

Reflections on a Racial Justice course for emergent activists

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In the context of unrelenting racism, and in response to the election of Donald Trump in the US, and Britain's decision to leave the European Union, at the Racial Justice Network we wanted to bring together black and brown people interested in learning and sharing skills and practices on fighting racial injustices.

With, harsher and more discriminatory immigration policies, and politicians making remarks that we would once have only expected from far-right hate groups, it is clear to us that there is a need for racially minoritized communities to get organised, create movement, and work in solidarity to challenge racial injustice. There is a need, too, for racially minoritised communities to see the connection between little spoken past and the present. The legacies of imperialism, colonialism and slavery continue to impact on many of the situations our communities face today: for example, migration and migration policies, global warming and its racialized impact, the criminal justice system, ethnic conflicts, mining, arms trade, and foreign debt.

Too often people experience racism in isolation. Institutional racism is harder to fight back as an individual especially as it is not always easy to connect the dots. Recurrent racist incidents have led to the normalisation of racism, to trauma, and - for many of the people we come into contact with through the Racial Justice Network - an increased sense of apathy as most do not think oppression and repression will change. With budget cuts and scarce resources, significant constraints have been placed upon the work of equality focused organisations, and specifically anti-racist organisations and those orientated towards the needs of 'BAME' communities. As such, we were determined to bring individuals working on racial justice to build the network, skills and power. Organising and campaign training is competitive or expensive so tends too often to exclude black and brown people. So we developed a unique programme that was not only affordable and therefore open, but that placed race at the centre of its philosophy and praxis.

Over the course of 7 months, we engaged with around 50 budding activists, organisers and campaigners, based in the North of England and as far as Scotland. Ranging widely in age, the group that we brought together held vast knowledge, experience and expertise in different areas of Racial Justice: from conflict resolution to reparations, economic empowerment, immigration advice and more, we have seen first-hand the vast array of skills in our communities.

Recognizing the near permanence of racism, our work and this project in particular has been informed by our belief that working in this area is a long-term endeavour. This is why we focus on capacity building as individuals and as a collective. We covered topics like mapping exercises, movement building, story of self, campaigns, power analysis, action planning amongst a range of other sessions) and also had facilitated sessions from participants. During this period, participants have been supported to develop their skills in areas they

wish. For example, participants have developed the skills and confidence to take part in radio interviews, to organize and start community groups, to facilitate groups/training, in public speaking at events, to develop student groups, to develop a campaign against G4S housing, to lay the foundations of a community education project, and to connect and support other participants, events and actions. We have witnessed confidence grow but also our participants move and take spaces at decision making tables. Participants have also developed a better understanding on race, history and the intersectional nature of inequalities that are determined by class, gender, sexuality, and religion, for example. These are important steps in anti-racist struggle.

The course has highlighted with spaces to learn, share and challenge, it is possible to grow a network of individuals with similar values, a shared purpose and common goal. It is harder to fight injustice as individuals and with most struggles lacking an analysis that places race at the centre, and the continued difficulty in having conversations about race, we know it is important to create spaces in which race, and our people, are placed at the centre. By creating a space for people who share our commitment to centring race, it is possible to make meaningful change. As we continue to grow, we are already beginning to see these ripples of change.

At RJN our vision is for holistic, economic, spiritual and culture repairs to end racial injustice and address legacies of colonialism. This course has seen us take steps towards that vision. We continue to move forward.