs were subjected to verbal abuse and football-style chanting of "Pakis go home". The front of their home was regularly daubed with graffiti and objects including nails, eggs and rubbish were thrown into the drive.

Following the procedure laid down or the reporting of such incidents, the Singhs contacted both the Housing Association and informed the council..

As the incidents grew in intensity, the Singhs sought support from the Housing Association but were constantly told that the matter was in hand and that the Association knew who the perpetrators were and would be taking action.

In fact the Association took no action and had allocated a specific person to deal with such incidents whose role was to support and advise tenants on 'equality issues'. She had 5000 property's to cover in east-London and was rarely available to offer support in person or over the telephone. The council absolved itself of responsibility, saying the Singhs were now the responsibility of the Housing Association and they were powerless to act.

The Singh's remain in the house and have had to resort to taking legal action against the Housing Association and are intending to pursue a complaint to the local government ombudsman on the issue of Newham Council's absolution of responsibility.

J family The J family are Eritrean refugees who have been recently awarded asylum by the Home Secretary because from the Eritrean civil war.

The family recently called the police after having been subjected to persistent racial abuse and threats by neighbours in the Stratford area. Two officers arrived but immediately summoned more officers and what they termed an "immigration liaison officer" from Forest Gate station. They spent an hour questioning the family of five on their immigration status and checking the J family's immigration papers. No regard was given to their appeals for help with the threats and when Mr. J raised the issue one officer told him, "Tough shit, that's what it's like here."

The local housing officer was informed but he was powerless to take action because the police had taken no action.

highest nationwide vote gained in 1994, anti-racists need to be clear in saying that victims of persecution who have fled to Britain are welcome in Newham. The council cannot pander to the agenda of the far-right. Rather than condemnation, refugees need practical support in rebuilding their lives.

Racism in football: the experience of Bari FC

On 27th January 1997, Bari Football Club, a team made up predominantly of Asian youth that prides itself in supporting football initiatives within the local Asian community, experienced the ugly face of racism in only its first season in the South Essex Football League.

On arriving at Cottons Park, the ground of Romside FC, Bari became the target of continuous racial and physical abuse. Despite this hostile reception, the team decided to play in spite of the concerns of many of the players. Before the game, the Bari players were taunted by the Romside team, setting the tone for the racist abuse and harassment from both players and supporters in the following ninety minutes, as shouts of "pakis, brown shit and monkeys" echoed around the ground.

Despite this, Bari scored after only ten minutes, but the goalscorer was soon informed that "if you win, you won't get home alive." Within 25 minutes, one Romside player who had been attacked seven of the Bari team was sent off for headbutting an opponent but the treatment of the remainder of the Bari team continued, not only from the field. One Romside supporter threatened to set his Pit Bull terrier on a Bari player and the 17-year-old refused to participate any further in the game. Meanwhile, the Bari goalkeeper had coins thrown at him and, at the final whistle, was set upon by a number of spectators and a Romside player. Having survived what one Romside player described as a "Paki-bashing spree," the whole Bari team was set upon in the changing rooms. Only their willingness to fight back saved them from serious injury.

What followed will be all too familiar to those who have read NMP's previous annual reports. First, the secretary of Bari FC was contacted by Romford police, who accused the team of attacking Romside players and threatened arrests if the names and addresses of the Bari team were not given. On top of this, Essex Football Association charged Bari with misconduct. It was at this stage that the team contacted NMP.

The project arranged press coverage highlighting the experiences of racist violence that the Bari players had suffered, which attracted widespread local and national coverage and revealed the extent of racism within Sunday league football. We got the team a solicitor and within 72 hours, all charges against them had been dropped. We



The Bari FC team with their NMP-sponsored team strip

spoke with the boys and their families and accompanied them to the FA disciplinary hearing. Unfortunately, as one of the boys commented, the disciplinary panel consisted of "five elderly white gentlemen, who had decided we were guilty before we had arrived."

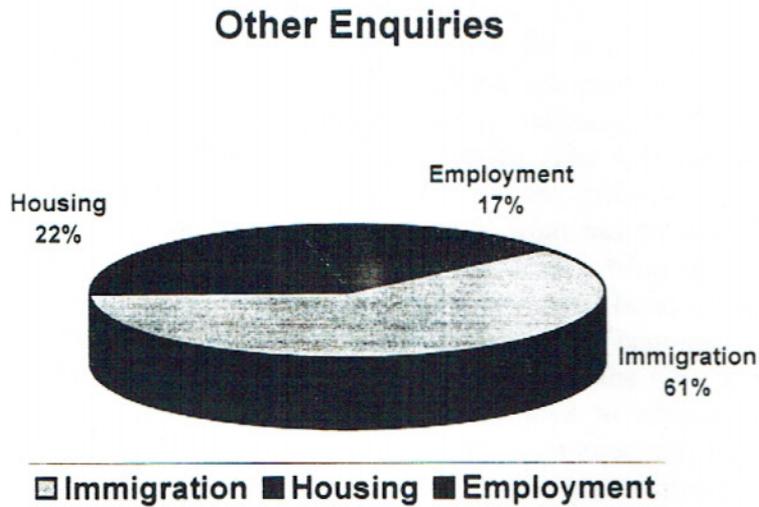
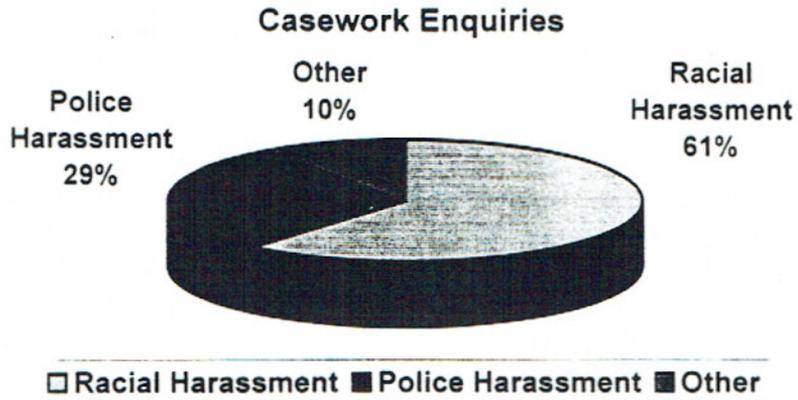
NMP supported the club throughout the remainder of the season and agreed to sponsor them. In a joint initiative, community centres, youth clubs and schools were invited to play matches against Bari and receive information about rights for young people when they suffer racial harassment or problems with the police.

What Bari FC experienced shows the deep-rooted racism that exists at the lower levels of football, which have been untouched by the focus on professional players and the Premier League. It is little wonder that there is no Asian player at the top of English football, despite the huge support for the game from within the Asian community, if Bari's treatment is commonplace and if they are blamed for the racism they have suffered. NMP is proud to sponsor the team and salute their courage and determination not to give up in the face of racist brutality and abuse.

We cannot thank NMP enough for the help they gave us. What happened at Romside we never want to experience again. If NMP are still here then I know we never will.

Imtiaz Patel, Bari FC

Casework Data



Casework	
Racial Harassment	141
Police Harassment	67
Other	23
TOTAL	231

Other Enquiries	
Immigration	14
Housing	5
Employment	4

Casework data contained in this report is chiefly for the period from April 1996 until December 1996. From January 1997, the struggle to maintain our funding and cope with the aftermath of the fire at the 382 Centre severely restricted our casework ability. From April 1997, the loss of funding which led to our staff losing their jobs has made the type of casework we have undertaken in the past almost impossible. Our advice sessions and reputation within the local community have allowed some minimal support to continue, although much of our time has been spent assisting those we have already made a commitment to.

Shiji and Ibrahima: unlawfully killed by the police

On 16 December 1994, Shiji Lapite died after being held in a neckhold and beaten by Stoke Newington police officers. On 16 March 1996, Ibrahima Sey died after being restrained and sprayed in the face with CS spray by Forest Gate and Ilford police officers. Sadly, they are but two of a large number of black people who have died in suspicious circumstances whilst in the custody of the British police.

In past Annual Reports, we have detailed the facts and circumstances of Shiji and Ibrahima's deaths and how their families and friends received substantial support from NMP. In short, we advised and supported the families in their hour of need, arranged legal representation, set up memorial campaigns, organised protests and publicised as widely as possible what had happened in order to ensure that the deaths of Shiji and Ibrahima were not swept under the carpet. All the hard work paid off when the juries at both inquests returned verdicts of unlawful killing, thereby recognising in no uncertain terms that the police were responsible for Shiji and Ibrahima's deaths.

Whilst the initial battles have been won, the struggle for justice continues. For example, NMP and the families of Shiji and Ibrahima are pursuing a variety of strategies in order to ensure that the police officers responsible for Shiji and Ibrahima's deaths are prosecuted and brought to justice. The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) has yet to make a decision on whether the officers implicated in Ibrahima's death should be prosecuted. Once we know what has been decided, we will respond accordingly. In Shiji's case, however, there have been unprecedented developments. The CPS initially decided that there was insufficient evidence to prosecute the officers implicated in Shiji's death. However, in response to Shiji's widow Olamide applying for a judicial review of that decision, the CPS admitted in the High Court that it had failed to give proper consideration to whether or not to prosecute. In an historic turn of events, the High Court, consequently, quashed the decision not to prosecute and ordered the CPS to consider the matter afresh. This was the very first time that the CPS had ever publicly admitted that its decision-making procedures were flawed and thus represents a major victory for all those, particularly in the black community, who have for years been critical of the failure of the CPS to take strong and decisive action against officers implicated in the deaths of black people in police custody. NMP is proud to have played a central role in forcing the CPS to retreat and reconsider its position.

We have also initiated a national campaign to ban CS spray in light of the growing scientific consensus that CS spray is extremely dangerous and harmful. Interestingly, the Coroner at Ibrahima's inquest, Dr Harold Price, has also expressed his concerns and the Strathclyde police initially suspended their trial use of CS spray (although this has been overturned without any further examination of the safety of CS being undertaken. Our campaign has already received widespread public support, including the endorsement of Liberty, Inquest and several MPs. On 29 October 1997, the campaign was formally launched at a successful and well-attended public meeting at the One Love Centre in Upton Park. As a result of asking people to phone us and report any case where the police have either used or threatened to use CS spray, we have been notified of several disturbing incidents, including one in Plaistow where the

police used CS spray in the presence of young children. Unfortunately, the Home Secretary, Jack Straw, appears unconcerned about the potential effects of CS spray and has in fact given his support to its use by the police. It is essential if we are to learn the lessons of Ibrahima's death and avoid future tragedies that we put maximum pressure on Jack Straw to change his mind and withdraw CS spray from circulation.

The issue of black deaths in police custody has never been one that has attracted a sensitive or favourable response from the media or those in authority. That is why NMP has always tried to do everything it can to highlight the individual cases of those who have died in suspicious circumstances, raise general issues that arise and call for those officers responsible to be prosecuted. It is an indictment of our criminal justice system that although over 50 black people have died in police custody, not a single police officer has ever been convicted of a criminal offence relating to those deaths. And it is an indictment of our media that black deaths in custody remain of lesser importance than what are considered more populist stories. Newspaper editors like Tom Duncan of the *Newham Recorder* should pay heed before using their editorial clout to condemn small organisations like NMP who campaign on behalf of those who have died in police custody. The fact that two inquest juries found that the police had unlawfully killed Shiji and Ibrahima provides the clearest possible indication that NMP was right to offer support when no one else was interested. May be Mr Duncan and others in power will not be so quick in the future to accept verbatim everything that the police say.

Accounts to 31 March 1996

Income & expenditure account for the year ended 31 March 1996

	£ 1996	£ 1995
Income		
Grants	159,518	157,843
Other Income	13,575	4,529
Total	<u>173,090</u>	<u>162,372</u>
Expenditure		
Staff Costs	103,023	87,993
Other Operating Costs	75,622	59,303
	<u>178,645</u>	<u>147,296</u>
(Loss)/Profit on Ordinary Activities before Taxation	(5,555)	15,076
Taxation	<u>(39)</u>	<u>(19)</u>
(Loss)/Profit on Ordinary Activities after Taxation	(5,594)	15,057
Transfer to Designated Funds	34,479	(21,384)
General Reserves at 01/01/95	<u>2,797</u>	<u>9,124</u>
General Reserves at 01/01/96	<u>31,682</u>	<u>2,797</u>

Balance sheet as at 31 March 1996

	£ 1996	£ 1995
Current Assets		
Debtors	854	31171
Cash at bank & at hand	<u>55062</u>	<u>15780</u>
	55916	46951
Creditors: Amounts Falling Due within one year	<u>(24,234)</u>	<u>(9,675)</u>
Net Current Assets	<u>31682</u>	<u>37276</u>
Capital Reserves		
General Purposes	31682	2797
Designated Reserves	0	34479
	<u>31682</u>	<u>37276</u>