

Everyday guide to challenge 'divide and rule' narratives

Race and class messaging toolkit

What we are aiming for:

A conversation about politics and inequality which builds solidarity across ordinary people to address the urgent issues facing society today.

What we're up against:

- 1. Ordinary people in the UK have been actively held back** by precariousness, lack of voice, prejudice and loss of community space; from the rural towns of Northern England to the tower blocks of London.¹
- 2. Instead of seeing their voices and struggles centred on the political agenda, communities have been divided and pitched against one another** in the public debate, often along the lines of Brexiteers/Remainers, deserving/undeserving, British/foreigner, white/BME, white/migrants.
- 3. 'Divide and rule' tactics have fuelled scaremongering and prejudice against migrants and people of colour and distracted us** from addressing the urgent issues facing communities today: a rigged system privileging a wealthy few at the top.
- 4. This needs to change.**

What we're proposing: At the heart of the status quo are pervasive narratives and slogans that have enabled the injustices facing everyday people: from benefits sanctions, housing evictions and community centre closures to police brutality, Prevent and Hostile Environment immigration policies. Building on race and class messaging and framing work in the UK and US, as well as our own research, we provide **language to build solidarity across difference and challenge 'divide and rule' narratives in daily conversations**. This is crucial to **avoid the ongoing scapegoating of people across working-class and BME communities, so that we can focus on the issues affecting people across the board**.

Toolkit edited by Laurie Mompelat

¹ Snoussi, D. and Mompelat, L. (2019) 'We Are Ghosts': Race, Class and Institutional Prejudice, London: The Runnymede Trust and The Centre for Labour And Social Studies.

Understanding 'divide and rule' / us versus them'

Have you ever heard people say things like ...?

1. **They** come here and take **our jobs** / **They** don't want to integrate.
2. **They** profit from the NHS/welfare/schools/housing on the back of **British people** who pay for it.
3. **They** [i.e. migrants/religious minorities/people of colour] are all **criminals, gangsters** and **extremists**.
4. **They** [i.e. working-class people] are all **chavs** and **scroungers** / **They're** not trying hard enough.

Most of us have.

These everyday phrases and ideas are key in building an 'other' to blame for the injustices that people feel daily: scarcity of decent jobs, rising costs of living, insecure access to education and healthcare, anxiety about our future, etc.

These phrases do not point at people of colour and/or people from working-class backgrounds in an overt way. Instead, they do so indirectly by using terms that carry specific images in the public imagination. For instance, the term 'illegal immigrant' seldom refers to Canadian backpackers who forgot to renew their visa. Similarly,

'welfare scroungers' seldom refers to wealthy people who did not pay their taxes (e.g. David Beckham or Robbie Williams). But somehow, everyone understands what the terms mean: **we** must protect ourselves against **'them': those who do not belong** in **our** society.

This **'them'** can take different forms over time. It has been the **'underclass'** under Margaret Thatcher as well as the **'welfare scroungers'** and **'illegal immigrants'** of today's public discourse. This tactic of indirectly scapegoating particular groups is known as **'dog whistling.'**

Where does it take us?

'Dog whistle' and 'divide and rule' tactics have done three things:

1. **Pitched communities against one another** along the lines of deserving/undeserving, British/foreigner, white working-class/migrants and people of colour
2. **Distracted public opinion** from addressing the issues facing people across the board
3. **Justified policies that cut support and protection for most of us** (such as austerity, benefits sanctions, housing evictions, community centre closures, Hostile Environment immigration policies, etc.)

Why does it work?

1. As governments of all stripes have failed to address the issues facing ordinary people, **many of us feel legitimate anger and resentment** in the face of an **unfair status quo**.
2. **'Divide and rule' rhetoric taps into these feelings of anger and resentment.**
3. The problem is that it **attaches such anger and resentment to specific communities, thus fuelling already existing suspicion towards people from migrant, working-class and/or BME backgrounds.** This leads to increased prejudice while inequality and injustice remain unaddressed.

How to respond: Building solidarity across difference

When we use an **inclusive 'we'** and highlight the possibility for **solidarity across difference**, we can fuel people's willingness to embrace diversity as a powerful strength, and motivate them to take action. This is because the inclusive **'we'** activates positive values of community, empathy and collective hope.

People practice these values every day, and they can be brought to life when triggered in the right way. This came out very strongly in our own research², drawing from interviews in London's working-class communities.

² Snoussi, D. and Mompelat, L. (2019) 'We Are Ghosts': Race, Class and Institutional Prejudice, London: The Runnymede Trust and The Centre for Labour And Social Studies.

THE THINGS PEOPLE SAY	THE THINGS WE NEED TO SAY
I can't get a job because of immigrants / People come here and take our jobs .	Regardless of our backgrounds or the colour of our skin, most of us are grafting to build a future for ourselves and our loved ones .
The white working class has been left behind / No one gives a damn about the white working class / White working-class boys are the ones truly left behind.	I think the working-class is the working-class, regardless of skin colour .
Immigrants are profiting from the NHS/welfare/schools/housing, on the back of British people who pay for it.	We need to shift our attention from who fight over the scraps from the table, to look instead at how much the table holds, and who really gets to enjoy the feast. ³ / You are more likely to be helped by an immigrant than to stand in queue behind them. / Tell me about the last time you used the NHS.
Those people keep complaining, but they're just not trying hard enough. You don't get something for nothing. I don't want to support lazy benefits scroungers .	Do you know we lose so much more money because of tax avoiders? Why don't we talk about that more? We should do something about the companies treating their workers like robots and hiding their profits offshore. That's what I'm really angry about.
They're [i.e. working-class people] all chavs and scroungers / They're all racist.	Many of us have been spoon-fed stereotypes about people struggling at the bottom of the ladder to justify policies that harm all of us . We should rise above contempt and redesign the game so that it works for everyone .
They're [i.e. migrants/people of colour/religious minorities] all criminals and extremists / They don't want to integrate.	Imagine how much stronger we could be if ordinary people were united in this country? Across cultures, races and places ? Together we can be so much greater than fear .
They should go back to where they came from / Their culture is not compatible with our values .	All sorts of people are making Britain and our culture what it is today: from the football teams we love, the doctors and nurses caring for us , the Indian restaurant down the road, the tea you had this morning and the British hip hop you like listening to.
We're too crowded, immigrants are swelling the population / We must put British people first / The longer these people stay in our country illegally, the greater the chance they never leave.	I don't think my neighbour, my doctor or the woman that looks after my mum are the enemy. Pointing at migrant communities is just a way to cover up the real injustices. What about the companies that don't pay taxes yet keep people in poverty wages?
I don't trust the government or statistics.	It's true that governments have let us down, but they also get us to blame each other rather than them. We need people in power who know how hard things can be.
The whole system is rigged anyway. What can we do?	Who we are now has been shaped by moments in our history where ordinary people chose to come together and fight. Think about the Manchester cotton boycott, the Battle of Cable Street, Dagenham Women's Strike, the Windrush scandal and the Stansted 15. We have done it before and we can do it again.

Quotes from research participants

"With Grenfell, it is a tragedy for **everyone**, but **we** are **together**. So hopefully **we** are going to keep working for a better future for the **community**. I find it very inspiring somehow, that people manage to get out of their houses to really make things work better." **Nhung, 40s**

"**We've** all grown **together**, I might know your children, or your auntie, or something along the lines. My generation are looking after the next generation same way **we** were looked after." **Carol, 40s**

"**We** want rights, justice and freedom. That's all **we're** looking for. We just want the **community** to be together you know, and **united**." **Abena, 50s**

"The **community** here, **we're** tight. Even though we've got our own little cultural communities, but when sh*t hits the fan, **we're** there **for each other**. When they're trying to close down the library or the college, **all sorts of people** are down there. Black, Asian, white, different ages, children, old people holding up little banners." **Delaeja, 20s**

³ Quote from Bottero, W. (2009) 'Class in the 21st Century', in Runnymede Trust, Who Cares about the White Working Class? London.

Four steps to change the narrative⁴:

1. Listen to what the person who's speaking to you has to say. This can be difficult and of course, if people are aggressive you have every right to walk away.

SO THAT: you allow the discussion to continue, which is crucial to establish trust and put forward your counter-narrative.

2. Recognize the injustice that **many of us** face today, insisting on a collective '**we**' **across cultural backgrounds, places and skin colours**.

SO THAT: You tackle the race/class prejudice at the core of 'us vs them' tactics and avoid leaving the conversation about difference monopolized by hate and scaremongering.

3. Denounce and call out scapegoating of working-class and migrant communities as a tool to divide and harm **all of us**.

SO THAT: we recognize certain communities' experience of prejudice and connect it back to wider collective issues and interests.

4. Highlight positive solutions⁵ and emphasize solidarity across difference as a key ingredient to get heard and realize progress.

SO THAT: we build public momentum for a better society: one that works for all of us.

Example:

1. Make sure you have listened: what are people concerned about? This will shape your next steps.
2. It's truly unfair that so many of **us** can't even get access to a decent job/secure education/good quality healthcare. **Regardless of our backgrounds** or the colour of our skin, **most of us** are working hard to build a bright future for **ourselves and our loved ones**.
3. But those who can actually make a difference – employers who can improve **our wages and working conditions**, or politicians who can decide to invest in **our schools and public transports** – have kept **us** fighting amongst ourselves, blaming poor families and people of colour for **our** hard times instead of fixing it **for all of us**.
4. **We** need to shift **our** attention from who fight over the scraps from the table, to think instead about how much the table holds, and who really gets to enjoy the feast. Imagine how much **stronger** we could be if ordinary people were **united** in this country? **We** must **uplift each other** to get heard, and re-design the game so that it works for **everyone**: what about a genuine living wage and better housing provision?

For more details and advice, have a look at our **Messaging checklist for advocates to build solidarity across difference**.

About the race and class messaging toolkit:

The narratives outlined in this toolkit have been carefully designed using insights from our own research on race and class '**We Are Ghosts**': **Race, Class and Institutional Prejudice** as well as from:

- Demos (2018) Race-Class: Our Progressive Narrative, available at: https://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/2019-03/Race_Class_Narrative_Handout_large-print_0.pdf
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Frameworks Institute (2019) FRAMING toolkit #TalkingAboutPoverty, Available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/framing-toolkit-talking-about-poverty>
- Lingayah, S., Khan, O. and McIntosh, K. for Runnymede and Voice4Change (2018) Making the case for racial equality: the potential and limits of 'framing', available at <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/Making-the-Case-for-Race-Equality%20-%20full%20report%20final.pdf>
- Clarke, C. for Global Dialogue (2017) Segmentation research on public attitudes to immigration.
- Katwala, S., Ballinger, S. and Rhodes, M. for British Future (2014) How to talk about migration, available at: <https://www.britishfuture.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/How-To-Talk-About-Immigration-FINAL.pdf>

⁴ Inspired by: Demos (2018) Race-Class: Our Progressive Narrative, available at: https://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/2019-03/Race_Class_Narrative_Handout_large-print_0.pdf

⁵ For practical policy responses to race and class inequality, see the executive summary of 'We Are Ghosts': Race, Class and Institutional Prejudice