Multiculturalism at work: The experiences of Ghanaians in London

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Introduction
There is a considerable ongoing popular, political and academic debate about migration and how to respond to and manage cultural and ethnic diversity in British society. In particular, recent discussions have questioned the benefits of multiculturalism as an approach to ethnic differences. These debates have tended to focus on what is classified as ‘New Commonwealth’ migrants from South Asia and the Caribbean, and the second and third generations from these communities. Rather less attention has been paid to the experiences of less established, smaller and legally differentiated migrant groups (Vertovec, 2006a; Whitehall, 2003; Castles 2003; Berkely, Khan and Ambikaipaker, 2006). However, as Vertovec has noted, it is crucial to attend to the experiences of these less established groups, as their recent growth has dramatically altered the social landscape of Britain (Vertovec, 2006a).

Drawing on survey data and in-depth interviews, this paper examines the experiences of Ghanaians living and working London, and the implications of their experiences for current debates about multiculturalism and diversity management. In particular, the paper examines this group’s experiences in the workplace, pointing to widespread and persistent feelings of exclusion and racism in Britain’s low-paid labour market, and the responses that people make to this. These experiences problematize current debates about multiculturalism. Specifically, it is argued that rather than abandoning multiculturalism as a policy, the need is to engage with the problems of racism and material inequalities that affect less established and, in particular, low paid migrant groups.

Multiculturalism
Official policy responses in Europe to immigration post-1945 have included assimilationism (France), gastarbeiter, which is based on the denial of political citizenship to migrant workers (Germany) and multiculturalism (Sweden, the Netherlands, Britain) (Rex and Singh, 2003). Multiculturalism has been subject to competing definitions and has been used to both describe an ethnically diverse society and to define the approach in terms of policy and philosophy to managing that society (Malik, 2005). In Britain the diversity created by migration has been seen as creating particular dilemmas that need to be overcome; namely how to reconcile the balance between fostering a common sense of belonging whilst at the same time respecting cultural
differences and plural identities. Despite the divergent discourses on multiculturalism the term broadly conveys the efforts to promote tolerance, respect and recognition for different ethnic groups within a limited state-bounded territory (Schuster and Solomos, 2001). In contrast to assimilationist approaches, which place onus on minority ethnic groups to adapt to an imagined homogenous British national culture, multiculturalism is based on the understanding that each group is distinctive and has a right to retain cultural distinctiveness. If groups are not be oppressed, marginalised and excluded, social equality and protection from discrimination must be key facets of multiculturalism. Indeed, the origins of multiculturalism in Britain and the US can be traced back to the struggles by minority ethnic activists who fought against racism particularly in the workplace (Sivanandan, 1981, 2006).

Within this broad framework, different forms of multiculturalism can be identified. ‘Weak’ multiculturalism refers to the understanding that cultural differences should be recognised in the private sphere, but should not impose on the public domain of law, government, the market, education and employment (Rex, 1991). However, a key problem with this is that some institutions straddle the private and public domain. Education, for instance, is a public institution yet it also imparts private moral values to students. Moreover, institutions in the public domain are not ‘neutral’ in relation to questions of ethnicity. The labour market, for example, results in sharp patterns of ethnic and gender segmentation. ‘Boutique multiculturalism’ is also seen as a weak type of multiculturalism that has turned minority ethnic groups into an ‘exotic other’ and failed to go beyond a tokenistic celebration of ‘saris, somosas and steel bands’ (Harris, 2001; Alibhai-Brown, 2000).

Conversely, ‘strong’ multiculturalism has been promoted by scholars such as Talyor who have argued that recognition is a vital human need and that multiculturalism should go beyond a tolerance of different cultures and grant people equal respect and worth in the public sphere (Taylor, 1994). Taylor’s approach has also been labelled as ‘primordial’ multiculturalism in that it assumes a rigid and essentialised view of cultural identities, in which groups carry a cultural baggage that is simply passed down between generations. In contrast a ‘civic’ form of multiculturalism acknowledges that cultures are permeable and dynamic, and urges for dialogue between and within communities. This is central to Parekh’s claims that multiculturalism as a
response to cultural diversity in society ‘might welcome and cherish it [difference], make it central to its self-understanding, and respect the demands of its constituting communities’ (2006: 6). From this perspective integration is a two way process (Modood, 2005). There are those, however who have made a more radical critique of multiculturalism arguing that the focus on cultural recognition and cultural differences masks important power differentials and injustices, particularly those associated with the economy. Fraser for example, has argued for a social justice approach to multiculturalism which recognises that economic disadvantage is entangled with cultural disrespect and needs to be tackled through a combined effort to redistribute income and recognise difference (Fraser, 1995).

Multiculturalism underpinned a range of policies developed during the 1980s in countries such as Britain, such as the celebration of cultural diversity and financial support for ethnic-minority-related activities and community associations, and has tended to have been employed differently across different sectors - including education, health, social welfare, politics and employment. Education was one of the first areas where the concept was converted into state policy and included initiatives to attract more ethnic minority teachers into schools while also recognising and celebrating a plurality of cultures - including different religions and histories within the National Curriculum. In the workplace, the ethos of multiculturalism was articulated in the 1980s through equal opportunities and more recently through ‘diversity management.’ These approaches have stressed that organisations should foster an inclusive workforce, facilitate understanding between cultures, and eliminate racism by assessing the merits of all employees on an individual basis.

A key criticism of these developments was that they failed to go beyond a celebration of diversity, neglecting to tackle the origins of ethnic discrimination and social injustice (Troyna and Carrington, 1990). Consequently, in the 1980s there was a considerable debate between supporters of ‘multiculturalism’ and those who favoured ‘antiracism’, though according to Brah this forced people to take sides, despite their commonalties and prevented a productive dialogue (Brah, 1996). In particular, critics of the ‘multicultural project’ argued that the focus on assessing people as individuals failed to tackle ‘institutional racism’ that affects groups, rather than simply individuals (Pole, 2001; Troyna and William, 1986; Carby, 1982). The policy of diversity
management in the workplace has also come under criticism for the presumption that diversity should be used only as a means to accumulate profits meaning that business incentives are the major motivation for eradicating racism. This approach neglects the moral and social motives for preventing racial exclusions and leaves equal opportunities to the dynamics of business and market forces (Wrench and Modood, 2000). Research has revealed that whilst some major companies have high profile equal opportunities initiatives, few companies actually have serious plans for the implementation of race equality policies (ibid.). Despite these criticisms, however, there has been a conspicuous lack of research into the way in which ethnic minorities experience institutions and workplace cultures (Solomos, 1999).1

More general criticisms of multiculturalism have focused on the ways in which multiculturalism can generate unintended consequences and new sets of problems to resolve. In particular, multiculturalist policies have been heavily criticised for pitting minority ethnic groups against each other in order to compete for funding and for co-opting and granting autonomy to unelected ‘ethnic brokers’ who, as male elders, typically suppress the interests of less powerful groups, such as women and youths, in the interests of presenting a unified ethnic community (Burlet and Reid, 1998; Kundnani, 2002). Multiculturalism has also been targeted for presupposing that different individuals are equally committed to their culture, thus failing to recognise the diverse positions individuals occupy; due to their gender, class, sexuality, life cycle, value systems and so on (Yuval-Davis, 1999).

Following the conflicts in British northern towns in the summer of 2001 and the bombs in July 2005 the value of multiculturalism has been questioned in the political arena and multiculturalism has been blamed for fostering fragmentations and divisions between ethnic communities in Britain (Observer 21 August 2005, Cantle, 2000). Trevor Phillips, head of the Commission for Racial Equality has been a key proponent of this argument. In 2004, Phillips controversially announced that multiculturalism was effectively moribund, and reasserted his concerns the following year with the dramatic statement that parts of Britain were ‘sleepwalking to segregation’ (22 September, 2005). Phillips criticised an ‘anything goes multiculturalism which leads to deeper division and inequality ... In recent years we’ve focused far too much on the ‘multi’ and not enough on the common culture’ (ibid.). More recently, Ruth Kelly, Secretary of
State for Communities and Local Government, voiced similar concerns that Britain’s minority ethnic communities live in segregated and isolated communities (The Guardian 24 August 2006). From this perspective, multiculturalism is seen as having gone too far and as threatening the common values of British society. As a solution to these problems, politicians have called for greater social cohesion, integration and inter-cultural contact. This is seen by some as a return to earlier discourses of assimilation, exemplified by the emphasis on allegiance to British values - as illustrated by the promotion of citizenship tests (Worley, 2005; Werbner, 2004). Within this discourse ‘cultural barriers’ are seen as the principal problem, rather than underlying racisms, inequalities and poverty (Kundnani, 2002). Moreover, the discourse of polarisation tends to blame minority ethnic groups for ‘choosing’ to be segregated and inward looking. In short, current debates about multicultural Britain ignore the impact of racial exclusions in creating cultural segregations and feelings of exclusion.

Migration
The migration literature makes a key distinction between the migration of long established groups in the 1970s and the ‘new migrants’ who have formed the main flows of migrants to the UK since 1991 (Kyambi, 2005; Spence, 2005). New migration is characterised by a decrease in the proportion of New Commonwealth migrants and an increase in asylum related immigration and net migration mainly from the Middle East and an ‘Other’ category which encompasses a variety of countries including Eastern Europe, Southern and Central America, South-east Asia and others (Berkely, Khan and Ambikaipaker, 2006). A key feature of this ‘new migration’ is the diversity in the migrants’ country of origin, producing what Vertovec (2006) calls ‘super-diversity’, particularly in London.

According to 2001 census figures, the number of black Africans in London (378,933) has now surpassed black Caribbeans (343,567) and Ghanaian migrants are an important element of London’s ‘super diversity.’ Ghanaians numbered 46,513 in the 2001 census and ranked ninth in the largest twenty five groups born outside Britain and living in London (Mackintosh 2005). However, whilst there is a growing body of literature on Ghanaians in the UK, this has tended to focus on issues of development and return migration (Tiemoko, 2003; Black et al., 2003; Henry and Mohan, 2003). There has been a distinct lack of research on the working conditions of
Ghanaians in Britain and the implications of their experiences in terms of debates on multiculturalism.

It is important to consider the context of Ghanaian migration. Whilst Ghanaians are distinct from the New Commonwealth migrants who originated from the Indian subcontinent and the West Indies and are part of London’s super diversity, to characterise Ghanaian migrants as ‘new’ is misleading. That is, Ghanaian migration did not begin in the 1990s but developed in the 1960s due to economic crisis in the country, and by the 1980s and early 1990s, 10-20 % of Ghanaians were living outside Ghana (Peil, 1995). Households often sent a family member to a wide range of destinations in Africa, the US, the Middle East and Europe with their migration tending to be temporary - with the aim of supporting their family and diasporic communities, improving their standard of living and ultimately acquiring enough capital to establish a business in Ghana (Peil, 1995; Black et al., 2003; Mohan, 2006). Only in the last decade, with increased political and economic stability in Ghana, has return migration become more feasible (Black et al., 2004).

The research

The findings from this paper are based on a research project that is examining the role and importance of migrants employed in low paid sectors in London including care work, hospitality, cleaning in offices and on the London Underground, food processing and construction. Although this paper focuses on the workplace, one of the main aims of the research was to gain a more holistic insight into the migrant worker’s lives. That is, to trace aspects of their life prior to migration, to examine the process of migration and outside of the workplace, examining questions of identity and reconstructions of communities and transnational networks.

The findings here are drawn from a larger data set of 362 questionnaire interviews and 74 in-depth interviews with migrant workers. This paper focuses specifically on 163 questionnaires with black Africans and 65 questionnaires and 18 in-depth interviews with Ghanaians. Approximately half (49%) of the Ghanaians surveyed were women and in the in-depth interviews seven of the respondents were men; the majority (12) had come to the UK after 2000. Participants for the interviews were contacted through the questionnaire survey and a process of snowballing. The use of contacts to arrange further interviews had a significant impact on the
quality of the interviews. Many of the questions relating to immigration status or uptake of benefits were highly sensitive and the use of a contact helped to reassure the respondents that this information would remain confidential. The contact may have also helped to traverse the interviewer’s location as an ‘outsider’ who, as an academic researcher, represented an elite institution. Nevertheless, there was a sense that the interviews gave the respondents the opportunity to divulge their experiences to the wider public arena. Arguably, this may have influenced the respondents’ decision to discuss certain issues such as exclusions within the workplace.

The analysis of the transcripts draws on both content and narrative analysis. A narrative approach seeks to understand the narrator’s overall viewpoint and their agency, and focuses on how someone describes events. It includes attention to features such as the selection of information, emphasis and silences, evaluative statements, as well as overall genres that shape the story. The respondent’s narratives are incorporated in this paper in an attempt to identify the main themes shaping their experiences, without losing sight of the overarching story (Franzosi, 1998; Chamberlain and Thompson, 1998).

**Working conditions**

The questionnaire survey revealed the concentration of migrants in low-paid jobs, which can be seen as evidence of an emergent ‘migrant division of labour’ in which migrants are over-represented in low paid elementary occupations (May et al., 2006; Spence, 2005). Our survey also highlighted the significance of black Africans in certain sectors. That is, whilst Eastern Europeans were most numerous in hospitality, black Africans mainly from Ghana or Nigeria made up 40% of workers in office cleaning, over two thirds (79%) of those employed as cleaners on the London Underground and over half of care workers surveyed (63%), though many respondents had worked in a range of other occupations, such as construction and customer service, prior to their current job. A key finding from the survey data was the poor working conditions endured by the workers, an experience that was shared by all migrant workers in the research (Evans et al., 2005). Firstly, levels of pay were particularly low. 94% of Ghanaians earned less than the Greater London Authority Living Wage for London (£6.70 an hour). 4 76% of Ghanaians did not receive sick pay, over two thirds (71%) had not had an annual pay rise, over
half (63%) lost pay if they took off work for emergencies and 76% received only the statutory number, or less of paid holidays. Over two thirds (77%) did not have a company pension scheme. Complaints concerning poor working conditions were shared by all migrant workers in our research, however, racism in the workplace emerged as a key theme from the interviews with Ghanaian migrants. To protect individuals, all names have been changed.

**Racism in the labour market**

The respondents conveyed the distinct sense that London and the spaces within the city were not associated with white hostility. Although some respondents recalled incidents whereby white people were made anxious by their presence by, for example, not wanting to sit next to them on a bus, this was often balanced with an account of a helpful neighbour. Indeed some commented on the difference between London and other cities. Nyana, for example, spent some time in Hull prior to coming to London and recalled of Hull, that: ‘There are a few of the black people there, it’s small, so they look at you, they are like that, they stare at you and when we are coming to their city they are scared of you. It makes me feel bad.’ Consequently, racism in their locality was not presented as a prime problem rather it was what they perceived as racist practices in employment that were of greater concern. Moreover, it is important to note that respondents did not tend to report problems caused by colleagues from other minority ethnic backgrounds. Though one carer described unfair treatment from a Jamaican nurse, and several reported tensions with Nigerians, others stated that it was easier to forge friendships at work with other migrant groups. In contrast, the prime problems identified were their exclusion from professional and managerial jobs and their experiences of racism and ill treatment by clients, managers at work and white colleagues.

The respondents stressed how they felt excluded from professional and white collar jobs. The survey data showed that 52% of the Ghanaians interviewed had acquired tertiary level education before moving to Britain and their sense of unjust exclusion was portrayed in their narratives through listing the relevant skills they possessed, the authority and responsibilities that came with their previous job(s) in Ghana, the qualifications they had acquired both in Ghana and Britain, and their various job search strategies. Joshua, for example, had worked as a manager for Unilever in Ghana and discussed at length his credentials and the skills he had acquired through
studying for an MBA at London Metropolitan University: ‘You are the person who has done the MBA, at the managerial level of doing thing, so you know how to handle people very well, how to deal with cases, how to solve cases and the like, got all this worked out, leadership, personal development and the like, we’ve been taught all this in the MBA.’ However, his educational capital did not translate into economic opportunities for him. He reflected:

You will not be taken, and sadly I may say that it is also one part the colour, the racism, we don’t see it but it is happening. Because I’ve been in a lot of interviews, you finish, they will tell you they can’t understand you. I know your accent cannot be my accent. I can’t speak like you do.

Joshua clearly felt that he was consistently judged on unfair terms. His experience and qualifications were disregarded due to his pronunciation, which acted as a marker of difference. He summed his feelings up with the words, ‘it’s more than frustration, more than frustration.‘

This was also a key theme evident throughout Jennifer’s narrative. In Ghana, Jennifer had worked for a port inspection company. The post commanded authority as it, ‘was important to the country’ and required specific knowledge and skills. As she explained: ‘It was more statistics, which I had the flame [for]’. In Britain, Jennifer had decided to work in the housing sector and completed a relevant course. However, like Joshua, this did not serve as a route into a job in this sector. She commented, ‘So what I have is a certificate. I have never worked at it, it is just a, a bit frustrating sometimes. You know I feel like going [back to Ghana] because I’d spent four hundred pounds on it.’ Like Joshua she felt that the costs embodied in the certificate, the investment of her time, labour and money did not culminate in any tangible value. Whilst Joshua’s lack of success was explained by employers as a matter of his communication difficulties, Jennifer’s experience was couched in terms of her ‘lack of experience’. Yet, like Joshua, she held a strong conviction that this was actually due to racial discrimination. This belief was influenced by stories from some return migrants that she had spoken to before she migrated and was reinforced by comments from her friends in Britain. As she explained:

a friend of mine told me ‘Jennifer this course you are doing at university I promise you, you are not going to get work with it in this country, so why are you worrying
you hear some of these things and it’s like, what are you to do?
So does that mean because of your colour, what you want to do, you will not be able to
do it. You know, it’s something that I’m battling with.

Clearly, the respondents felt that a tacit hierarchy existed within the labour market that
automatically situated them as inferior to British born whites. Whilst care work was seen as
slightly better than many other jobs, such as serving fast food, it was generally not the
respondents long held ideal career. As Joshua commented on his care job: ‘looking at how we’ve
suffered, getting all these qualifications and going to somebody who doesn’t care.’

Another common theme to emerge from the narratives was racism from their clients. The
respondents frequently commented that they were ‘looked down upon’ as carers, but also that
their clients typically responded to them with racist insults. However, they also felt that they
could negotiate this. Kofi for instance, spoke in great depth about the racist reactions from some
of his clients and their ensuing conversations, yet he also stressed that with patience the problem
was surmountable. He summarised the trajectory of one case:

when I went there for the first time [the client] was making some comments about my
colour, I didn’t mind; one, I saw that he was quite old and he can’t help himself, so
now when he’s making a comment, making comment about my colour, whatever, I’m
there to help him, so I help him. He is now used to me, let me put it that way. Every
time that I go there, he is now happy, he allows himself for me to help him. That’s how
it is.

Pamela shared this evaluation. When asked to describe her experiences of care work she claimed:
‘Honestly it’s really, really quite challenging, very, very challenging. Some of the clients are like
oh, you know, as soon as some of them when they see the skin, they don’t even want you to
attend to them at all. And sometimes I do understand them cause they’re like, ‘oh where’s this
one, where is she from yeah?’’. However, she concluded: ‘It’s quite difficult with humans, but
with time authority shifts.’
Whilst racist responses from clients could be both rationalised and ameliorated over time, differential treatment from managers and colleagues posed more intractable difficulties. Many felt that when they had worked in nursing homes they were treated unfairly by permanent nursing staff because they were agency staff. Respondents argued that they were given the most unpleasant and difficult jobs. As Ellen observed, ‘They don’t kind of work with you…they are kind of like, you know, you are agency, they give you the hard jobs to do, hard, hard jobs to do.’ This corresponds with other research which has highlighted how discrimination towards migrant workers in health care settings is partly due to the hierarchical structure of British nursing (Allan et al., 2004). Others recalled examples of what they perceived to be racial discrimination. For instance, Komla commented on one of his colleagues in his cleaning job, saying ‘he wasn’t really nice to me and for no reason. I just thought he didn’t like black people.’ According to Komla this racism surfaced when he made a mistake and was late for work one day; an experience that was echoed by others.

Nyana for instance, described at great length a case in her first job in a food processing factory whereby she was sent home because she was five minutes late. The money she had spent on her travel ticket had been wasted, yet she also noticed how this was part of a pattern in which black people were selected to go home while her white colleagues were not. She recalled the conversation with her supervisor that day as she attempted to save her job: ‘“Something happened and I’m begging you, not that I’m not late, I’m trying to say I’m sorry for what I’ve done”. “No, get out of here,” and the way she will shout at you and then they all start staring at you like that, you feel embarrassed’. This humiliation was heightened by her former status in Ghana. She explained, ‘Look where I come from, I’m well off, you don’t do such work, although we have such work, we don’t do such work, I would never go and do such work in my country. I’m doing this because I need a bit of money, look at the way this lady is treating me’. Although Nyana felt that this was racism, she also felt it was disguised in a bureaucratic language of standard procedure. In her words:

They will tell you, it’s the procedure, everything is their procedure. You know somebody is crushing you. The other person is doing to you is not right. They tell somebody the procedure, where are you going? Who are you going to tell? The
managers? You tell them, they will say something nice to cover it up, you don’t have anywhere to go.

She added: ‘They cover it in the modern way, they cover racist kind of things, they cover it in a modern way, you will not find, but they treat us underground’. Taking Anthias’ (1999) definition that a racist practice can be one that produces racist effects and differential treatment that correlates with ethnic differences, these examples demonstrate how racist practices may co-exist with official recognition that it is unacceptable. Mistakes in the workplace serve as a trigger for differential treatment. Furthermore it highlights how the respondents were acutely aware that these processes may be presented as unbiased and egalitarian through the language of ‘procedure.’ As recent developments in the field of whiteness studies have shown, apparently neutral social arrangements and institutional practices that appear to have no racial prejudice may in fact privilege whites and reproduce racial dominance (for example, Hartigan, 1999).

Collectively, the interviews show the many layers and different forms of discrimination identified by the respondents within the labour market, which they saw as having a paramount bearing on the job selection process, interactions with clients, colleagues, and supervisors, including the implementation of ‘neutral’ policies. This is supported by recent studies. For instance, McGregor’s (2006) research on Zimbabwean nurses also revealed high levels of institutional racism in private nursing homes, from clients, management and through inadequate procedures for complaints. The life stories of the Ghanaians convey the cumulative impact of these experiences on the respondents in terms of the quality of their life and well being, yet a key finding was that for those respondents who held a student visa, these problems were given particular prominence. Those who held such a visa did not have settlement rights in Britain and were only legally allowed to work twenty hours per week. Although there was a possibility that they could change to a dependent status or for an employer to apply for a work permit, their situation and future prospects were precarious. This was reflected in their narratives, as they turned to genres of suffering to frame their stories and emphasise their struggle in the face of adversity. Nyana, for instance, introduced this at the outset. When asked to describe Kumasi in Ghana she replied, ‘where I was born it’s very interesting, like I don’t suffer like I have done over here’, whilst George relayed his story as a series of misfortunes, interspersed with
statements such as: ‘We have struggled a lot’. Some respondents such as Danso described a double bind whereby, over the years, they had subscribed to a number of courses but failed to complete them due to lack of funds and the need to work; however, they also knew that this was in breach of their visa and could impede their chances of staying in Britain. This predicament has been identified in other studies of migrants and their dependency on student visas in Britain (Ruhs and Anderson, 2006). Research has also shown that due to the need to send remittances, Ghanaian migrants were more likely to stop studying and take up paid employment compared to other West African migrants (Ammassari, 2004). This highlights the importance of immigration status in understanding the respondents’ feelings and perceptions of exclusion. Moreover, it shows how immigration policy intersects with ethnicity. That is, immigration status creates important lines of differentiation within an ethnic group, and new forms of exclusion and polarisation between those who can at least attempt to establish a career path in Britain and those whose progression beyond being a cheap pool of labour is blocked, leaving them disenfranchised (Whitwell, 2003; Ruhs and Anderson, 2006).

**Responses to exclusions**

The respondents responded to these negative experiences in the workplace in various ways. Some stressed their powerlessness. For example, Nyana stated that she routinely felt humiliated at work, but her only option was to ignore the problem. She claimed, ‘So for the sake of your job you swallow it. You come back home and talk, talk, talk, it’s not getting you anywhere [laughs] then the next day you are back there, that’s why you have it.’ For Nyana sharing the problem with her friends was her only outlet, but this ultimately proved futile. She lamented: ‘You don’t have the choice. You have to swallow it, swallow it bitterly.’

Others claimed that they had developed preventative strategies. Ellen, for instance, explained that even though racism was often difficult to pinpoint, she had developed specific measures to evade the possibility of differential treatment. She explained:

> I can’t tell if I’ve been discriminated, they haven’t done it straight to my face, because of my colour I feel a bit discriminated, you know, in some of the actions that they do, but with me I know how to play my cards very, very well. If you try anything in the health system there’s a lot of discrimination, they say we don’t
discriminate a lot, but they discriminate a lot, but what I believe it’s like, if what I’m doing, I know I’m right, I make sure I do it nicely, I don’t make a mistake, whatever you say you don’t get me. It’s when I make a mistake, that’s when you can’t stand on that with your racial attitude.

A more striking finding was the respondents’ conviction that their adverse situation, in terms of their low paid job, was absolutely temporary. Some articulated this belief in terms of a religious narrative. Jennifer claimed, ‘I’m a Christian and I believe this situation is not going to be permanent. That’s not where I’m going to end, you hope for this’. Others emphasised that it depended on their perseverance and commitment. Kessy stressed that she was ‘focusing more’ in Britain and this was echoed by others. Florence stated, ‘here I’m more focused, I’m on my own I’m more independent, and I want to strive hard.’ The determination to succeed despite the difficulties was reflected in their positive and active language. Ellen for example, claimed ‘I really want to move up, I don’t want to be stuck. ’Cause I’ve seen people who have been qualified for years and years still at the same place, that’s not me. I want to climb up there’; whilst Jennifer claimed, ‘I just want to set up. I feel hungry now.’ This mindset was expressed by the female respondents rather than the men, and reveals how despite the obstacles, they shared an evaluation that employment prospects were ultimately greater for women in London than in Ghana.

The responses discussed thus far can be seen as individual strategies, yet collective responses, which provided alternative sources of respect were also important. The survey data revealed that 81% of the respondents belonged to a faith based organisation. Religion has historically played a key role for various migrant groups, providing a vital social space and helping to maintain an ethnic memory (Burrell and Panayi, 2006). Here too there was ample evidence that the church helped to counter some of the respondents’ feelings of frustration and exclusion. For example, the church was often described as a respite and sanctuary from their work - for Eleanor it provided support when she had a problem and was ‘like a small family’, whilst Gladys claimed ‘there you feel so happy, it’s your people. The church that we go to we are appreciated’. Kofi defined his church as inclusive and caring:
In my church, when you get here, you see that you are really in a community, you are embraced. Be you a Ghanaian, an American or whatever, you can be from the church community and they’ll see you as a church member, straightforward. So they give you a form to fill, your telephone number, it will be there and maybe the elders will be calling you to see how you are feeling, so much of the time, you feel at home, that is how my church is.

 Whilst the church was open to different ethnic groups, many also drew on specifically Ghanaian networks. The respondents frequently spoke of other diasporic associations that provided social interactions through dinner and dance evenings and meetings, and which included groups based on language, religion, schools and home town associations as well as national Ghanaian associations (Datta et al., 2006). Some of the respondents clearly drew on a well organised and rich associational culture that fulfilled a range of functions beyond socialising, such as self-help and judicial functions (Peil, 1995; Owusu, 2000; Giles and Mohan, 2003; Mohan, 2006).

 Another response was their assertion of Ghanaian values and negative assessment of British people’s behaviour. Indeed, the interviews were replete with statements about Ghanaian values. This included Ghanaian hospitality. As Joshua remarked; ‘like you come into my country, how I will feed you, I will embrace you, they call it Ghanaian hospitality and I not find it here’. Others emphasised how Ghanaians were caring and helped others. For example, Abena’s comment that ‘as for Ghanaians we are helpers’ was typical. When Komla was asked to describe Accra where he was bought up, he replied:

 Accra is a nice place and you have, people are very nice, more especially when you are a foreigner, they are very nice to you, because it’s kind of the ethics there, so far as you were born in the home and grew up in the home, they give you that kind of training that you have to give respect to elderly people and then you, people you don’t know, you have to show some kind of kindness to them.

 The respondents often contrasted their willingness to help with instances in London whereby a passer-by would ignore someone in need of aid. As mentioned in Komla’s quote, respect to elders was described as another core Ghanaian value. Mary explained, ‘back in Ghana, you
respect age [laughs]. They respect age and everybody is everybody’s keeper, the child is not necessarily your child before you can discipline that child’. This shows how Ghanaian values were given a new emphasis in the context of their experiences in Britain (Vertovec, 2006). This was most evident in Abena’s narrative. For instance, she claimed, ‘Ghana is better, I prefer because Ghana is my country and then in Ghana …they help us and they protect us. What I see here is, they don’t care about us, especially us black people, they don’t care about us.’ Ghanaian principles were given new meanings as a result of their feelings of exclusion and the disrespect they had encountered. By emphasising Ghanaian values, the respondents can also been seen as constructing a boundary between themselves and others to protect and enhance their self esteem and dignity (Lamont, 2000). The effect of the narratives was to impart the significant message that whilst the respondents were not economically successful in London, their code of conduct and attitudes, particularly the respect and compassion they bestowed to others, positioned them as morally superior to the British, particularly in a context where they were perceived to be inferior in everyday life and society.

Comparative statements about Ghana and Britain can also be read in relation to their experiences of the workplace. Britain was represented as a place of educational opportunities and facilities, but also of work and stress. As Mary claimed, ‘There’s so much stress, so, so much stress [laughs], so much stress over here and Ghana is not like that. We enjoy life, every bit of it’. Ghana was invariably portrayed as the antithesis of Britain, and associated with sunshine and fresh food. Jennifer, for example, expressed her frustration that she was unable to secure a job in housing and added: ‘Yeah, sometimes you feel like going back home. [Laughs]. If you think about it. Because over there, apart from that, you get your fresh food to eat. Everything from farms is very fresh. Here you always eat frozen, frozen, frozen. And we have the weather, it’s always summer.’ These examples portrayed the distinct sense that their quality of life and sense of well being was better in Ghana. Others conceded that although the standard of living was higher in Britain, this was ultimately counteracted by the disrespect they encountered. This was clearly articulated by Nyana and her comments followed a discussion of the discrimination she encountered in the workplace:
It makes you feel, you feel pain, because the happiness or the mind that you go through coming to Britain. I mean the country is very nice to live in, it is far better than our country. I’ve been telling people since I came that I have the electricity, [it] does not turn off, shortage of water and those everyday things, here they have telephones in their houses, you have this, you are well off, I mean we don’t, but we’re fine. We don’t have such things but we’re okay. You have it, but the way we are being treated, sort of makes you feel no good, we don’t feel so good.

These narratives of home were also gendered, with several women claiming they missed the childcare support networks that were available to them in Ghana, whilst the men tended to lament their higher status back home as illustrated by their ownership of houses and cars. George claimed: ‘in Ghana I’ve got my own house everything living all right, good money, my own cars, two private cars. I was alright. But here I don’t have nothing. I’m broke and start afresh.’

The interview narratives were replete with statements that juxtaposed Ghana and Britain and they were a way of articulating and expressing their deep dissatisfaction with certain aspects of their lives in London. Yet they also reveal the contradictions and ambivalence that is at the crux of the migrant experience (Gardner, 2002). This ambivalence was particularly reflected in their statements about their economic situation as they grappled with the paradox of living in London. That is, whilst London offered the opportunity to earn more money compared to Ghana, the cost of living was also significantly higher. Many stated in the interviews that their wages did not meet the costs of living in London and particular concerns were the high cost of travel, council tax and specifically, rent. Jennifer discussed the economic opportunities in Britain but stated ‘one of the main concerns here is when I convert it into our currency it’s a lot of money but because you pay a lot of rent it’s meaningless. Back home you’re not paying as much as this’. Similarly, Komla claimed that he earned more money in London as cleaner than as an office worker in Ghana but he reflected, ‘in London living is quite expensive and for everything you have to cherish the pound, you really have to suffer for it and the little you get you have to use too. So if you don’t get paid, you can’t eat, you have to be really extremely careful before you can save, that’s one thing I don’t like’. As a result, many were ambivalent about their plans for their future, stating that they would only stay in Britain if they could secure a better job: but they would only return to Ghana if they could establish their own business.
Implications for multiculturalism

The ways in which respondents drew on religious and ethnic networks and reasserted Ghanaian values, could be interpreted as a form of self-segregation. That is, these responses could be seen as demonstrating a retreat into Ghanaian enclaves as opposed to developing social networks and contact with the ‘host’ society, and cultivating a sense of belonging and solidarity with Britain. However, these networks were clearly part of a survival strategy to alleviate the sense of exclusion and frustration they felt which was not only due to racism, but their poor working conditions and poor quality of life as a result of their low paid work. Migrants have historically drawn on these forms of survival strategies (Herbert, forthcoming), yet in the political domain these responses are now stigmatised. However, such survival strategies do not necessarily preclude engagement in the wider society, and might even predicate it. Moreover, many Ghanaians actually embraced multicultural living by working alongside other ethnic groups, interacting with a diversity of people and gaining knowledge about different cultures. As Kofi reflected:

I came to meet a whole lot of people from different countries and I’ve learned a lot from such people… Like the way that people live. You see Indians, their lifestyle is quite different, you see Chinese, their lifestyle is quite different, you see somebody from Russia, you know what I mean? So with this experience, I’ve learned a lot from such different, different, different people in this country.

Kofi’s reflections resonate with Malik’s beliefs on the benefits of living in a multicultural society. According to Malik: ‘Diversity is important not in and of itself, but because it allows us to expand our horizons, to compare and contrast different values, beliefs and lifestyles and make judgements upon them (2005: 18). The barrier, therefore, was not with other migrant workers but with the white British. This was confirmed by Nyana:

It’s very difficult to get a white as a friend. If you are not born here and you come from outside the country you can’t get a white as a friend, a British person as a friend. Maybe you are born here and you started school with the
person and they’ve been in the same classroom as yourself. But from other countries you get other EU people like, because you all come from outside Britain so we make friendship easier. The real British person is not easy--,

*To make friends with?*

To make good friends with.

The current political discourse focuses attention on minority ethnic groups as causing fundamental problems for integration, yet white Britons continue to evade scrutiny in this respect. The perceived barriers underlying relationships with white people, alongside experiences of systematic and institutional racisms, particularly in the labour market, highlights that for multiculturalism to function as a two way process, it is vital for white people to change and go beyond a mere lip-service of tolerance (Alibhai-Brown, 2000).

Some policy implications can also be drawn from the interviews. Most importantly, perhaps, rather than simply abandoning the project of multiculturalism, the implementation of multicultural policies needs to be improved. Firstly, the evidence of enduring racisms highlights the need for anti-racism to be incorporated into policy agendas. The interviews highlighted the responses of the Ghanaians to their experiences of discrimination. Whilst a few emphasised their powerlessness, a response that may have intensified the effect of racisms by provoking disengagement and reinforcing feelings of exclusion, many responded with a determination to succeed and had developed coping strategies to negotiate difficulties. Yet despite this range of responses, the respondents did not use formal procedures in the workplace to challenge racism; in fact the interviews highlighted the conspicuous lack of institutional support. Managers play a key role in providing this support by intervening to tackle discrimination, yet help from managers was also absent in the Ghanaians’ narratives and instead, respondents recalled situations whereby managers dismissed and denied the issue.

Secondly, racism was one element of the respondents’ poor working conditions, which included low levels of pay and a lack of work related benefits such as sick pay and compassionate leave. Therefore, efforts to tackle racism need to operate in a broader context and go beyond an effort to afford cultural recognition to incorporate economic justice, through for example, a London living wage (See also Fraser 1995). According to Wrench and Modood equal opportunities are
‘virtually irrelevant’ for those employed in the lowest paid jobs, as improvements in general working conditions and fairer wages are a greater priority (2000:2). However, the interviews with Ghanaians reveal that racism did have a significant impact on their lives and should be tackled alongside more general improvements in their poor working conditions.

Conclusion
Whilst scholars have called for the study of less established migrant groups in an effort to further develop our understanding of multiculturalism, this paper has responded by focusing on the experiences of Ghanaians working in London’s low-paid labour market. Whilst the respondents recognised the benefits of living in a multicultural society and had established contacts with other migrant groups at work, diversity management had not penetrated at the level of these low paid sectors in London. The core aims of multiculturalism, to respect and value ethnic difference and protect groups from discrimination, were a distant rhetoric that had little bearing on their daily lives. Instead the Ghanaians interviewed felt that racism was endemic in the labour market, that they were denied opportunities and stuck at bottom of the employment ladder. For the respondents, racism and discriminatory practices were often disguised in various forms, and incidents whereby racism was concealed provoked the most frustration. Indeed, apart from overtly racist remarks from clients towards carers, racism was largely portrayed as an implicit and silent phenomenon. This is in line with Whitwell’s observation that we have entered a ‘new age of racisms’, whereby racisms are increasingly subtle and diverse (2003: 17). Indeed, this diversity of experiences was also reflected in the role played by immigration status and for those who held a student feelings of exclusion and anxiety were heightened. Interviewees had responded to these experiences in different ways and in some cases they had developed coping strategies to negotiate difficulties. These included preventive strategies, such as drawing on their religion and ethnic associations as an inclusive community and, particularly for women, cultivating a determination to succeed. They also responded by drawing moral boundaries between Ghanaians and the British, and remembering the positive aspects of their country of origin. Essentially though, their experiences in the workplace provoked deep feelings of ambivalence regarding their life in Britain and future prospects.
Critics of multiculturalism have argued that it is the main culprit for creating ethnic and cultural conflicts and perpetuating divisions. However, our interview material show that at this level, divisions and exclusions had little to do with multicultural policies and were the result of older patterns of racisms which current political discourses have tended to negate. The discourse of polarisation and segregation tends to indicate that separation is self-imposing, but the narratives reveal that Ghanaians did not choose to feel excluded or separated. Many were trying to integrate by moving higher up the employment hierarchy into more professional jobs such as housing management, business administration and leadership, but reported failing at the application and interview stage. For our respondents, this failure was a product of their nationality and the racism of employers. Whereas the current political discourse of multiculturalism implies self-segregation, our research highlighted the segmentation of the labour market and the barriers that exist for the upward movement of migrants. In this context, it is hardly surprising that migrants may then cultivate their own ethnic networks to counter the effects of exclusion. The experiences of the Ghanaians we have interviewed clearly underscores the vital need for these less established migrants to be incorporated into policy agendas aimed at eradicating social inequalities and fostering social inclusion and labour market reform. Ultimately, the evidence suggests that perhaps it is premature to talk of the end of multiculturalism; rather, at this level, multiculturalism has yet to begin.

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1 According to Solomos the ethnic and racial studies literature has tended to focus on theoretical abstraction. Research outside of academia has however emphasised the problem of racism in the workplace. See TUC 2000.

2 The team of 11 researchers were recruited and managed by London Citizens, the research was directed by our team at Queen Mary and the work was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Greater London Authority (GLA), Oxfam, Queen Mary, University of London and UNISON. The researchers were also undertaking training in organising techniques with London Citizens as part of their Summer Academy and the research has been used to support the living wage campaign in London (for more information, see Evans et al., 2005).

3 One came in the 1970s, two in the 1980s and three in the 1990s.

4 In 2005 this was calculated at £6.70. However, this is based on workers claiming tax credits and benefits and without the take up of these benefits the London living wage was calculated at £8.10. The calculated London living wage for 2006 is £7.05.

5 20 days including bank holidays.