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ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT

The Death of Colin Roach and the Politics of Grief and Anger in Late Twentieth-Century Britain

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Abstract

This article examines the death of Colin Roach in Stoke Newington Police Station, Hackney, in 1983, and explores the emotional politics of the campaigns that followed his death. These campaigns were focused on both determining the circumstances of Roach's death and highlighting tensions between the police and the Black community of Hackney. Using hitherto unpublished archival sources, local newspapers, and visual sources, the article documents racial politics in Hackney in the early 1980s and examines the relationship between race and policing at that time. The article argues that the experience and expression of grief and anger were critical to understanding the political problem of race and policing in London in the 1980s, to forming and mobilizing political communities, and to interrogating the power of the state. The article also argues that a critical element of the emotional economy around race in Hackney in 1983 was the indifference and lack of empathy of the police in Stoke Newington to ethnic minority communities. This lack of empathy not only illustrated the problem of race within the police force at this time but further fueled local campaigns to make the police accountable. This links the Roach case to a later turning point—the 1999 Macpherson inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence, which characterized the Metropolitan Police as institutionally racist.

In January 1983, Colin Roach was twenty-one years old, a young Black man living at home in Bow, East London with his mother and father, Pamela and James, and three of his siblings (see Figure 1). After leaving school at 16, he had worked as a tailor's cutter. By all accounts, he was "very outgoing" and had many friends.[1] Just after 11.15 pm on Wednesday, 12 January 1983, Colin entered Stoke Newington police station, in the neighboring borough of Hackney. Within fifteen minutes, he was dead in the foyer from a gunshot wound to the head, a sawn-off shotgun on the floor near his body.

Two days later, about a hundred people picketed Stoke Newington police station. Some were Colin's friends from Saxon youth club in Bow. They had seen a television report on Colin's death, which had suggested, based on police sources, that the gunshot wound was self-inflicted. Colin's friends alleged instead that Roach had been "murdered" by the police.[2] Word spread about Colin's death and local people joined the picket at the police station. When a sit-down protest was attempted on the High Street, police rushed out of the station, grabbing people and making arrests. Another picket occurred on Monday, 17 January. That

[1] The Roach Family Support Committee/Independent Committee of Inquiry, *Policing in Hackney 1945–1984* (Karia Press/Roach Family Support Committee, 1989) (hereafter *Policing in Hackney*), 32; *Hackney Gazette and East London Advertiser* (London) (hereafter *Hackney Gazette*), 17 January 1983.

[2] *Policing in Hackney*, 60; for video footage of this protest, see Thames News, 14 January 1983, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SBouL3Nr-C8&t=16s.

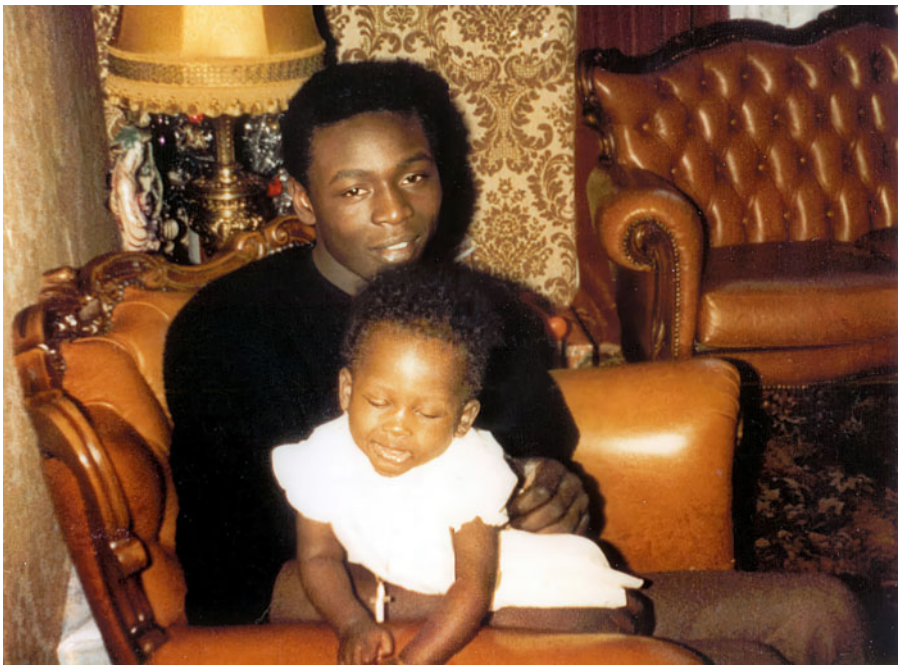

Figure 1. Colin Roach. David Hoffman Photo Library ©David Hoffman.

evening, the Roach Family Support Committee (hereafter RFSC) was established at a large meeting organized by local Black activists. Colin's mother and father, Pamela and James, and two of his siblings, Pauline and Patrick, were centrally involved in the RFSC, which organized a campaign to find out the truth behind Colin's death.

That truth was unknown in 1983 and remains so. "Who Killed Colin Roach?" was a question asked in verse and film after his death by, respectively, the poet Benjamin Zephaniah and the visual artist Isaac Julien.[3] It had, and has, no definitive answer. "The truth," Pamela Roach said, "is there but it is hiding."[4] That truth was also contested. The police suggested Colin's death was self-inflicted. A coroner's inquest in June 1983 reached a finding of suicide, though much of the evidence it heard was neither straightforward nor clear in this regard. As the picket on 14 January showed, there were immediate suspicions in Hackney that the police were implicated in Colin's death: either they had covered up his murder by an unknown third party or were directly involved in his killing.[5] A local Labour councilor, Patrick Kodikara, stated that "Colin Roach was murdered ... [a]nd the police did it."[6] A Black youth worker said that while she had been detained at Stoke Newington, police officers told her that they had killed Colin Roach:

> One plainclothes officer said, "we killed Colin Roach because he would not give us the evidence we wanted". His colleagues laughed at this remark. The same officer said "we shot him with a sawn-off shotgun".[7]

[3] Benjamin Zephaniah, "Who Killed Colin Roach?" (1983), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=njs3I4ECIe0; Isaac Julien, dir., *Who Killed Colin Roach?* (1983), https://www.isaacjulien.com/projects/who-killed-colin-roach/.

[4] Julien, *Who Killed Colin Roach?*.

[5] See Ken Fero and Graham Smith, "A Crime is a Crime," https://4wardevernewsvine.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/01/colin-roach-a-crime-is-a-crime-is-a-crime.pdf

[6] *Hackney Gazette*, 28 January 1983.

[7] *The Voice* (London), 5 February 1983.

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Such allegations would not have seemed exaggerated in 1980s Hackney. Stoke Newington police had a long-standing reputation for violence against ethnic minority people, and between 1971 and 1982, four Black people had died in suspicious circumstances within the station.[8] In 1989, a report of the detailed independent inquiry into Roach's death was published, for which the cultural theorist Stuart Hall had served as advisor. In his preface to the report, Hall made clear that while the inquiry did not "commit itself to an alternative explanation of how Colin Roach died," it did show "clearly and incontrovertibly" that "he could not have died in the way the police and inquest say he did."[9] Since accounts of what happened during Colin Roach's last hours have been repeatedly questioned, I use "death" here not as a neutral descriptor but rather to underscore the contested nature of this tragic event.

The Affective Ecology of Hackney, 1983

In 1983, Colin's family and the Black community of East London urgently demanded an answer to the question "who killed Colin Roach?" The RFSC asked for an official Home Office inquiry into the true circumstances of Colin's death. A public inquiry would also expose what one local activist group called the failings of the "police, the courts and other forces which defend the brutal, racist police and who deny black and other working class people their basic rights."[10] Willie Whitelaw, the Conservative Home Secretary, denied the request for an official inquiry. Unsatisfied by this response, Hackney Council threatened to withhold the police precept (in effect, defunding the police) as "an expression of anger at the state of policing in Hackney."[11] The streets of Hackney also became a theater for such anger. The RFSC organized four major demonstrations between January and June 1983, in which hundreds of people marched through the borough, usually ending at Stoke Newington police station, chanting slogans such as "No Cover Up," "Stoke Newington Police Legalize Murder," and "What Do We Want—The Truth! What Have They Done—Murder!"[12] The police clashed with demonstrators at each of these demonstrations; in all, nearly a hundred people were arrested. At Colin's funeral in February 1983, Reverend Clive Young remarked: "I see some who are angry and we need that right sort of anger at a time like this."[13]

This story—grief and anger at the death of Black people followed by political organization and collective protests against the police—recurs across the landscape of late twentieth-century Britain. A turning point came in in January 1981, when a fire at a birthday party in New Cross left thirteen young Black people dead.[14] Anger at the perceived failings of the police investigation into the fire led to the first major national demonstration for Black rights—the Black People's Day of Action on 2 March 1981.[15] The Black People's Day of Action was a critical moment of political organization in Black politics and made visible both the grief at the death of young people in New Cross and a critique of racism and injustice in British society. In 1985, the police shooting of a Black mother in Brixton, Cherry

[8] These were Aseta Simms, Simeon Collins, Franklyn Lee, and Michael Ferreira.

[9] *Policing in Hackney*, 14.

[10] Stoke Newington and Hackney Defence Campaign, Bulletin No. 3 (undated, July 1983), Hackney Archives, London, 2019/38.

[11] Quoted in *Hackney Gazette*, 25 February 1983.

[12] See photographs in the bulletins of the RFSC, (undated, January to March 1983), Hackney Archives, London, 2019/38; *The News Line* (London), 22 January 1983; *The Voice*, 22 January 1983.

[13] Quoted in *Hackney Gazette*, 22 February 1983.

[14] Yvonne Ruddock, Paul Ruddock, Humphrey Brown, Steve Collins, Owen Thompson, Andrew Gooding, Patricia Johnson, Rosaline Henry, Lloyd Hall, Patrick Cummings, Gerry Francis, Steve Collins, and Glenton Powell. One more victim of the fire, Anthony Berbeck, committed suicide in 1983.

[15] Aaron Andrews, "Truth, Justice, and Expertise in 1980s Britain: The Cultural Politics of the New Cross Massacre," *History Workshop Journal* 91, no. 1 (2021): 182–209; Robin Bunce and Paul Field, *Renegade: Darcus Howe and the Fight for Black British Civil Rights* (Bloomsbury, 2021).

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Groce, and the death of another in Tottenham, Cynthia Jarrett, both during police searches, triggered violent protests, notably on the Broadwater Farm council housing estate. The racist murder of Stephen Lawrence in April 1993 and the botched police investigation of that murder resulted in the official recognition, with the 1999 Macpherson report, of the institutional racism of the Metropolitan Police, after long campaigning by Stephen's parents, Doreen and Neville Lawrence.[16] In all of these cases, the death of Black people—and the grief and anger this produced—became a flashpoint for political organization around the problems of racism and policing.

This article explores the role that affect—in particular, grief and anger—played in the political campaigns following the death of Colin Roach in Hackney in 1983. Sara Ahmed has asked, "[h]ow are emotions bound up with stories of justice and injustice?"[17] Barnor Hesse has reflected upon Ahmed's question in relation to the politics of the Black Lives Matter movement and the expression of what Hesse calls "Black feeling" as a response to the deaths of Black people after encounters with the police:

> During 2020, this radical formation of Black politics as a populist orientation was strategically supplemented by activist desires and capacities to make public an expansive, interruptive singularity of *Black feeling* [italics in original] that struggled with [Sara Ahmed's] question: "What happens when those who have been designated as ungrievable are grievable, and when their loss is not only felt as a loss, but becomes a symbol of the injustice of the loss?"[18]

How did grief and anger do political work following the death of Colin Roach? In particular, thinking of Hesse's and Ahmed's questions, how did grief and anger highlight the politics of race and racial injustice in late twentieth-century Britain? This article historicizes Hesse's and Ahmed's reflections by examining the political campaign that followed the death of Colin Roach. It does so through an exploration of three different moments and spaces: the death of Colin Roach and its immediate aftermath on 12 and 13 January 1983, within Stoke Newington police station; the streets of Hackney in the period from January to May 1983, focusing on demonstrations organized by the RFSC; and the coroner's inquest, held in Clerkenwell County Court in June 1983.

Modern British historians have recently been encouraged to think about "the place of race in postwar social democracy."[19] In late twentieth-century Britain, race, Stuart Hall argued in *Policing the Crisis* (1978), became "the arena in which complex fears, tensions and anxieties" were "worked through."[20] Examining affect, and using it as a prism, can deepen our understanding of how race worked, how it was articulated, and how it was felt. Race operated within a particular affective ecology shaped in private and public spaces and spheres by a variety of actors, including individuals, families, organizations, and, not least, the police.[21] This affective ecology made visible Black grief and anger that emerged in response to Black deaths resulting from encounters with the police. It underlined the "city as a space of state violence against the black subject."[22] Kennetta Hammond Perry has shown how the police's involvement in the death of David Oluwale in Leicester in 1969 brought "into focus moments where the making of Black victimhood … lays bare the

[16] Doreen Lawrence, *And Still I Rise* (Faber and Faber, 2007).

[17] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Routledge, 1991), 191.

[18] Barnor Hesse, "Black Populism," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 121, no. 3 (July 2022): 577; quote from Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 192.

[19] See Marc Matera, Radhika Natarajan, Kennetta Hammond Perry, Camilla Schofield and Rob Waters, "Marking Race," *Twentieth-Century British History* 34, no. 3 (2023): 407–14.

[20] Stuart Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis* (Macmillan, 1978), 333.

[21] See Stephen Brooke, "Spaces, Emotions and the Everyday: The Affective Ecology of 1980s London," *Twentieth-Century British History* 28, no. 1 (2017), 112.

[22] Rob Waters, *Thinking Black* (University of California Press, 2015), 102.

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often unspeakable violence of the state."[23] The expression of grief and anger following Colin Roach's death "spoke" the violence of the state. It was a means of gaining public recognition of the injuries and injustice of racism, underlining the material and emotional damage of racist policing to families and communities.[24] In a different way, the state also spoke its own violence. Even leaving aside their possible direct complicity in Colin Roach's death, in 1983 the Stoke Newington police responded to Roach's family and the Black community with indifference, hostility, and further violence. Colin Roach's death revealed (as did other episodes in the late twentieth century) the reiteration by the state, through the police, of its violence towards Black people and its indifference to Black deaths. This had both affective and material aspects, which can be seen and documented in the police's response to the Roach family and to the campaign that followed his death. Echoing Charles M. Pierce and Sara Ahmed, this created a mundane, but extreme environment, a hostile whiteness "surrounding" Black people in Hackney in 1983.[25] Thinking about emotion in this way deepens our understanding of race, not least in emphasizing the injuries of racism in late twentieth-century Britain and illuminating the political dynamic that addressed those injuries.

Speaking of the role of affect in campaigns around racial politics does not displace the critical role of organization in those campaigns. In Hackney in the 1980s, as across London, there was a mosaic of Black activism focused on questions such as policing, education, employment, and housing.[26] Such activism and organization helped forge ideas of Blackness and Black politics, asserted a physical presence in the city through the acquisition of premises, and provided services to local Black communities. The RFSC was itself an example of such organization and activism. Its work included the dissemination of information about Colin's death and the state of policing in Hackney through a newsletter, lobbying local and national politicians, and planning marches. Affect informed and accompanied such organization while organization grounded affect in political campaigns.

Grief and anger served as the foundation for an emotional community in Hackney and a spur for collective political mobilization.[27] Grief is, of course, often a private emotion. But grief can also, following Judith Butler, "furnish a sense of political community" that transcends the private sphere.[28] The devastating grief felt by Colin Roach's parents and siblings informed and was foregrounded in the political campaigns in Hackney in 1983. Shared grief at the death of Colin Roach bridged private and public spheres, as a statement by the RFSC evinced: "[a] Black family—the Roach family have suffered a devastating loss ... Because of its various dimensions it is a major issue for Black and other people."[29] That sense of shared, public grief was an immediate response to Colin Roach's death, as the picket of 14

[23] Kennetta Hammond Perry, "The Sights and Sounds of State Violence," *Twentieth-Century British History* 34, no. 3 (2023): 479–80.

[24] I am thinking here of Stuart Hall's writing on the "politics of recognition" or "its absence" in the "struggle for social justice and equality." See Stuart Hall, "The Multicultural Question," The Political Economy Research Centre Annual Lecture, 4 May 2000. There is a considerable literature on American Black politics on a similar point. See Dave Tell, *Remembering Emmett Till* (Chicago, 2019); Erica S. Lawson, "Bereaved Black Mothers and Maternal Activism in the Racial State," *Feminist Studies* 44, no. 3 (2018): 713–35; Barnor Hesse, "White Sovereignty (...), Black Life Politics: 'The N****r They Couldn't Kill'," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 116, no. 3 (July 2017): 581–602.

[25] Charles M. Pierce's idea of a mundane extreme environment for Black people is referred to in Grace Carroll, "Mundane Extreme Environmental Stress and African American Families: A Case for Recognizing Different Realities," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 29, no. 2 (1998): 271. On whiteness and "surrounding," see Sara Ahmed, "Atmospheric Walls," *Feminist Killjoys*, 15 September 2014, https://feministkilljoys.com/2014/09/15/atmospheric-walls/; and Sara Ahmed, "Being Surrounded," *Feminist Killjoys*, 24 November 2013, https://feministkilljoys.com/2013/11/24/being-surrounded/.

[26] Waters, *Thinking Black*; Stephen Brooke, *London, 1984* (Oxford, 2024), Chapter 2.

[27] On the idea of emotional community, see Barbara Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Cornell, 2005); on emotion and political mobilization, see Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper and Francesca Poletta, eds., *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements* (Chicago, 2001).

[28] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life* (Verso, 2004), 22.

[29] RFSC, Bulletin No. 3, March 1983, Hackney Archives, 2019/38.

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January showed. At that demonstration, it was clear that grief went hand in hand with anger. Grief and mourning often afford, in the words of Brahma Prakash, "a site of solidarity … where there is a prevailing sense of injustice."[30] As Ahmed shows, affect can open up the question of justice and injustice.[31] The public expression of anger is one means of seeking the redress of such injustice.[32]

The expression of emotions such as grief and anger served as a critique of the police and, more broadly, the state. There were few forms of formal political agency available to ethnic minority people in the 1970s and 1980s to make the police accountable.[33] In this absence, the public expression of grief and anger was one means for Black people to interrogate the police. As Aaron Andrews has argued, the Black People's Day of Action in 1981 was a means of marking grief at the death of thirteen young Black people, making racism and racial injustice visible, and highlighting the failures of the state.[34] Lucy Noakes has suggested that grief is a "disruptive" emotion and, in this regard, the expression of grief over the deaths of Black people was disruptive of the late twentieth-century British state, highlighting its violence, hostility, and injustice towards Black people; it challenged what Hesse has called the "white sovereignty" that underlay political culture.[35]

The police also shaped the affective ecology of race in Hackney in 1983. Indeed, their outlook and actions did much to create that affective ecology and to provoke the political campaigns around race in Hackney. This was rooted in the hostility shown on an everyday basis to the Black community in the 1970s and 1980s, which was thrown into sharp relief in 1983 by the callousness and indifference with which the police responded to the grief of Colin Roach's parents. In Isaac Julien's *Who Killed Colin Roach?*, Colin's mother, Pamela, remarks that a police detective "wasn't talking to us as if we were parents who had just lost their son."[36] The emotional dynamic of that moment is important in understanding what was at stake between Colin Roach's family, the Black community of Hackney, and the police. What the family of Colin Roach and the Black community in Hackney sought was a recognition of their grief at the death of a young Black man. That was exactly what Stoke Newington police refused to provide. The Black politician and, from 1987, the MP for Hackney North and Stoke Newington, Diane Abbott, has stated that the police response to the 1981 New Cross fire showed that "for the state, black lives didn't matter."[37] This also seemed true in Hackney in 1983.

Policing Race

In the late twentieth century, the Metropolitan police was pervaded by a racist culture and outlook towards ethnic minority people.[38] Its practices of everyday policing such as stop

[30] Brahma Prakash, "Who is Afraid of Mourning?," *Performance Research* 27, no. 5 (2019): 35, 40.

[31] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 191.

[32] On anger and social justice, see Katie Stockdale, *Hope Under Oppression* (Oxford, 2021), 82–83, 111; Alice MacLachlan, "Unreasonable Resentments," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 41, no. 4 (2010): 422–41. On anger as a force for political mobilization, see David Ost, *The Defeat of Solidarity: Anger and Politics in Postcommunist Europe* (Cornell, 2005).

[33] On the problems of police accountability, see Tony Jefferson and Roger Crenshaw, *Controlling the Constable: Accountability in England and Wales* (Routledge, 1984); Phil Scraton, *The State of the Police* (Pluto Press, 1985).

[34] Andrews, "Truth, Justice, and Expertise"; for similar moments involving the British Asian community, see Sarah Glynn, *Class, Ethnicity and Religion in the Bengali East End* (Manchester, 2017); Ali Riaz, *Islam and Identity Politics Among British Bangladeshi*s (Manchester, 2013).

[35] Lucy Noakes, "Gender, Grief, and Bereavement in Second World War Britain," *Journal of War and Cultural Studies* 8, no. 1 (2015): 73; Hesse, "Black Populism," 567–68.

[36] Julien, *Who Killed Colin Roach*.

[37] Quoted in Robin Bunce and Samara Linton, *Diane Abbott* (Biteback Books, 2020), 140.

[38] The evidence for this is overwhelming. See Stephen Small, *Police and People in London*, vol. II, *A Group of Young Black People* (Policy Studies Institute, 1983); D.J. Smith and J. Gray, *Police and People in London*, vol. IV, *The Police in Action* (Policy Studies Institute, 1985); Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration, 1971–72, *Police/*

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under suspicion ("sus") were explicitly discriminatory against Black people. The Met coupled such over-policing with the under-policing of racist violence against and harassment of Black people. As Stuart Hall and others have suggested, encounters between Black youth and the police at the local level "*politicized*" Black communities.[39] From the late 1960s on, "escalating conflicts between youth and the police in areas of Black settlement came to define Black politics"; the police were, in this light, "the face of the state."[40] Tensions between the police and Black people erupted in the Brixton rising of 1981. Few, if any, formal or mainstream political avenues existed to raise the issue of racist policing or to make the police more accountable. In 1981, the newly elected Labour-led Greater London Council established a Police Committee to press for democratic control of the Met to address this problem. There were also local versions of this at the borough level, including in Hackney. But these initiatives had little real power. In 1984, the Police and Criminal Evidence Act gave even more autonomy and power to the police.[41]

Hackney illustrated many of these tensions around race and policing. It was a racially diverse borough: 40 percent of the borough's population was of Afro-Caribbean or South Asian descent.[42] The relationship between Black people in Hackney and the police was strained. The head of the Met, Kenneth Newman, said that Hackney, like Brixton, was a "frontline," a place of conflict between the police and Black people, "where the racial ingredient is at its most potent."[43] Black people viewed the police with apprehension across that internal border. For them, Newman's "racial ingredient" translated into everyday racism, hostility, and violence by the police. "The Black community in Hackney," a local councilor said in 1983, "considers the police to be their enemies and oppressors."[44] In February 1983, a month after the death of Colin Roach, the Hackney Council for Racial Equality (a local pressure group created by the Commission for Racial Equality), detailed forty-five cases between 1978 and 1982 showing "overt racism in the police, their violence and terrorisation of the community, their arbitrary and tyrannical action, their scant regard for the law and rules governing their actions and their incompetence in dealing with crime."[45] The Black Mayor of Hackney, Sam Springer, suggested that some members of the Stoke Newington police had connections with the far right.[46] The treatment of Black people in custody in Stoke Newington police station was a particularly alarming aspect of this problem: before the death of Colin Roach, four Black people had died in police custody. In 1971, Aseta Simms died in suspicious circumstances at the station. Seven years later, Michael Ferreira also died in the same station; he had been the victim of a racist attack and died of his wounds because the police failed to rush him to hospital. There were also numerous other examples of police violence against Black people across Hackney. In 1976, for instance, a Black couple in their sixties had been subject to a police raid without a warrant, had been beaten during that raid, and then were charged with assaulting the police. They were acquitted of that charge and later took a private action against the police. In 1982, they were awarded £51,000 in damages. The judge in the case publicly condemned Stoke Newington police's

Immigrant Relations, vol. III, *Evidence, Documents and Index* (Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1972); Institute of Race Relations, *Policing Against Black People* (Institute of Race Relations, 1987).

[39] Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis*, 331. Italics in original.

[40] Waters, *Thinking Black*, 166, 102.

[41] See Brooke, *London, 1984*, Chapter 9.

[42] See Paul Harrison, *Inside the Inner City* (Penguin, 1983).

[43] Quoted in Michael Keith, "'Policing a Perplexed Society': No-Go Areas and the Mystification of Black-Police Conflict," in *Out of Order: Policing Black People*, ed. Ellis Cashmore and Eugene McLauglin (Routledge, 1991), 204; see also Daniel Renshaw, "The Violent Frontline: Space, Ethnicity and Confronting the State in Edwardian Spitalfields and 1980s Brixton," *Contemporary British History* 32, no. 2 (2018): 231–52.

[44] *Hackney Gazette*, 28 January 1983.

[45] "Policing in Hackney—A Record of HCRE's Experience 1978–82," Hackney Council for Racial Equality, February 1983, Hackney Archives, London, HA 2019/38.

[46] *The Voice*, 29 January 1983.

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Figure 2. Stoke Newington Police Station during a Colin Roach demonstration, 1983. David Hoffman Photo Library ©David Hoffman.

"unjustified use of force" and "monstrous, wicked and shameful conduct."[47] Before and after Colin Roach's death, rumors circulated of other Black men in custody in Stoke Newington station being questioned "with a gun to [their] head," having guns pulled on them during raids on their homes, or being taken on threatening car rides.[48] Stoke Newington police station, a forbidding Victorian structure on Stoke Newington High Street, was a symbol of the power of the police over the Black community (see Figure 2).

Critics described it as "a fortress," like "a compound in a colonial society," a physical manifestation of the state's domination of minority communities through aggressive policing.[49] For ethnic minority people, it also dominated the psychic landscape of Hackney, given the knowledge of police violence against Black people that took place within its walls. For all these reasons, well before the death of Colin Roach in January 1983, there were, according to the Hackney Council for Racial Equality, "deep angry feelings in the community about policing in Hackney."[50]

Stoke Newington Police Station, 12–13 January 1983

On 12 January 1983, Colin Roach visited his sister Valerie who had just given birth. Colin was apparently "overjoyed" to meet the baby.[51] Colin then spent the evening watching television with his family. At the end of the 9 o'clock news, he went out and got two friends to drive him around East London. Throughout the drive he said people were following him. Colin carried a sports bag with him, but not one big enough to have contained a shotgun. At one point, he wanted to go to Bethnal Green police station. Colin then changed his mind and

[47] *Policing in Hackney*, 70; see also Scraton, *The State of the Police*, 100.

[48] *City Limits* (London), 28 January 1983; Hackney Black Women's Group, "Black People's Demonstration Against Police Harassment," July 1980, George Padmore Institute Archives, LRA/01/0114/01.

[49] Harrison, *Inside the Inner City*, 83; Melissa Benn and Ken Worpole, *Death in the City* (Canary Press, 1986), 37.

[50] "Policing in Hackney—A Record of HCRE's Experience 1978–82," Hackney Council for Racial Equality, February 1983, Hackney Archives, London, HA 2019/38.

[51] *Policing in Hackney*, 38.

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asked to be dropped on Victoria Road in Stoke Newington near where his brother Patrick lived. His friends saw Colin go around the corner to Stoke Newington police station after getting out of the car. Increasingly worried, they went to see Colin's father, James. At 12.15 am on 13 January, James Roach arrived at the police station to find the doors locked and taped off.

It was only after questioning him for over two hours that the police told James that his son was dead. This was despite the fact that the police had issued a press release about the death at around 1.00 am, naming Colin and suggesting the gunshot was self-inflicted. As later investigations showed, it was never clear how the police knew who Colin was without his father having formally identified the body. Those investigations also revealed the police's considerable evasiveness about important facts such as whether Colin's body had been moved, and which officers had been present after the shooting. The police kept James Roach under questioning, without allowing him to see his son. At 5.00 am, the police entered the Roach home in Bow and searched Colin's room for ammunition and prescription drugs. During the search, a female police officer allegedly grabbed Pamela by the throat and pushed her into a chair to prevent her from going upstairs.[52]

After Colin's death, the *Evening Standard* claimed he had a "history of mental instability," a claim the police circulated to the press in the early hours of 13 January.[53] This was not true. Colin was known as a "quiet and well-liked young man" with a "'very close and supportive family'."[54] He had no previous history of mental illness. A particular experience at the end of 1982 had nonetheless disturbed him. In December 1982, Colin served a three-week term of imprisonment in Pentonville for the theft of a wallet and possession of an offensive weapon in the form of a penknife, a sentence overturned on appeal. During his time in jail, Colin had an unspecified conflict with three other prisoners. When he came out of prison at the end of December 1982, he was anxious, mentioning to his friends that he was concerned for his own welfare and that of his family and friends, fearing that unnamed persons would "bring aggravation" upon them.[55] His family doctor prescribed anti-anxiety medication after finding him "upset" with a "lot on his mind." At no point, however, did that doctor feel that he was suicidal, and she was "'shocked and surprised'" when told of the circumstances of his death.[56]

On the day following Colin's death, his parents went to Stoke Newington police station. Dennis Twomey, a local Labour councilor in Bow, and Gareth Peirce, a solicitor from the firm of Benedict Birnberg, accompanied them. Peirce specialized in cases of police excess and was a central figure in the overturning of the unjust convictions in the Guildford Four and Birmingham Six cases. That the Roaches brought their local councilor and a solicitor with such expertise to the police station indicates the apprehension and distrust with which Black people viewed the police in Hackney. On 13 January, the police were confrontational and unsympathetic to Colin's parents according to Twomey:

> We spoke with Detective Inspector Scott who refused even to let us get enough chairs for everyone to sit down. We should not be surprised by this. It is the sort of callous and insensitive behaviour the community has come to expect from Stoke Newington Police.[57]

Taken aback by this treatment, Peirce believed that the police were deliberately withholding information: "on this occasion the family were treated with such discourtesy that Gareth

[52] *Hackney Gazette*, 14 January 1983.
[53] Quoted in *Policing in Hackney*, 54.
[54] *Policing in Hackney*, 32.
[55] *Policing in Hackney*, 33.
[56] Quoted in *Policing in Hackney*, 35.
[57] Bulletin of the RFSC (undated, January 1983), Hackney Archives, London, 2019/38.

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Pearce [sic] has … stated that her suspicions were aroused."[58] She felt immediately that the police were covering up something. The police treatment of James and Pamela Roach showed, according to the RFSC, none of the "respect and attention" that the Roaches deserved and a lack of "'[h]umanitarian' behaviour."[59] Peirce commented on the behavior of the lead detective: "'one expected a murmur of sympathy or compassion or a base minimum of politeness from him'," but none was forthcoming: "not only was Scott 'laughing' as they left, he was 'very aggressive' and 'extraordinarily callous'."[60] The police thus reacted with derision, hostility, and insensitivity to parental grief at the violent death of a child.

James Roach had experienced the same pitilessness at the police station hours before. Roach recalled that the police detective questioning him about Colin "'offered no sympathy, condolences or refreshment. At the time that [I] had been told of Colin's death, [I] was crying, yet the questioning continued regardless'."[61] The police treated James Roach as a suspect, not as a father concerned about the welfare of his child:

> … they wanted to know who brought me down to the station … They asked me what time my son left home. They were tormenting me, I said I am not in a court, tell me whether my son is here or not. They went outside, one came back. He told me that were not giving me no information unless I made a statement … An officer who had been writing, tore up the paper he was writing on, he said, 'you are telling me lies'… [at 3 am] Another officer I have never seen before came in and said 'sorry but your son is dead'.[62]

A few days later, Colin's sister Pauline criticized the police for treating her family "harshly," noting that "Chief Inspector Scott had no time for the family."[63]

The disjuncture between the police's emotional approach to the death of Colin Roach and the family's own emotional state was jarring. Colin Roach's death did not seem to matter, nor did his parents' grief. What dominated the police's affective response was callousness and hostility. We might think, at this point, about the affective qualities of whiteness. As Camilla Schofield's work has shown, white anxieties triggered by the emergence of a multiracial nation often manifested themselves in the emotional expression of loss and fear.[64] Unrestrained hatred was the emotion expressed on housing estates towards ethnic minority tenants by white tenants and what were called "reception committees" often organized by the far right.[65] In such ways, race was again a cauldron of anxiety, which could be articulated through emotion. For the police in Stoke Newington in 1983, the dominant affective response to grieving Black parents was indifference and hostility.

These initial encounters between the family and the police on 13 January 1983 fueled the subsequent political mobilization of the Black community in Hackney. Indeed, the emotional narrative of these private encounters lay at the heart of that public campaign. Barnor Hesse, a member of the RFSC, told local councilors in Hackney in 1983 that there was a connection between the private grief of the family and the sense of injustice felt more widely by Black people in Hackney; the call for a public inquiry "has its roots in the pain and distress of the

[58] Circular to all Labour MPs, RFSC, March 1983, Hackney Archives, London, 2019/38.

[59] Circular to all Labour MPs, RFSC, March 1983, Hackney Archives, London, 2019/38; Bulletin of the RFSC (undated, January 1983), Hackney Archives, London, 2019/38.

[60] *Policing in Hackney*, 54–55.

[61] *Policing in Hackney*, 52.

[62] Transcript of Coroner's Inquest, 6 June 1983, Hackney Archives, London, 2019/38.

[63] *The Voice*, 17 January 1983.

[64] Camilla Schofield, *Enoch Powell and the Making of Postcolonial Britain* (Cambridge, 2013); Camilla Schofield, "In Defence of White Freedom: Working Men's Clubs and the Politics of Sociability in Late Industrial Britain," *Twentieth-Century British History* 34, no. 3 (2023): 515–51; Daniel Geary, Camilla Schofield and Jennifer Sutton, eds., *Global White Nationalism* (Manchester, 2020); Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Chapter 2.

[65] Brooke, *London, 1984*, Chapter 8.

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Roach family and in the deep concern of the Black community."[66] The same argument was made to mobilize a wider public. In a handbill calling for public participation in a demonstration planned for 12 February 1983, for example, the RFSC emphasized the "extreme distress" suffered by Pamela and James Roach in their contact with the police.[67] A circular letter sent to Labour MPs seeking support for a public inquiry similarly highlighted the emotional devastation of that encounter.[68] Writing to the Home Secretary in the winter of 1983, the RFSC drew out the "police's treatment of the Roach family in the midst of their grief" as the catalyst for the "horror and outrage of the wider Black community in Hackney."[69] The demonstrations in Hackney between January and June 1983 placed those private emotions in a public and political context. In these ways, both intimate family grief and the reiteration of a hostile state helped mobilize public political action.

Hackney, January to May 1983

On 17 January, the Hackney Black People's Association (HBPA) held a meeting, which about a hundred and fifty people attended. The HBPA had been organized in the wake of the 1981 Black People's Day of Action to examine the "Economic and Social Conditions of Black people living and or working in Hackney."[70] Lester Lewis and Barnor Hesse were leading figures in the HBPA. The RFSC was established at the meeting with the active involvement of James and Pamela Roach, as well as Colin's sister and brother, Pauline and Patrick. Other Hackney-based Black activist organizations also lent their support. These included the Hackney Legal Defence Fund, the Hackney Black Women's Group, and the Stoke Newington Defence Campaign. The campaign that followed had an emotive center in the grief of the Roach family, of course, and the Roach family was also very much at the heart of its organizational work, with James, Pamela, and Pauline heavily involved in its activities, including meetings, the organization of marches, and the discussion of the RFSC's aims and strategy.[71] The Roaches do not seem to have been engaged in community activism in East London before the death of their son, so their involvement in formal political activism was the product of their son's tragedy.

The RFSC received funding from several sources, including the Greater London Council. Those funds were used to publish a regular bulletin and print handbills for demonstrations, to support the visual documentation of the marches through photography and film, and, later, to fund a private inquiry into the circumstances of Colin's death. The RFSC coordinated and contributed to the costs of the defense of those protesters arrested in demonstrations. It also communicated with local government (particularly with Labour members of Hackney Council, such as Brynley Heaven, chair of Hackney's Police Committee) and the local Hackney Labour MPs Ernie Roberts, Brian Sedgemore, and Stanley Clinton Davis. Roberts and Davis organized early day motions in Parliament in February 1983 to open an inquiry into Colin's death, which attracted 134 signatures. Finally, the RFSC worked to lobby the Home Office (first under Willie Whitelaw, then under Leon Brittan, with Douglas Hurd as the Minister of State) for a public inquiry.

The RFSC organized four main demonstrations in Hackney in 1983, on 22 January, 12 February, 12 March, and 14 May. The numbers involved in each of these demonstrations ranged from fifty to three hundred. Pickets of the police station involving smaller numbers also happened every Saturday in this period. Each of the demonstrations followed a similar pattern: a march through Hackney with a protest at Stoke Newington police station. On 22

[66] Barnor Hesse, RFSC, Letter to Hackney Councillors, 22 February 1983, Hackney Archives, London, 2019/38.
[67] RFSC, Handbill for Demonstration, 12 February 1983, Hackney Archives, London, 2019/9/39.
[68] RFSC, Circular to all Labour MPs, March 1983, Hackney Archives, 2019/38.
[69] RFSC, Bulletin No. 1 (February 1983), Hackney Archives, London, 2019/38.
[70] "Objects: What the Hackney Black People's Association Stands For," https://www.oocities.org/hackney_black_people/page6.htm; see also https://hackneyhistory.wordpress.com/2015/11/.
[71] For this, see the minutes of the RFSC, Hackney Archives, London, 2019/38.

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Figure 3. Demonstration following the shooting of Colin Roach, Hackney, 12 February 1983. David Hoffman Photo Library © David Hoffman.

January 1983, for example, about three hundred people, mostly Black, but with a significant number of white people present as well, walked from Hackney Town Hall, stopped at Stoke Newington police station where a two-minute silence was observed, and then went on to Stoke Newington Common. Demonstrators carried placards with Colin Roach's picture and the word "murdered." The 12 March event took the same route, with slogans that included "Colin Roach no Cover Up!," "Police Violence Out," and "Hands Off Black People."[72] These marches made visible the grief and anger at Colin Roach's death; in so doing, they also made visible a political critique of the racial state, underlining the violence and culpability of the police (see Figure 3). Video footage and photographic records of the Roach pickets and demonstrations testify to the widespread expression of grief and anger.[73] Affect was, in this way, attached to the streets of Hackney.[74] Metropolitan television coverage made that affect and that critique available to a wider public. Like the Black People's Day of Action, a public act of mourning raised a political question. These marches were texts that showed "the effects of injustice, in the form of wounds and injury;" they revealed, as later Black Lives Matter demonstrations did, "the unapologetic expression of Black feelings of pain and anger."[75]

All four demonstrations were heavily policed. Lines of officers flanked the marchers from Hackney Town Hall to Stoke Newington police station.[76] Police officers outnumbered demonstrators in what one account called "saturation proportions."[77] A news article quoted

[72] See Route and Stewards Instructions May 14 [sic] March, RFSC, Hackney Archives, London, 2019/38.

[73] See, for example, *Thames News*, 14 January 1983 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SBouL3Nr-C8; for a photographic record of the marches, see the work of David Hoffman https://www.hoffmanphotos.com/?search=Colin+Roach&gallery=4b13d747-a25f-4030-8ae0-4ba666b25b05&search_in_gallery=.

[74] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*.

[75] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 191; Hesse, "Black Populism," 577.

[76] *Hackney Gazette*, 25 January 1983.

[77] RFSC Bulletin No. 2 (February 1983), Hackney Archives, London, 2019/38. News and video footage of the time does suggest that police officers did outnumber marchers; see, for example, the footage of the demonstrations found in Julien, *Who Killed Colin Roach?*.

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Figure 4. Protest over the shooting and death of Colin Roach, Hackney, 1983. David Hoffman Photo Library ©David Hoffman.

one attendee: "[T]he police were everywhere," including helicopters hovering overhead.[78] According to the RFSC, "physical intimidation and hostility" went along with this heavy police presence, despite a senior officer's stated desire in the local press that such demonstrations be "'policed with restraint'" and dealt with "'sensitively'."[79] Across two pickets and four demonstrations the police arrested ninety-two people (see Figure 4). These included James Roach, though charges against him were dropped. One hundred and twenty-seven charges were brought, with sixty-eight convictions. But only six people received significant jail sentences (of between one and four weeks), mostly for obstruction and affray, which may suggest that judges did not always trust the police's versions of these protests.[80] Although local newspapers in Hackney were generally deferential to the police, their accounts of the demonstrations were notably critical of the violence of the police. The *Hackney Gazette* reported, for example, that during the 12 March demonstration: "[g]roups of about four officers charged into the crowd, flinging suspects against a wall, over-powered them and sometimes carried them to a van."[81] Other accounts later collected by the independent inquiry established by the RFSC similarly highlighted police aggression:

> ... [police] appeared from out of their large green Police vans near the police station and began to rush towards the people, most of whom turned and fled back down Stoke Newington High Street to avoid trouble. Then they were confronted by officers running towards them from the opposite direction.[82]

[78] *Islington Gutter Press* (London), 97, March 1983, Hackney Archives, London, 2019/38.

[79] RFSC Bulletin No. 1, January 1983, Hackney Archives, London, 2019/38; *Hackney Gazette*, 18 March 1983; on the policing of public order, see Jac St John, "Consolidating 'Traditional Methods' of Public Order Policing: The Response of the Home Office and the Metropolitan Police to Mass Demonstrations in 1968," *Contemporary British History* 38, no. 3 (2024): 270–98.

[80] See Greater London Council, *Policing London* 2/11 (February to March 1984); statistics from the Community Alliance for Police Accountability, 1983 Report.

[81] *Hackney Gazette*, 18 March 1983.

[82] *Policing in Hackney*, 65–66.

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James Roach's arrest illustrates the intensity of the encounters between police and demonstrators and the violence of the police:

> James Roach testified that he had gone to the side of the lead truck to see what the police were doing to two women they had surrounded when he was grabbed and assaulted ... punched in the face so that blood streamed down—before being taken off.[83]

Isaac Julien, whose 1983 film *Who Killed Colin Roach?* documented the marches, remarked later that it was the police who were really "the people rioting."[84] We might think again about how the police contributed to the affective ecology in Hackney in 1983 given how they policed these demonstrations. Far from "restraint" being exercised, the police were unrestrained in their conduct. Police violence was the immediate response to the expression of Black feeling.[85] This was how race was policed in the late twentieth century. For their part, the police alleged that demonstrators had showed a "pattern of public disorder" that required "police action to restore calm."[86] They also complained in media accounts of "'terrible abuse'" from demonstrators and being "spat at."[87] The police also alleged (falsely) that looting and theft had resulted from the protests. In addition to the heavy police tactics overtly used against the Roach campaign, the police also operated against it covertly: undercover members of the Met's Special Demonstration Squad infiltrated the RFSC as part of its now notorious "spycops" program.[88]

Within the public expression of grief and anger in these marches lay the private grief of Colin's family. These events foregrounded parental grief. Pamela and James Roach were always central figures in the demonstrations, with James often speaking at them (see Figure 5). A photomontage by Humphrey Nemar in the RFSC Bulletin showed "Six Faces of Protest;" the very first, foundational photograph was of James and Pamela Roach at a demonstration.[89] An account of the 12 March demonstration by an alternative local newspaper provides a sense of the affective quality of the demonstrations and the role played, in particular, by James Roach:

> This was a real march, going around the borough along Mare Street, past Ridley Road, where there are market people to talk to, who'll listen and hopefully join us ... A march in which two parents participate, Mr and Mrs Roach, lamenting a son who never returned alive out of Stoke Newington Police Station. A march with a warm feeling of solidarity (hate not for whites but [for] the police) and, as the feeling grew strongest, there were loud, clear chants—"what do we want?" "Justice." "When do we want it?" "Now."

The account called this a "funeral march." Its most intense moment came with an emotional speech by James Roach:

[83] Stoke Newington and Hackney Defence Campaign, Bulletin No. 7, Hackney Archives, London, HA 2019/38; see also report in *The Voice*, 4 June 1983.

[84] Isaac Julien, *Riot* (MOMA, 2014), 28.

[85] Hesse, "Black Populism," 567.

[86] W. Moore, Assistant Chief Superintendent, Metropolitan Police, to Lester Lewis, Hackney Black People's Association, 25 January 1983, Hackney Archives, London, 2019/38; High Court of Justice, Queen's Bench Division, Affidavit of Allan Burgess, Chief Superintendent of Policing, Hackney, April 1983, Hackney Archives, London, 2019/38.

[87] *Hackney Gazette*, 18 March 1983.

[88] See, for example, Special Branch Report on Stoke Newington and Hackney Defence Committee Involvement in a Demonstration Organised by the RFSC on 14 May 1983, UCPI0000019122; https://www.ucpi.org.uk/publications/special-branch-report-on-stoke-newington-and-hackney-defence-committee-involvement-in-a-demonstration-organised-by-the-rfsc-on-14th-may-1983/

[89] Humphrey Nemar, "Six Faces of Protest," RFSC, Bulletin No. 1, January 1983, Hackney Archives, London, HA 2019/38.

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Figure 5. James and Pamela Roach leading a demonstration, Hackney, 12 February 1983. David Hoffman Photo Library ©David Hoffman.

> Mr Roach spoke a few words before breaking down in sobs. "I went into the station at 12.15 pm and was kept till a quarter to three in the morning. I was worried; my missus was home. Colin and I watched television together the night before. He didn't shoot himself. He had too much to live for."[90]

Parental grief was thus at the heart of this public, political movement.

There has been considerable attention given to the importance of maternal grief to Black politics. Erica S. Lawson has spoken, for example, of Black "maternal grief as 'public motherhood' rather than as a private expression of pain."[91] Black mothers, write Tiffany Caesar, Desirée Melonas, and Tara Jones, "are pulled into the depths of loss, grief, and mourning when state agents and other actors take their children's lives."[92] As Jennifer Nash points out, "dead or dying black—usually male—bodies" bring Black women "into focus as political subjects through maternity and through maternal practices that are intimate with loss, grief, and death."[93] Emmett Till's mother, Mamie Till-Mobley was an example of this.[94] In late twentieth-century Britain, Black mothers have occupied a central role in the history of violence against Black people, whether as mothers of sons (Pamela Roach and Doreen Lawrence) or as victims themselves (Aseta Simms, Cherry Croce, Cynthia Jarrett).

Pamela Roach actively participated in the organizational work of the RFSC. Representations of Pamela underlined her personal grief. Sometimes, this emphasized the unrestrained expression of her grief. At Colin's funeral, the press reported the "agony" of the family, when a "sobbing" Pamela Roach had to be "helped gently into St. Barnabas Church."[95] Photographs of her at demonstrations portrayed a more restrained grief. Isaac

[90] *Islington Gutter Press* (London), 97, March 1983, Hackney Archives, London, 2019/38.

[91] Lawson, "Bereaved Black Mothers," 713–14.

[92] Tiffany Caesar, Desirée Melonas and Tara Jones, "Mothering Dead Bodies: Black Maternal Necropolitics," *Meridians* 21, no. 2 (2022): 523.

[93] Jennifer C. Nash, "The Political Life of Black Motherhood," *Feminist Studies* 44, no. 3 (2018): 712.

[94] See, for example, Tell, *Remembering Emmett Till*.

[95] *Hackney Gazette*, 25 February 1983.

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Julien's *Who Killed Colin Roach* also placed Pamela at the heart of the political narrative of Colin's death. In one scene, she is shown sitting in her front room speaking to the camera: "I don't believe my son killed himself. He was quite happy in his home. Good parents who cared about him … he was my best friend."[96]

If it is critical to note the presence of maternal grief at the heart of the political campaigns following Colin Roach's death, paternal grief also shaped these collective expressions of Black suffering. James Roach was an important and consistent presence in the organizational work and the protests of 1983 that foregrounded the unrestrained expression of his emotions, particularly his crying and his distress. This was also central to his accounts of his treatment by the police on 13 January and became an important aspect of the testimony he gave at the coroner's inquest. The emotional place of fathers in family life has been the subject of less scholarly attention than that of mothers.[97] What has tended to dominate views of fathers' emotions is a framework of masculinity that emphasizes emotional restraint.[98] By contrast, James Roach openly wept and spoke of his emotional devastation at the loss of his son, placing his private grief, rather than a masculinized anger, at the center of the public campaign to find out the truth of his son's death. Indeed, what is striking are the similarities between how James and Pamela openly expressed their sense of loss. This unrestrained outpouring of shared parental grief lay at the core of the link between private mourning and the public and explicitly political expression of anguish and anger in the demonstrations in Hackney between January and May 1983.

The Coroner's Inquest, Clerkenwell, June 1983

The Home Secretary, Willie Whitelaw, denied the Roach family's demand for a full public inquiry in the weeks following Colin's death. The investigation of the manner of his death was then left to a coroner's inquest, though one that involved a jury because the death occurred in a police station.[99] Coroner's inquests were limited to establishing the facts of a person's death, without the possibility of opening up the contexts of such deaths (as occurred in the public inquiry into Stephen Lawrence's murder).[100] Witnesses could be questioned by barristers representing either the police, in this circumstance, or "interested persons" such as the family. Inquests involving deaths after contact with the police or in police custody rarely clarified the true circumstances of a person's death. The 1979 Blair Peach case had demonstrated the limitations of such inquests in this respect. Peach died while participating in an anti-racist demonstration in Southall. The true circumstances of his death were only revealed by the release of an internal policy inquiry in 2010 that determined that Peach had been killed by a member of the Met's Special Patrol Group.[101] It was, therefore, very difficult to hold the police accountable or to establish, through coroners' inquests, the truth about deaths in police custody or deaths that occurred after contact with the police. On 14 January 1983, one of those participating at the first picket of Stoke Newington station remarked to a television reporter: "[a] coroner's inquest—you know what that is—that is all a cover up … it never gets to the truth."[102] The campaigning organization Inquest, founded in 1981, maintained that the legal system "hampered" the discovery of the true circumstances of deaths in police or state custody.[103]

[96] Julien, *Who Killed Colin Roach?*.

[97] The important exceptions to this are Julie Marie Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class, 1865–1914* (Cambridge, 2015); Laura King, *Family Men: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Britain, 1914–1960* (Oxford, 2015); and Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (Cambridge, 1995), Chapter 2.

[98] See Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle* (Manchester, 2010), Part 1.

[99] *Policing in Hackney*, 63–65.

[100] Tony Ward and Dave Leadbetter, "Oh Death, Where is Thy Sting?," *Socialist Lawyer* 7 (Winter/Spring 1989): 18.

[101] Alex May, "Blair Peach," *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2012).

[102] *Thames News*, 14 January 1983, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SBouL3Nr-C8.

[103] Mick Ryan, *Lobbying from Below: Inquest in Defence of Civil Liberties* (Routledge, 1995), 1.

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A public inquiry or a rigorous coroner's inquest was designed to establish the empirical evidence of a particular death. In her work on emotions and capital punishment, Claire Langhamer has suggested that there were "two ways of knowing—feeling and logic" in post-war democracy—these ways of knowing had a "complex [...] relationship" but were not necessarily opposed.[104] The coroner's inquest of the death of Colin Roach brought together these two ways of knowing in the establishment of facts and the expression of emotion. In the case of Colin Roach, the first proved elusive.

There was considerable controversy about where the inquest should be held. The RFSC wanted it held in Hackney, but the police requested, successfully, that it should be held outside of Hackney because of the "likelihood of disorder."[105] Eventually, it was held in Clerkenwell County Court in June 1983. The space of a coroner's inquest, held within a court was, of course, very different from the interior of a police station or the public space of a street, a more formal, institutional setting. The Roach inquest involved six days of testimony from fifty-one witnesses. This included eleven experts (doctors, pathologists, forensic and technical experts), sixteen police officers, and six of Colin's friends and family, including James Roach. There was a jury of ten people, six white and four Black. At the end of the testimony, the coroner directed the jury to four possible verdicts: suicide, misadventure, unlawful killing, or an open verdict. Much of the expert evidence at the inquest focused upon two things—the forensic evidence and Colin's state of mind on the evening of his death. With respect to the latter, the barrister representing the police pursued the line that Colin had suffered from mental illness at the time of his death, specifically that he was suffering a psychotic episode, a position rejected by the Roach family.[106] There were many troubling questions and inconsistencies around the forensic evidence such as the placement of his body (whether, for example, it had been moved), how Colin had access to a firearm and where that firearm came from (it was not clear, for instance, whether a shotgun would have fit in the bag he was carrying and how Colin came into possession of a shotgun originally owned by a farmer), and whether Colin's fingerprints were on the weapon. The police also proved evasive in their testimony at the inquest, not being clear, for example, about why they did not try to resuscitate Colin, about how they knew who he was, about the whereabouts of certain police officers around the time of his death, and about their reluctance to allow James Roach to identify Colin's body.[107] A particularly important question was why they waited two- and-a-half hours before telling James Roach what had happened. In the view of the jury, police witnesses at the inquest lied or were deliberately misleading about this point.

The inquest proved a highly charged occasion emotionally. Each day of the inquest saw a large attendance by supporters of the Roach family and James and Pamela Roach themselves. James and Pamela made a number of angry interventions. During testimony by a police officer about the questioning of James Roach, "Mr Roach stood up shouting, 'Lie, lie, lie. He's telling lies all the time'."[108] During the testimony of the doctor who had attended Colin before his death and who suggested that he might have been suffering from psychosis, Pamela Roach yelled "'that's a lie'."[109] James Roach gave evidence himself and was subject to cross-examination by the barrister representing the police. At points that testimony became very emotional. Pressed about a statement he had signed in the police station under questioning, for example, James testified:

[104] Claire Langhamer, "The Live Dynamic Whole of Feeling and Behavior," *Journal of British Studies* 51 (2012): 440.
[105] High Court of Justice, Queen's Bench Division, Affidavit of Allan Burgess, Chief Superintendent of Policing, Hackney, April 1983, Hackney Archives, London, 2019/38.
[106] *Policing in Hackney*, 120–24.
[107] *Policing in Hackney*, 85–119.
[108] *The Voice*, 25 June 1983.
[109] *The Voice*, 18 June 1983.

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> [Roach]: Whatever I told him at 3 am, we were really distressed … I didn't say that … while he was writing, I was crying. I did not know that he was writing …
> [Marriage, barrister for police]: Did you make corrections to the original?
> [Roach]: No. At the same time I was distressed that my son is dead.[110]

At another point, Pamela Roach intervened in the inquest:

> [Michael Mansfield, barrister for the Roaches]: There is a connection here between the police station and the death that isn't being revealed.
> [Detective Chief Superintendent Robertson, Stoke Newington]: That allegation is totally and utterly false!
> [Mansfield]: The family are very disturbed about the investigation and want to know whether it was a truthful investigation … If this is a suicide and that is all it is, about the simplest, most humanitarian thing is for the father to have been shown the body and to have been taken home in a police car to his wife to explain the situation.
> [Coroner]: That sounds to me more like a complaint against the police. If Mr. Roach had been kept at the police station until Christmas time it wouldn't have affected the cause of death.
> Mrs. Roach (from public gallery): You're biased! You don't want the truth to come out![111]

The exclamation point following the police officer's response also suggests the intensity of the moment in the inquest, while the coroner's comments were themselves another exercise in callousness.

Despite the ambiguities around the circumstances of Colin's death, the jury, heavily directed by the coroner, reached a verdict of suicide by a vote of eight to two. An alternative would have been an "open verdict." The organization Inquest found serious problems with the suicide verdict:

> We have noted the unsatisfactory nature of the evidence as to Colin's mental state, and it seems unnecessary to dwell on the weaknesses of the evidence linking Colin with the gun. The medical evidence … at most shows the relative unlikelihood of murder, rather than affirmatively proving suicide … [the coroner] did everything possible to point the jury towards a verdict of suicide, and away from an open verdict.[112]

Pamela and James Roach publicly expressed their anger at the decision of the jury at the end of the inquest. Pamela told them that they were "biased" and that the coroner "[did] not want the truth coming out." James stated that they were "lying."[113] It was striking that, despite their verdict, the jury wrote to the new Home Secretary, Leon Brittan, "saying that the police were neither sympathetic nor diligent enough, keeping the bereaved Roach family in the dark over the death of their son."[114] This was an "unprecedented move" in inquests.[115] It seemed that the jury recognized the emotional arguments made by the Roach family, even if it did not accept their empirical arguments against their son's death being self-inflicted. Like the demonstrations in Hackney over the first six months of 1983, the coroner's inquest proved a theatre of emotion about Colin Roach's death. But that inquest did little to answer the question "who killed Colin Roach?" In a press conference

[110] Transcript of Inquest, 6 June 1983, Hackney Archives, London, 2019/38.
[111] *Policing in Hackney*, 120; Michael Mansfield was a barrister involved with Inquest.
[112] "The Roach Verdict," *Inquest*, Bulletin 7, no. 2 (1985), unpaginated, London School of Economics Archives, London, LCCJ/19.
[113] See *Policing in Hackney*.
[114] *Caribbean Times* (London), 8–14 June 1983.
[115] Scraton, *The State of the Police*, 102.

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following the verdict, James and Pamela Roach, the former with tears in his eyes, committed themselves to continuing to seek the truth about Colin's death.[116]

Afterlives

After the coroner's verdict, the RFSC established an independent inquiry into Colin's death. This was chaired by Reverend David Moore, an Anglican priest from Bristol, and its committee members included Melissa Benn, the journalist; Merle Amory, the Leader of Brent Council; Fara Brown, a barrister; Paul Gordon, a research and information officer at the Runnymede Trust; and A.B. Ngcobo, an education liaison officer with the Inner London Education Authority. Stuart Hall was the advisor to the inquiry. The inquiry's remit was to examine the death of Colin Roach, Stoke Newington police station, and the relationship between Black people and the police in Hackney in both a contemporary and historical context. It met with witnesses through 1985, many from the RFSC and other community organizations. The police refused to meet with the inquiry, saying that the details of Colin's death had been already determined by the coroner's inquest and that any further discussion could only be done through an official police-community consultative group.[117] The inquiry's report, entitled *Policing in Hackney 1945–1984* was published in 1989. The inquiry concluded that there was no definite answer to the cause of Colin Roach's death but that those seeking the truth had been obstructed by the authorities: "nobody has the slightest idea how a young Black man lost his life in the foyer of one of the most controversial police stations in London ... steps have been consistently blocked which might have led to these matters being systematically and satisfactorily enquired into."[118] Colin's family saw the report as a vindication of their belief that he had not committed suicide, as his sister Pauline said:

> We believe the report vindicates the position we have taken for the past five years. On the basis of all the available evidence, it is clear to us that Colin Roach did not take his own life. The circumstances in which Colin died have yet to be established.[119]

The RFSC also pursued other avenues. In November 1983, for example, a deputation that included the MP Ernie Roberts and Lester Lewis, of the RFSC and the HBPA, met with Douglas Hurd, Minister of State at the Home Office, to once more press the case for a public inquiry. This was rejected.[120] Nonetheless, Colin's death continued to be a touchstone in campaigns in Hackney and through London around police violence against racial minorities.[121] And sadly, that violence continued: there were two more suspicious deaths in police custody in 1987, Trevor Monerville and Tunny Hasan. The Stoke Newington and Hackney Defence Campaign established the Colin Roach Centre on the tenth anniversary of Colin's death as a home to campaigns addressing problems of policing.[122]

In 1993, the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence in Eltham, South London highlighted many of the issues apparent a decade earlier in the death of Colin Roach. The police investigation of Lawrence's murder was compromised by the indifference and incompetence shown by the Met in dealing with the death of a Black person. What was different was that years of campaigning by the Lawrence family secured an official public inquiry into policing under a newly elected Labour government in 1997. By 1997, at least for the Labour Party, the political context around policing had changed. Labour's election manifesto

[116] See *Thames News*, 22 June 1983, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iwpqek5Uxcc.

[117] *Policing in Hackney*, 289.

[118] Stuart Hall, "Foreword," *Policing in Hackney*, 15.

[119] *Hackney Gazette*, 15 January 1988.

[120] See Ernie Roberts, MP, "Bad Policing in Hackney," Press Release, 30 November 1983, Hackney Archives, London, 2019/38.

[121] See poster for "We Remember: Torchlit Procession to Dalston and Stoke Newington Police Station," 9 January 1990, Hackney Museum, London.

[122] *Hackney Gazette*, 16 February 2017. The Centre closed in 1999.

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that year emphasized that Britain was a "multicultural and multiracial society," in which all citizens, whatever their ethnicity, "must have the protection of the law."[123] The 1999 Macpherson report mapped out what such equal protection demanded in terms of policing. It characterized the Met as institutionally racist. The institutional racism that failed the Lawrence family was "the collective failure of an organization to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin."[124] A critical aspect of this concerned the affective response of the police. The Macpherson inquiry concluded that from their "first contact" with the police after the murder of their son, Neville and Doreen Lawrence experienced "insensitivity and lack of sympathy" from the Met, even from officers specifically tasked to provide such support.[125] According to Macpherson's report, "thoughtlessness" was an important aspect of the Met's institutional failure.[126] After 1999, the role of family liaison officers was established by the Met to provide, in the words of the College of Policing, "support and information, in a sensitive and compassionate manner" in murder investigations.[127] Obviously, this represented the belated dismantling of an older and more hostile emotional regime by the police towards Black people, a process that has yet to be fully realized.

This article has traced the relationship between the experience and expression of emotion and the politics of race through the unexplained death of a young Black man. Colin Roach's story is not exceptional in the history of modern Britain. Following the Macpherson report, Stuart Hall wrote about the "repetitive persistence" of a particular narrative of racial politics in twentieth-century Britain in which "black people have been the subject of racialized attack, had their grievances largely ignored by the police, and been subjected to racially-inflected practices of policing."[128] That "ancient story," stretching from the 1950s to the end of the twentieth century, included the death of Colin Roach and the "lack of explanation of many other black deaths in police custody."[129] Understanding that narrative and the place of race in late twentieth-century Britain demands, of course, understanding how race was experienced, articulated, and, not least, felt.

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[123] *New Labour: Because Britain Deserves Better* (Labour Party, 1997), unpaginated.
[124] *The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry* (Cm. 4262-I, 1999), paras 46.25 and 46.28 (ii).
[125] *The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry*, para. 46.7.
[126] *The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry*, para. 46.25.
[127] https://profdev.college.police.uk/professional-profile/family-liaison-officer-flo/; see also http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/4739990.stm.
[128] Stuart Hall, "From Scarman to Stephen Lawrence," *History Workshop Journal* no. 48 (1999): 188.
[129] Hall, "From Scarman to Stephen Lawrence," 188.

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