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**Resilient Resistance? The third sector in the London Borough of Newham
at a time of 'post-racial' politics**

1 This paper engages with the shift towards an emphasis on ‘resilience’ in local government
2 discourses. Using the London Borough of Newham as a case study, it will argue that
3 contradictory definitions of the term have, until recently, been used to justify the erosion of
4 the third sector in the borough, specifically groups who support religious and **linguistic**
5 minorities. Interviews and documentary analysis are used to consider how the concept of
6 resilience had a racializing effect in this borough and we argue that as a facet of policy
7 resilience risks treating plurality as a threat rather than a strength. This is highlighted through
8 an examination of how the third sector was characterised as retarding individuals’ resilience
9 and promoting ‘ethno-centrism’ in official resilience discourse. We offer three distinctive
10 insights on the problem of resilience as a feature of policy, firstly, that resilience has a
11 symbolic power that makes it difficult **to** securitize; secondly, resilience discourses risk
12 instituting racism within policy; and thirdly, that resilience is built against collective forms of
13 resistance and is therefore incapable of harnessing the resources and capacities of local
14 populations. To conclude, we discuss the evolving political situation in the borough and the
15 demise of the administration promoting resilience, through collective forms of resistance.

16
17
18 *We believe a lack of resilience keeps our residents poor*

19 [London Borough of Newham, 2011c]

20 21 Introduction 22

23 The prolonged austerity measures experienced by the U.K have provided fertile ground
24 within which a discourse of resilience has taken root in local policy. This article will explore
25 the policies and practices of one local authority, the London Borough of Newham (L.B.N).
26 We argue, that as a facet of local policy, resilience had a racializing effect in this borough.
27 We will contend that instituting a concept such as resilience only has merit if understood in
28 relation to wider structural forces and collective forms of resistance. To begin, the austerity
29 context in which the policy of resilience emerged in this borough is described; we examine
30 the genesis of the term and consider how Newham’s policy sits with respect to broader
31 national and international trends. **We argue that Newham is a revealing case study, given the
32 breadth of policy reconfigured through the concept of resilience, the directly elected mayoral
33 system in the borough, and the long and continued history of collective resistance to the
34 administration that promoted the resilience agenda and led to its demise in 2018.**

36 Newham

37 Between 2009 and 2014 the spending power of local authorities in England was reduced by a
38 fifth. This is double the cuts to the rest of the public sector (DCLG 2011, DCLG 2015).
39 Central government reduced funding to local councils' in London by 33% (Fitzgerald and
40 Lupton 2015). The borough most affected was **the London Borough of Newham (henceforth**
41 **L.B.N.)** has seen its spending power decrease by 26%, more than neighbours Tower Hamlets
42 (25%); Hackney (24%) and Redbridge (19%) (Fitzgerald and Lupton 2015). Little changed
43 under the Westminster government led by Theresa May. The Ministry of Housing,
44 Communities and Local Government's (2017, 2019) analysis of each council's core spending
45 power estimates that between 2016 – 2020 Newham's spending power will increase by £7.3
46 million, but with concurrent a rise in housing stock in the same period this amounts to a net
47 decrease in spending per dwellingⁱ. The largest single drop in L.B.N.'s finances came in 2011
48 when the council's budget dropped by 11% (L.B.N 2011a). In the same year L.B.N.'s Labour
49 council launched its 'Resilience Agenda' in a series of five policy documents.

50

51 The quote that starts this piece is from the second of these documents, *Quid pro quo, not*
52 *status quo* (L.B.N. 2011c), and specifically from the forward written by the then Mayor of
53 Newham. *Quid pro quo* seeks to make a case for reconfiguring the role of the local council as
54 an enabler rather than a direct service provider, or as it describes itself within the stakeholder
55 consultation which preceded it, as a 'springboard for residents' success' (L.B.N. 2011b: 14).
56 In these documents, the social problems faced by residents are characterised as the
57 consequence of a failure of resilience in the local population fostered by previous policy
58 approaches, which have neglected to 'demand more from people', and condemned them to
59 live 'unfulfilled and stunted lives' (L.B.N. 2011c: 05). The forward ends with a call for the
60 residents of Newham to be allowed to 'flourish':

61 It is time to care enough about the people whose lives we have damaged over the last few decades to
62 challenge the policies that might make professionals feel virtuous but ultimately hold our people and
63 our community back'. (L.B.N. 2011c: 05)

64 While the use of 'we' suggests collective responsibility (including on the part of the council)
65 for the supposed lack of resilience in the local population, through the course of fieldwork the
66 extent to which this exhortation was targeted at voluntary and community groups emerged.
67 What became clear was that the shift to a resilience agenda was understood by L.B.N. less as
68 a failure of council policy and more as a measure to curb the influence of the third sector.
69 'Professionals' in this borough had come to be represented as retarding the resilience of
70 residents, and to have done so specifically by promoting ethno-centrism.

71

72 In 2014/2015 [anonymised] interviewed twenty-two ‘professionals’ in Newham. The term
73 ‘professionals’ is used here to describe those ‘working’ in organisations with an interest in
74 the borough. Including individuals from local, regional and central government; housing
75 associations; campaigning and religious organisations and community groups. Although
76 some were paid, others worked in voluntary capacities and most were also residents of
77 Newham. In May 2018 after the local elections [anonymised] contacted the original
78 respondents and five agreed to discuss further developments in local. Due to the charged
79 political atmosphere in the borough, quotes will be presented here with complete anonymity,
80 without general descriptors. Changes to funding has led to a number of organisations folding
81 and in the context of this diminished third sector, participants from specific types of
82 organisations, are more easily identifiable.

83

84 Resilience

85 The concept of resilience saturates the policy strategies of local and national government,
86 think tanks and funding bodies (Harrison, 2012). Usually defined as positive adaptation to
87 negative circumstances (Luthar et al. 2000), its rise to prominence in policy is associated with
88 two shifts in perspective on the nature of civil society and agentic capacities of populations.
89 In the context of the latter, policy and research focused on the strengths of individuals has
90 been welcomed as a counterbalance to approaches fixated on vulnerability. For Boyden and
91 Cooper (2007) though, what may have started as recognition of agency, has led to the
92 formation of an orthodoxy in research and policy, whereby those who appear to have
93 achieved some measure of social success, are analysed in relation to a psychological
94 understanding of resilience alone. Harrison (2012) argues this turn to individualism has
95 negated the examination of systemic inequality in a way that benefits socially conservative
96 policy. Indeed, Peck and Tickell (2002) contend that a focus on resilience as a personal
97 attribute, has the effect of transferring responsibility to communities without devolving any
98 real power, as the processes that shape outcomes operate at the scale of ‘capitalist social
99 relations’ (McKinnon and Derickson 2012: 255). Thus, this turn to resilience has been
100 highlighted as divesting responsibility from local authorities, turning attention away from the
101 question of how the public sector might work to ‘change the odds’, to the assumption that
102 individuals and communities should be ‘beating’ them through their own resources
103 (Seccombe 2002).

104

105 McKinnon and Driscoll (2012) argue capitalism relies on resilience, they argue that ‘resilient
106 spaces are what capitalism needs – spaces that are periodically reinvented to meet the
107 changing demands of capital accumulation in an increasingly globalized economy’ (ibid:
108 254). While capitalism may generate the upheavals to which policies of resilience purport to
109 respond, pressure to adapt to its inherent contradictions keeps the system from collapsing.
110 This is akin to treating capitalism as a force of nature, which protects structural inequality
111 from scrutiny (Swyngedouw and Heynen 2003). Or in Wacquant’s (2004) terms, public policy
112 has become wedded to market forces, to such an extent that all of civil society must be
113 brought under the logic of the market. Garrett (2016) has emphasised the influence of the
114 U.S.A. behind such neo-liberal shifts. He highlights the irony of social policy measures that
115 follow its example, given the leading capitalist economy has pioneered separating public
116 policy from a socially progressive ethos (Garrett 2016). The U.S.A’s influence in
117 proliferating resilience policy globally is observable through the ‘100 Resilient Cities’
118 scheme, funded by the U.S.A based Rockefeller Foundation. Within Britain, this organisation
119 is partnered by the British Council and five British cities are members: Manchester, Bristol,
120 London, Glasgow and Belfast. The initiative provides funding for ‘Chief Resilience Officers’
121 to be employed within city councils, with a remit to make sure cities, ‘survive, adapt, and
122 grow, no matter what kinds of chronic stresses and acute shocks they experience’
123 (100resilientcities.org, no date). This mirrors (and likely influenced) the decisions of councils
124 across Britain to produce resilience documents dealing with ‘shocks’ such as cyber-attack
125 (Belfast 2016), climate change (Llywodraeth Cymru 2018) and economic insecurity
126 (Glasgow 2016). In these cases the impetus is placed on localities and local residents to
127 govern responses to the volatility of the capitalist project (Garrett 2016).

128

129 However, a creeping trend in these policy measures is the treatment of the populace itself as a
130 threat to resilience. For instance Manchester City Council lists ‘community cohesion’, along
131 with fire, flooding and infrastructure as key priorities for its resilience strategy due to be
132 published in 2019 (Greater Manchester Combined Authority 2018). Here, it is not simply that
133 individuals should be resilient to the economic and climatic fallout of capitalism, but are in
134 and of themselves a danger. Or perhaps more precisely certain demographic mixes are thus
135 construed, given the extent to which the phrase ‘community cohesion’ is often used to
136 describe racial and religious plurality (Pilkington 2008). If the resilience discourse is
137 predicated on the idea that ‘good subjects’ should survive and indeed thrive in any situation
138 (Neocleous 2013), ‘bad’ subjects are part of the challenge of resilience itself. The question

139 [remains though, what is taken as evidence of resilience?](#) Howard et al. (1999) argue that
140 much of the literature which uses the term uncritically has neglected to consider resilience
141 through the terms groups themselves define it. Moreover, forms of ‘success’ can emerge from
142 what policy makers may consider evidence of **maladaptation** (Luthar et al. 2000). Behaviour
143 considered non-conforming, may be a strategy and, in itself, evidence of resilience, especially
144 in the face of systemic forms of racism or injustice (Lorde 2007 [1984]). In L.B.N. there is a
145 long history of opposition to institutional inequality and racism, which has often found
146 expression in communal organisation, yet as we will see this activity was not interpreted as
147 resilient behaviour by the council, but rather as something to be curbed in and of itself.
148 Indeed, in many ways, the council’s resilience approach was used to undermine the viability
149 of groups set up by and supporting minorities, under the guise that they eroded the capacity
150 for resilience.

151

152 ‘Resilience’ in Newham

153 Like many local, national and international bodies, L.B.N. produced core policy documents
154 on resilience. [However, in contrast to the situation in other local areas, in addition to six core](#)
155 [documents, the council also produced and commissioned at least twenty-three other reports,](#)
156 covering topics as diverse as equalities and diversity (L.B.N 2013d), analysis of survey data
157 (L.B.N 2015b) and calculations on the minimum wage (L.B.N 2015a) all of which were
158 framed in relation to resilience. Within the principal documents, some of the measures
159 introduced and justified as promoting resilience include: closer links with private business
160 (L.B.N 2013b); changes in housing policy (L.B.N 2013d); the removal of ‘foreign’ language
161 newspapers and books from libraries (L.B.N 2013b: 20); and significant changes to funding.
162 Between 2011 and 2013 three funding pools were developed which awarded money to
163 residents (L.B.N 2013a, 2013b, L.B.N. 2011), but excluded established groups from
164 applying. The council institutionalised core criteria of not providing funding to groups they
165 characterised as ‘for only one or particular specific communities’ (L.B.N 2013a: 4). These
166 policy shifts impacted those defined by the council as ‘single identity’ (L.B.N 2013d). The
167 validity of this characterisation is discussed below, but it is worth noting here that many of
168 these groups have long histories in the borough, rooted in successive waves of anti-racism
169 mobilisation.

170

171 L.B.N is the most diverse part of London: eight out of ten of the most diverse wards in East
172 London are in Newham, no one group makes up more than 17% of the population (Jivraj

211 considerable evidence of what, by any reasonable measure, may be called resilience. Indeed,
212 histories of organized resistance to inequality and racism constituted a hard-won set of
213 institutional and intellectual resources for these groups, which informed their current
214 practices and forms of mobilization:

215 And I remember one of their [council] officers came to the meeting of the NGOs, [...] I or somebody
216 else questioned [...] taking away the funding for independent advice, [...] that officer said, "Do you
217 presume that you know Newham better than the leadership of our borough?" [...] "Do you presume..."
218 obviously the answer is, yes, we do presume so because (laughs) we live in Newham and we work with
219 communities in Newham [...] We can speak for many people who populate the whole Newham – the
220 whole borough and who travel here, who live here, who go to the doctors here, who take their children to
221 school, and who struggle with daily sort of existence in terms of social exclusion or poverty [New19]

222 As Gregory (2014) notes though, the resilience literature has tended to avoid exploring
223 resistance as a form of resilience. For Dagdeviren et al (2016) this is so as resistance does not
224 fit with the individualised definition of the term favoured within policy and theory. Indeed,
225 for a senior member of Newham council, who could speak authoritatively on policy
226 developments, the development of any form of collective resistance was to be avoided:

227 So, [...] we've got Eastern Europeans moving in. They don't ask for anything, they don't want anything.
228 They want to come, they want to work. They don't get involved in politics. You wait ten years, there'll
229 be people saying, "Ah, no, I need money to create community groups and create things so that..." And
230 people will come and seek to get resources to place them in a position of leadership with that group of
231 people. That's what happened in all the groups of immigrants coming in. [...] So, initially they're working
232 and they're doing things, but then some people look around and say, "Ah, I could..." [...] They got money
233 and it placed them in positions of significance.
234

[New13]

235 For this representative, resilience could not be understood as involvement in politics nor did
236 it involve taking a leadership role with regard to local affairs, as both were considered
237 problematic, rather than something to be encouraged. Dagdeviren et al. (2016) highlight that
238 while individuals may display resilient reactions; the conditions that necessitate such actions
239 are tied to structural forces. They warn that, 'ignoring social conditions of resilience may give
240 rise to an identification problem' (2016: 13), as what is identified as individual resilience may
241 instead be the absence of a structural risk factor. Within the resilience discourse though,
242 'success' is often misrecognised as something defined in terms of individual merit, to the
243 exclusion of any consideration of structure or collective action (Garrett 2016). Within
244 Newham there was evidence of just this understanding of resilience:

245 He [the Mayor] sees his strategy as making Newham a place to 'live, play and stay', [air quotes] but his
246 strategy is entirely around residents and individuals. It doesn't see a place for the third sector. It
247 recognises that there are voters who put him there, [...] So he's just started a scheme whereby any
248 individual can apply for a small grant to improve themselves. [...]. He will encourage individuals to
249 come together and have an event or a party in their street and that, and they will give them money to
250 hold that event and get together as a group of individuals. But he doesn't fund capacity building for a
251 group of people that want to get together...there's no money available for anything like that. [New2]

252 For Dagdeviren et al. resilience is also 'prone to ideological exploitation when it is

253 considered in isolation from its social conditions' (2016, 14-15). In Newham, the targeting of
254 individuals under the resilience approach seemed to be ideologically aligned with
255 characterisations of collectives, especially those seen to be run for and by 'single identity'
256 groups, as ethno-centric, constructed by the council as creating division.

257

258 Resilience and Racism:

259 Throughout the interviews professionals shared their frustration that it was no longer viable
260 to talk about racism in the borough:

261 It's like the other equalities strands which are so important these days at the expense of
262 race, which is terribly unfair because, you know, race sort of set the scene for so many years

263 [New14]

264 A number emphasized that racism of the kind which they were set up to address was still
265 happening, both at a micro level:

266 It remains a legitimate target for a sort of public prejudice. It's changed only in that the East European
267 Roma [...] They sort of have gotten a focus [...], but they're certainly experiencing the same. I don't
268 think it's got any better. [New8]

269 and at the level of institutions:

270 I think it's a legacy of failed policy [nationally and locally] and it's a legacy of racism, institutional
271 racism that still exists [New17]

272 While all recognised there were a myriad of factors at play in L.B.N's policy decisions, and
273 that these often extended beyond the context of local politics, there was nevertheless a real
274 sense of anger at how Newham council had turned away from support for explicitly anti-
275 racism work. These criticisms tended to take a personalized form, with the then Mayor
276 blamed for this disengagement from discussions of race and a broader dissatisfaction with
277 what was perceived as an authoritarian leadership style:

278 the Mayor in Newham has got sort of more powers than that, you know. He sort of – he is sort of
279 like— What did he do? He has inhaled Newham. He has kind of inhaled to the point that there is no
280 governance, other than his leadership. [New19]

281

282 Sir Robin Wales was head of Newham council from 1995 -2002 and elected Labour Mayor
283 from 2002-2018. Many of the measures outlined above became the focus of national
284 headlines and the former Mayor was the main spokesperson and target of both criticism and
285 praise for these policies. For instance, the removal of 'foreign language' newspapers and
286 translation services (L.B.N, 2013b) was discussed on *Newsnight* (Nye 2013), where the
287 Mayor characterises 'his' measures as a solution for what he perceived to be separation
288 amongst racial and ethnic groups in the borough, which he likened to 'Apartheid'. Wales also
289 took part in a number of policy events promoting the council's resilience approach involving

325
326 Newham's justification for that was this whole idea of resilience and, "We want to encourage people to
327 learn English to be able to get jobs," when in fact, not everyone who goes into a library wants to get a
328 job.... it may be an elderly person who's retired... For me, that was really important because it was
329 almost like a social aspect to it as well. [New4]

330 Whether denying the population the chance to read newspapers in a public space or read
331 about council services through translated documents could be said to reduce the presumed
332 separation of ethnic minority groups, has been questioned by many third sector groups, as
333 well as in the media and amongst opposition politicians:

334 When the Mayor comes out and says astonishing things...."We will not have any translation services,
335 we will not translate anything" and there isn't a peep from his Councillors, many of whom represent
336 ethnic minorities where English is not well held... And we're saying that we do not translate those
337 leaflets because of some hackneyed quasi racist instinct from the Mayor of Newham? [New12]

338 Minimally, this shows a rather blunt interpretation of what libraries and reading materials are
339 for, but it also betrays a crude interpretation of what might make for, or constitute, separation.
340 For example, the use of a paper written in Arabic, the official language of 22 nations and
341 unofficially used in countless others, can only be designated as ethno-centric if one assumes
342 that a vast range of heterogeneous audiences and readers belong to a homogenous 'other'.
343 Moreover the characterisation of material not in the English language as 'foreign' ties readers
344 to such a characterisation (Alexander et al. 2007). The assumption of this policy is that to
345 read in Urdu is not British, despite 'Britain' being made within Empire, and Newham's own
346 globalised history (Bhabha 1990). While the use of the English language as a tool of cultural
347 annihilation may be acknowledged in historic colonialism (Hindley 1990), its continued
348 propagation domestically as a 'neutral' way to enhance understanding, acts to veil how
349 'other' languages are marginalized and their users remade as foreign and separate, even as
350 they engage in shared public spaces. One can see this discursive move playing out in Wales'
351 2014 AGM speech where he argued that:

352 To join in properly people need a common language [...] We cannot build community resilience
353 without it. (Wales 2014)

354

355 When asked if the council understands why some people might find these policies
356 controversial the council's representative responded:

357 It's an incredibly popular policy. The people that criticise it, I'm sorry, I don't understand what they're
358 trying to do. What is [the council's] job? To encourage people to be separate or to spend public
359 money bringing people together? It is not controversial. It's only controversial in the minds of a few
360 people, like [names third sector groups in L.B.N] [New13]

361 In this account, dissenting voices from the third sector were dismissed as failing to represent
362 residents. When asked what role the council believes the third sector to have, the council
363 argued:

364 Often there's a sense of entitlement, they get bloated [...] They have a role if they can contribute. But
365 our task [is to say ...] If you can contribute to developing and supporting resilience in this borough,
366 you're our buddies. And if you can do it better than we can, you'll do it. [...] But you must contribute
367 to what we're trying to achieve. [New13]

368 Thus development of groups who feel entitled to be heard is placed in contrast to resilience,
369 which is itself conflated with the council's agenda. Resilience in this case becomes a means
370 of demanding acquiescence with 'what we are trying to achieve'. Indeed, the nature of the
371 way in which local groups emerged in response to racism and serve their needs became an
372 object of explicit critique for the council:

373 I will never prioritise one group – be it religious, national or ethnic – over another. Newham will stand
374 up against those who try to divide our community. (Wales 2014: 7)

375 An exact definition of what the council considered a 'single ethnic group', remained
376 ambiguous, for L.B.N. entire religions and languages were used to homogenise
377 heterogeneous populations. For MacKinnon and Derickson, attempts to generate 'a discourse
378 of equivalence between groups and individuals... often having [sic] the effect of suppressing
379 social difference (according to class, gender, race etc) and masking [sic] inequality and
380 hierarchy' (2013: 259). The dangers of ignoring the continued need to support residents in
381 multifaceted ways, especially in how individuals and groups continue to address racism, was
382 a key concern of our interviewees:

383 The whole emphasis is, "In Newham, we're a get up and go borough and if you help yourself, we'll
384 help you." Help you do what? [...] The system, the benefits system, is so skewed nationally that it
385 doesn't make no difference [...] destitution and poverty is more acute amongst certain ethnic
386 minorities.
387 [...]
388 Communities, individuals don't work like that. So sharing a cupcake with somebody along the street
389 party doesn't make you friends for life, doesn't mean you still don't have racist views or you still learn
390 to speak English any better. And that's what he [Mayor] can't get through his head. It's these big,
391 superficial ideas that have got absolutely no substance, no understanding behind them at all because he
392 doesn't understand how equality works, or how cohesion or diversity works; basic principal stuff.
393 Doesn't understand but isn't interested. [...] That's exactly what the resilience strategy's built on.
394 [New3]
395

396 We might note here, that the concept of resilience has particular rhetorical or normative
397 freight in this context. Resilience, as an alleged or imputed quality of communities implies,
398 above all, their capacity to maintain themselves in the face of change. It invokes stability and
399 singularity as the condition of community, the condition to which resilience pertains. The
400 resilience of the resilient subject is the capacity to maintain its imagined subjecthood, its self-
401 sameness. In this regard, as we can see from the usage of the term in official discourse here, it
402 is all too well aligned with a political imagination which conceives of diversity, plurality and
403 everyday multiculturalism as threats, those things which one needs to be resilient in the face
404 of, rather than as strengths. The council was at pains to name a quality in individuals it

405 wished to enhance through official policy, but their efforts to define what resilience meant,
406 encompassed a plethora of contradictory ideas and policies to the extent that the concept
407 seemed to be rendered useless (Fesenmyer 2015). Yet, it effectively functioned in one sense;
408 as it allowed the accusation of a lack of resilience to be levelled against a range of groups and
409 actions. In this respect, collective action, speaking ‘foreign’ languages, being in and funding
410 ‘single identity groups’, feeling entitled to speak up for residents or take on a leadership role
411 for the community, were all treated as evidence of a lack of resilience. As a term, we suggest,
412 its political and normative work is mostly done in the negative, allowing a range of actors to
413 be defined in terms of a particular ‘lack’. In short, ethnic minorities, migrants and
414 organisations developed for and by them were precluded from this concept. Hence, for a
415 policy, which the council declared as undercutting racism, the very terms of this erasure had a
416 racializing effect, and a divisive one, given the ways in which it elaborated and sustained
417 distinctions between ‘resilient’ and ‘non-resilient’ peoples.

418 Nevertheless resilience as a word is evocative, it appeals to what we hope ourselves to be, as
419 given the choice between being resilient and defeatist, few would choose the latter. When
420 official policy adopts resilience as the mantle below which to introduce a raft of reforms, it
421 makes it difficult for dissenting voices to be heard, as opponents risk sounding as though they
422 oppose resilience or have no faith in the resilience of their communities. Thus, measures
423 which for many were regressive, were repackaged as an expression of faith in the population.
424 The appeal of a term like resilience is it seems to illuminate the power in your hands, when
425 really it only places responsibility there. Indeed, the existence of the third sector at all though,
426 belies the fact that resilience is not that straightforward. Individuals and groups are not
427 resilient simply in relation to personal factors, but are engaged in resilient practices to deal
428 with challenges whose origins are structural in nature. Within Newham one of these key
429 structures became the council itself. The policy of resilience and leaders within L.B.N who
430 advocated them, became the focus of resistance in the borough.

431

432 Resisting Resilience:

433 [On May 3rd 2018 Rokhsana Fiaz was elected Mayor of Newham. Before entering local](#)
434 [politics in 2014, Fiaz worked for many third sector anti-racism organisations at a local,](#)
435 [national and European level. She has defined herself as a ‘community activist’ \(Waugh](#)
436 [2018a\). Given the council’s past characterisation of members of third sector groups as](#)
437 [professionals who erode resilience, as a figurehead Fiaz marks a break from these policies.](#)

438 Yet, beyond Fiaz as an individual, the collective movement behind her election is worth
439 noting. In much of the national press her election was characterised as a win for Momentumⁱⁱⁱ
440 (Elgot 2018). However while the process of bringing Fiaz to power began in 2016, informally
441 the effort to remove Wales dates back, at the very least, to the last local elections in 2014. In
442 December 2016 Robin Wales won a ‘trigger ballot’, to automatically run as the Labour
443 candidate in the 2018 local elections. In response, Newham Labour party members wrote an
444 appeal letter to the National Executive Committee outlining irregularities in the ballot and
445 crowd funded a court case over the matter (Hill 2017). Before a full hearing, Wales agreed to
446 re-run the trigger ballot, which he lost. In an open competition between Wales and Fiaz the
447 latter was selected as the Labour candidate and subsequently as Mayor. Key players in these
448 processes included members of third sector organisations in the borough, many of whom took
449 part in this study. On contacting the original interviewees after Fiaz’s election they reflected
450 on the collective effort that resulted in Fiaz’s win:

451 Well it’s [Fiaz election] the culmination of a lot of effort, from all of us [New 14(2)]
452

453 Labelling this a Momentum win, that is the press [...] they just write some really lazy pieces about this
454 being a Corbyn thing, but no, we working on this from before the last elections. I mean I think I
455 mentioned this to you at the time, going the route of changing the labour candidate was, because really
456 it’s a one party state here, so that was the best method of bringing some democracy back [New 16(2)]
457

458 Fiaz is a Newham candidate not Momentum, Momentum has been a good rallying point, but it only
459 gave fuel to a fire [New 19(2)]
460
461

462 The scope of this piece does not allow for a discussion of Momentum, but what may be
463 happening at a larger scale should not overshadow local level resistance. Indeed this
464 respondent drew a line from the resilience policy of L.B.N to Fiaz’s victory:

465 Wales wanted resilience in the borough right? He got it [...] the people of Newham are resilient not in
466 the way he wanted though [laughs]. [New 17(2)]

467 Resilience is reconfigured here, then, as something collective and subversive of the intention
468 of L.B.N’s resilience agenda which was called out as a policy of assimilation:

469 If you had any doubts on what the resilience agenda was all about all you had to hear was how Wales
470 handled the leadership contest with Fiaz [...] his barely suppressed fear and rage leaked out [...] Being
471 resilient, (laughs) it was all a dressed up attempt at assimilation, at annihilation of difference
472 [New 17(2)]

473 During the internal battle for the mayoral nomination Wales argued that ‘community politics’
474 were at play, and claimed that ‘Muslim party members’ were signed up to vote against him.
475 He pointed to the former Mayor of Tower Hamlets (who was found guilty of voting fraud in

476 2015) as an example of what happens when ‘minority ethnic party activists separate residents
477 rather than bring them together’ (Waugh, 2018b). The continued characterisation of Muslim
478 residents as separating (and therefore non-resilient), even while at the heart of local politics,
479 illuminates the work of political misdirection the concept sustains. ‘Bad’ subjects could be
480 named by drawing on racial scripts but simultaneously couched in supposedly neutral
481 psycho-social parlance. However, this time there was a public reframing of these comments
482 by Fiaz, who labelled them ‘appalling dog-whistle politics’ (Waugh, 2018a).

483 Hence is Fiaz’s election a win for resistance over resilience? The new administration has
484 distanced itself from the private housing policies previously advocated as building resilience.
485 One month before the 2018 local elections financial irregularities in Newham council were
486 reported by auditors, with funds ‘misaid’ and 80% of council tax going to pay off high
487 interest loans to fund the previous administrations private housing scheme (Moore 2017).
488 Two weeks into Fiaz’s term two financial officers left the council (Cusack 2018). As of 2019
489 though, L.B.N website still promotes resilience, no new documentation has been produced,
490 but the core documents still feature as a part of official policy and the social housing
491 allocation polices have not changed since 2016. Protest by local people in relation to housing
492 is ongoing, most prominently by the Focus E15 campaign^{iv} and lately by residents of
493 temporary and emergency accommodation. Attending a council meeting in July 2019
494 residents drew on L.B.N’s resilience policy as a focal point of their protest. Resident
495 ‘Egwolo’ drew from these policies to point out the difficulty of practicing resilience, while
496 enduring housing inequality:

497 Newham Council website talks about building a resilient community [...] residents have spent months,
498 and years in our current situation and to ask us to wait patiently [...] goes beyond the resilience
499 required of any individual. (Focus E15 campaign 2019)

500 With this, does the long history of resistance in the Borough have a new rallying point, that of
501 opposition to the political discourse of resilience itself?

502

503 Conclusion

504 Boyden and Cooper (2007) argue any definition of resilience is largely ambiguous as most
505 attempts to measure it are based on a pre-existing understanding of risk. This relies on
506 assumptions of what individuals and communities have been, need to be, and should be
507 resilient to. L.B.N’s policy approach clearly presumed diversity to be a risk factor, yet
508 neglected to consider the risks of their own policies. Moreover, rather than seeking to foster

509 the already evident resistance in the community, they instead identified this as threat to
510 resilience policy itself. As Neocleous (2013) argues, resilience often finds its
511 definition against resistance. Resilience seeks accommodation; it demands we use our actions
512 to acquiesce to capital and the state. Demanding resilience demands capitulation, not
513 resistance. While critiques of the resilience discourse rightly point out the absurdity of
514 holding individuals responsible for the instabilities of neoliberalism, the case of Newham
515 emphasises that policies of resilience are not supposed to work. It functions much as
516 Bourdieu and Wacquant (1999) argue as a ‘screen discourse’ where questions of racialised
517 inequality are deflected through implicit notions of cultural deficit, ironic given the history of
518 resilience scholarship is rooted in fighting such conceptions.

519
520 Garrett warns of the importance of being attuned to the motivation behind ‘resilience talk’, as
521 a way to expose its role in solidifying ‘the neo-liberal hegemonic order’ (2016: 1912). The
522 case of Newham emphasises the racializing mechanisms within that order, where good and bad
523 subjects are defined, supposedly through individual attributes, yet coded by collective
524 racialized imaginations. With policies of resilience proliferating across Britain and globally at
525 a time of right wing populism, policy makers cannot continue to present terms like resilience
526 as neutral, as though its anonymity isn’t simultaneously created, all too easily woven into
527 institutionally racist policy. Indeed, even if one does not accept the institutional racism at risk
528 with policies of resilience, at the very least the case of Newham asks the question of whether
529 personal attributes should ever be mandated by policy? Surely, personality traits are not the
530 business of social institutions as at the very least the measurement of them are based on
531 assumptions and quite likely on prejudices, dangerous to institute in policy. If social policy
532 insists on social and personal uniformity to be effective, its focus is not on facilitating the
533 community, but in the words of our respondents on ‘annihilating’ it. Annihilation lurks too
534 within the embrace local policy makers have with the concept itself. Austerity measures from
535 central government under the guise of resilience have deeply affected local councils, yet the
536 very rationale used to cut their funding is what they have embraced. While in the short term
537 these measures may bring savings, how can councils viably contest Westminster or wider
538 global neo-liberal forces, if they have acquiesced so completely? Perhaps local councils
539 should take a lesson from the playbook of Newham’s third sector and resist resilience.

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ⁱ Core spending in 2016-2017 was recorded as 251.7m in 2019/2020 spending is estimated at 259m.

ⁱⁱ Demos is a think tank criticised for their approach to issues of ethnicity. The evidence base L.B.N uses draws from Demos' work (L.B.N 2013c)

ⁱⁱⁱ Momentum is a grassroots organisation supportive of Jeremy Corbyn as labour leader.

^{iv} E15 is a campaign group formed of young mothers served eviction notices after Newham Council cut funding to housing associations.