

**CARIBBEAN REPRESENTATION ON BBC TELEVISION:
A CASE STUDY OF *SMALL AXE* PENTALOGY**

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates Caribbean representation on BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) television through a case study of Steve McQueen's *Small Axe* pentalogy. *Small Axe* references an African proverb popularized by Jamaican reggae singer Bob Marley – “If you are the big tree, we are the Small Axe /Sharpened to cut you down” – which means in essence, continuous action, no matter how small can eventually result in meaningful change. That said, metaphorically speaking, McQueen has used the proverbial axe to make a dent on a mainstream platform, delving into largely uncharted territory and giving representation to people of Caribbean descent in a way that has not been done before. Thus, in this thesis, the argument is made that *Small Axe* has broken new ground on BBC television, paving a new path for other filmmakers who want to change the narrative and write the West Indian experience into British history. Specifically, the study seeks to analyse the ways in which McQueen uses content and form in a collection of five films to highlight the less familiar aspects of British history involving the experience of Caribbean immigrants in Britain from the 1960s through 1980s. Until then, the West Indian struggle for equality in Britain from the perspective of the said immigrants has been rarely seen on British screens. Consequently, McQueen intended to address this cinematic scarcity and write London's West Indian community into British history, bringing to light the real life experiences of Caribbean immigrants such as structural racism, discriminatory policing and racial disparity in education. The importance of McQueen's *Small Axe* pentalogy for Black British cinema cannot be overstated and is even more significant in light of the 2018 Windrush scandal in which the Home Office has been revealed to be denying Caribbean immigrants and their children British citizenship.

Furthermore, the British government's April 2021 report on the state of race relations in the United Kingdom and subsequent recommendations to mitigate racial disparities suggest that the problems affecting Blacks in Britain as highlighted in the *Small Axe* films are as relevant today as they were during the period depicted in the films. Produced in collaboration with BBC Films, *Small Axe* is significant for many reasons, not least because it has made its mark in an industry traditionally unwelcoming to stories about immigrant communities. The five films are thematically intertwined, with each exploring a distinct aspect of the Caribbean immigrant experience, pushing the boundaries of cinema and representation for people of colour, rarely seen on BBC television. Throughout the series McQueen shows his commitment to detail and historical accuracy to ensure authenticity is achieved regarding the Black experience in Britain, in a way that resonates with West Indians and other immigrant communities.

Using Berry's (1997) Acculturation Theory, scene analysis is conducted to explore the narrative of the 'Caribbean immigrant experience' in Britain as presented in *Small Axe*. In doing so, an argument is presented that through each protagonist, with the

unconventional use of lighting, camera angles, framing and point-of-view, McQueen sheds light on the Black experience in a British society that is steeped in racism and discrimination. Indeed, McQueen's unparalleled success in retelling British history through the perspective of West Indian immigrants demonstrates that *Small Axe* is of considerable importance in relation to the reshaping of Caribbean representation on BBC television, particularly on the subject of the unrepresented or under-represented history of Caribbean immigrants in Britain.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my baby girl Kaya who has been with me on this journey every step of the way. We smile together, always.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This MA thesis aims to investigate Caribbean representation on BBC television through the prism of Steven McQueen's *Small Axe* (2020) series. The misrepresentation of Caribbean people in the British media dates back to the early 1900s when, through their own misperceptions and ill-informed notions and beliefs about Black immigrants, White media practitioners often depicted this minority group around the polar construction of 'us' and 'them', frequently causing dissatisfaction among Black viewers (Long, 2011: 266). The White domination of British media meant that Black representation on television, often steeped in ethnic stereotypes, provided a distorted and misguided image of the Caribbean community rather than presenting a true picture of the day-to-day realities of Blacks living in Britain. In contrast with media representations of Caribbean immigrants in the decades following their arrival in Britain in 1948, Caribbean representation on BBC television has changed significantly in the last few years. A ground-breaking example of this is the 2020 BBC pentalogy film series *Small Axe*, created and directed by Steve McQueen. This five-part drama series recounts the experiences of first and second generation West Indians living in Britain through their own perspective, redefining the Black-British experience and pushing the boundaries of television drama on the BBC.

In light of this, the objectives of this thesis include an examination of the history of Caribbean representation on BBC television and the extent to which the BBC presented a distorted image of the Caribbean community following their arrival in Britain. BBC films and television series such as *A Man From The Sun* (1956, John Elliot), *Rainbow City* (1967, John Elliot), *Black Christmas* (1977, Stephen Frears) and *Empire Road* (1978 – 1979, Horace Ové) will be discussed in an attempt to investigate the ways in which Caribbean stereotypes have been reinforced or subverted on British television from the 1950s to the 1970s. In addition to this will be a discussion on the evolution of Caribbean representation on BBC TV from the period 1980s to 2000s. Furthermore, this thesis will explore the ways in which the Black British experience has been presented in the *Small Axe* series and the extent to which the series repositions Caribbean representation on BBC television. Given the focus of this study, the following primary question will need to be answered: How does *Small Axe* reshape Caribbean representation on BBC television by means of its form and content? However, before addressing this, it would be important to first explain the purpose of this research, why it is necessary and what exactly constitutes the term 'Caribbean'.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate Caribbean representation on BBC television through a case study of the *Small Axe* pentalogy. In recent times, due to the successful campaigning of anti-racist and equal rights groups, several films and TV programmes such as *Gone with the Wind* (1939, Victor Fleming) and *Little Britain* (2003, BBC) have been pulled from streaming platforms due to their offensive content, thereby shedding new light on the way Black people are depicted in the media (Moses, 2020; Victor, 2020).

This unprecedented move to remove controversial content has opened up new debates on representation in film and television.

As it relates to the Black experience in Britain and other countries around the world where Whites makes up the vast majority, the global fight for racial justice and equality seemed to have reached a historical peak in 2020 following the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA. Floyd, a 46 year old Black man was killed under the knee of a White police officer with footage circulating around the world of him pleading, “I can’t breathe” (Gottbrath, 2020). The murder of Floyd triggered a wave of global demonstrations and reignited protests in support of the #BlackLivesMatter campaign – a social movement which began in 2013, calling for action to address racism, oppression and inequality experienced by Black people.

It is in light of these developments that this research finds its impact. By considering these and other social issues relating to equality, diversity and inclusion, this thesis makes a significant contribution to the discourse on the latest phenomena of Caribbean representation in the current landscape of BBC television programming.

1.2 Need for the Study

The representation of Blacks on British television is a topic that has piqued the interest of researchers and critics in the immediate post Second World War years when Britain saw an increase in migration flows from Commonwealth countries. While important scholarship exists on media representations of Blacks and other minority groups in Britain, little scholarly attention has been paid specifically to Caribbean representation on BBC television. Also, the period covered in preceding studies only extends to the early 2000s. This research gap suggests that the role played by the BBC in shaping behaviour in British society as it relates to the representation of Caribbean migrants in the United Kingdom is largely undocumented. Certainly, with the BBC being the world’s largest and oldest broadcaster, this move to examine BBC television’s involvement in the history of British race relations with the Caribbean community is long overdue. It is therefore necessary to make a critical intervention in the study of Caribbean representation on BBC and given that *Small Axe* has, as a series, broken new ground, this makes it a key work which enables us to investigate the reshaping of Caribbean representation on BBC television.

1.3 Definition of Terms

In order to help define the parameters of this study, it is necessary to clarify the term ‘Caribbean’. For the purposes of this research, the term “Caribbean” or “Caribbean people” will be used to refer to people originating from Caribbean Commonwealth countries - the first large group of immigrants to the United Kingdom during the first World War. Known as the Windrush generation, these migrants came from British territories in the Caribbean, including Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados, Grenada and Dominica. This definition also extends to include those of Caribbean descent living in Britain. It is worthy to note however that during the period of colonialization in the

fifteenth century, the British colonies in the Caribbean were referred to as the West Indies, and so people originating from the islands are called West Indians – a term coined by European colonisers, which therefore carries imperialistic connotations. That said, the works surveyed within this thesis as well as the literature reviewed make particular reference to the ‘West Indians’ in Britain and so in this thesis, both terms are used interchangeably.

1.4 Research Questions

The primary focus for this research is Caribbean representation on BBC television. In particular, this thesis will consider how the *Small Axe* series reshapes Caribbean representation on BBC television. In order to investigate Caribbean representation on BBC television through a case study of the *Small Axe* pentalogy, this thesis will answer the following research questions: What is the history of Caribbean representation on BBC television? Also, to what extent might the BBC be considered to have neglected its mandate to serve all audiences by representing diverse groups and communities within the UK in relation to the mis- or under- representation of Caribbean people and culture in the UK? Furthermore, what is the unrepresented or under-represented history of Caribbean migration to the UK? In relation to the SMALL AXE series, this thesis will consider how and why might SMALL AXE be considered important in relation to the reshaping of Caribbean representation on BBC television, particularly in relation to the unrepresented or under-represented history of Caribbean migration to the UK? And finally, how, why and to what extent does SMALL AXE reorient the representation of Caribbean people and culture in the UK by means of its form and content?

As it relates to the history of Caribbean representation on BBC television, the films and television series analysed in this study were selected based on their status as iconic and ground-breaking of their time, with themes depicting Caribbean immigrant life in Britain. To consider the importance of *Small Axe* in relation to reshaping Caribbean representation on British television, an analysis of the five films – *Mangrove*, *Lovers Rock*, *Red*, *White and Blue*, *Alex Wheatle* and *Education* was conducted.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

1.5.1 Introduction

The theoretical framework which underpins the analysis of Caribbean representation on BBC television through the prism of the *Small Axe* pentalogy is that of ‘acculturation’ as it relates to preserving as well as forming of identities in adoptive societies. Much of the theoretical insight here comes from the work of J. W. Berry, who is known for his research on how immigrants and indigenous groups adapt in their new environments following constant intercultural contact with people of a different culture. For the purposes of this thesis, Berry’s acculturation theory (1997) will be applied in order to analyse the Caribbean immigrant experience in Britain as represented in the *Small Axe* films.

This section will therefore discuss Berry's model of acculturation, explaining the four acculturation strategies – assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization and critical perspectives on this model. Finally, a rationale for choosing this analytical tool for this research will be offered with an explanation of how Berry's theory can help in the understanding of the acculturation attitudes of the Windrush generation and their descendants in light of the Black British experience as presented in the *Small Axe* series.

1.5.2 Acculturation Theory

The traditional definition of acculturation refers to the sociocultural “process of acquiring aspects of a foreign culture by an individual, or a group of people who were born in a different cultural sphere” (Newworldencyclopedia.org, 2019). As a concept, acculturation has been the cornerstone of understanding how individuals adapt and change as a result of continuous contact with culturally dissimilar people (Gibson 2001: 19). Drawing from Postcolonial and Diaspora theories, acculturation analysis has been used to investigate the variability of the experience of immigrants from the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East as they adapt and settle in Western societies (Gibson 2001: 19).

1.5.3 Berry's Acculturation Framework

Berry attests to the efficacy of the concept of acculturation for academics working specifically in the field of cross-cultural psychology (Sam and Berry, 2010). Berry defines acculturation as “the process of cultural and psychological change that results following meeting between cultures” (Sam and Berry 2010: 472) Acculturation was initially conceptualized as a unidimensional process whereby new arrivals undergo a process of adaptation which eventually leads to assimilation. Berry however argues that acculturation is two-dimensional. The first dimension recognises that individuals retain or reject their heritage cultures while the second dimension concerns the adoption or rejection of the culture of the host society. According to Berry's model of acculturation, depending on whether the individual chooses to retain or reject their heritage culture/ethnic identity or adopt or reject the behaviours and values of the mainstream society, the individual adopts an acculturation attitude of assimilation, separation, integration or marginalization (Berry 1997: 9). The ‘assimilation’ strategy refers to individuals who adopt the cultural norms of the host country over their heritage culture. This often results in the loss of their ethnic/cultural identity due to the complete absorption of the dominant culture (ibid). In contrast, ‘separation’ occurs when individuals have a desire to maintain their original cultural identity and at the same time reject the values of the host culture, to the extent where, in some cases, they avoid interaction with members of the dominant society (Berry 1997: 9). ‘Integration’ refers to the desire to preserve key elements of the immigrant's original culture while simultaneously adopting the cultural norms of the dominant society. In this case, “some degree of cultural integrity is maintained” and these individuals are often referred to as bicultural (Berry 1997: 9). Finally, ‘marginalization’ occurs when there is a desire to

reject both the original culture and that of the mainstream society. As it relates to the latter, often there is little interest in social interaction with others due to “reasons of exclusion or discrimination” (Berry 1997: 9).

It should be noted that Berry’s model has faced criticism for its position on both retaining the heritage culture and identity, and the adoption of the host culture. In response to this, critics have proposed the idea that in the dominant culture, immigrants are constantly creating, recreating, deconstructing and negotiating their cultural identities (Dominelli, 2002). However according to Berry, individuals and groups may experience acculturation to varying degrees, and for some, “acculturative changes may all be in the form of stressors, while for others, they may be benign or seen as opportunities” (Berry et al 1987: 493-494). In cases where individuals encounter conflicting cultural behaviours during “acculturative change” and experience what has been traditionally known as “culture shock”, Berry refers to this as “acculturative stress” (Berry 1997: 13). He explains by saying, “the notion of shock carries only negative connotations, while stress can vary from positive to negative” (Berry 2006: 294). Acculturative stress refers to the problems associated with being an outsider in a mainstream society and going through the acculturation process. This comes about when immigrants or ethnic minorities experience change events in their lives that challenge their cultural behaviours. These events may be stressful as a result of issues related to lack of social support, language barriers, identity struggles, cultural differences and discrimination. “In these situations, they come to understand that they are facing problems resulting from intercultural contact that cannot be dealt with easily or quickly by simply adjusting or assimilating to them” (Berry 2006: 294).

Berry posits that the demographic, social and psychological attributes of the acculturating individual can affect the acculturation stress relationship (Berry et al. 1987: 495). He says, while some individuals may possess a variety of coping strategies that allow them to adapt successfully to acculturation, others are unable to cope, and this results in high acculturative stress (Berry et al. 1987: 495).

The ways in which immigrants cope with acculturative stress has been a matter of much interest to psychologists in their study of acculturation (Berry, 1997). Caribbean immigrants in Britain are among those who experience acculturative stress as there is substantial evidence suggesting that this community encounters racism and discrimination in education, housing, employment, healthcare and the criminal justice system. However, to date, there is very little empirical research using Berry’s acculturation model in the United Kingdom, particularly as it relates to the psychological acculturation of Caribbean migrants in Britain. Moreover, while there have been investigations on how acculturation, acculturative stress and racial discrimination affect immigrants in mainstream societies, there are no studies specifically looking at the representation of acculturation in film, particularly in regard to the Caribbean community, and this is a gap which this research aims to address.

Berry’s model of acculturation is highly regarded in the field and thus has influenced the approach taken in this study to analyse the Caribbean immigrant experience in Britain as represented on BBC television and in the *Small Axe* series in particular. Berry’s framework seems appropriate for *Small Axe*, as, in contrast to the initial concept of

acculturation being a one-dimensional process, where individuals or groups either retain their original heritage culture and reject the dominant culture, or vice versa, Berry has proposed a two dimensional model which intersect to create four acculturation strategies. This latter approach appears to be more in line with the experiences of the Caribbean immigrants and their children as presented in *Small Axe*, as while first generation immigrants may adopt the strategies of separation and marginalisation, their off-springs may be better adjusted, bicultural individuals and are therefore better able to integrate and assimilate into British society. Consequently, their experiences of discrimination and acculturative stress will be significantly different. A phenomenon that will be discussed later in Chapter 5.

1.6 Rationale of Chapters

Having provided an explanation for the importance of this study, a practical definition of the term Caribbean, the research questions to be answered as well as the theoretical framework applied in this research, this section will now outline the chapters of this thesis. Firstly, Chapter 2 presents a Literature Review with an evaluation of existing scholarship on Caribbean representation, particularly on BBC television. Secondly, Chapter 3 will provide an outline of the methodology used to analyse the textual and visual representations of the Caribbean immigrant experience in Britain as presented in the BBC productions from the 1950s to the 1970s as well as McQueen's *Small Axe* (2020) series. Following this, Chapter 4 will be a discussion on the history of Caribbean representation on BBC television. This section will consider the extent to which the BBC might be considered to have neglected its mandate to serve all audiences by representing diverse groups and communities within the UK in relation to the mis- or under-representation of Caribbean people and culture in Britain. This will therefore include a discussion on the BBC's mission, public purposes and remit as a public service broadcaster (PSB) and its effect on representation of minority groups on television, particularly the Caribbean community. In relation to the question 'what is the unrepresented or under-represented history of Caribbean migration to the UK' this chapter will also include a survey of BBC television productions which attempted to highlight the experiences of Caribbean immigrants in Britain as early as the 1950s with a discussion on the extent to which the broadcaster played a role in advancing distorted representations of the Caribbean community in Britain. As a point of comparison, this section will also include a brief survey of Caribbean representation on other PSBs such as Channel 4. Chapter 5 will then focus on the BBC *Small Axe* series paying particular attention to film form and content and the ways in which this series may have reshaped Caribbean representation on BBC television. Finally, the conclusion of this research will reflect on the narrative and visual style adopted by McQueen to celebrate Black British voices in the *Small Axe* series and how this may impact the future of Caribbean representation on BBC television.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review aims to examine the history of Caribbean representation on BBC television and will provide an evaluation of existing scholarship that specifically address Black representation on British television in general, as well as works that explicitly address Caribbean representation on the BBC. This review will focus on studies undertaken by Sarita Malik, Darrell Newton and Gavin Schaffer.

2.1 Caribbean Representation on British Television

Nine months after being the first Black female reporter on British television, in 1968, Jamaican journalist Barbara Blake-Hannah was dismissed from her job at Thames TV without warning. Her dismissal came after several complaints from viewers who demanded that station bosses “get that nigger off our screens” (Johnson-Obeng, 2020). Blake-Hannah was later hired as a researcher with the BBC, working behind the scenes on a television documentary and current affairs series (Jolaoso, 2020).

The issue of Black representation on British television has been a topic of recurring interest to scholars in the fields of film, media and cultural studies. Research on minority representation in British media often focus on Black representation in general and very rarely give attention to Caribbean representation in particular. On the rare occasions that they do, studies often investigate representation in all forms of media and not BBC television specifically. This therefore begs the question: ‘What is the history of Caribbean representation on BBC television?’ This is a very pertinent question given the main purpose of this thesis is to examine the ways in which Caribbean people have been represented on BBC television and how this representation has evolved over the years to this present day, in light of the creation of Steve McQueen’s *Small Axe* series. That said, studies that explore Black representation on BBC television, particularly as it relates to Caribbean communities, form the foundation of this thesis.

While previous studies by researchers such as Newton and Malik highlight the issue of misrepresentation or underrepresentation of Black and other ethnic groups in the UK, this research, with its specific focus on Caribbean representation through the prism of McQueen’s *Small Axe* films, will make a significant contribution to scholarly discourses within film, media and Caribbean cultural studies. This section will therefore evaluate the work undertaken by Sarita Malik, Darrell Newton and Gavin Schaffer following on from the pioneering work of Stuart Hall in an attempt to provide an overview of the history of Caribbean representation on BBC television.

2.2 Representing Black Britain

Sarita Malik’s ground-breaking study, *Representing Black Britain – Black and Asian Images on Television* (2002) makes a solid contribution to the literature on race relations, media representation and politics in Britain. A former student of Hall, Malik presents a critical analysis of Black and Asian representation on British television from the post war period to 2000. Her work on the ‘Black British’ experience covers a range of television

genres such as film, drama, sitcoms, comedy and documentaries on British television channels including the BBC. Although not necessarily focussed on Caribbean representation, Malik's study has been found to be useful to this research as she gives a comprehensive analysis of Black representation on British television, taking into consideration how race and identity are constructed through these representations. Despite its limitation (with a general focus on Black and Asian images), Malik's work contains several important observations relevant to this discussion on Caribbean representation on BBC television. In viewing representation within the broad context of race and politics, Malik argues that policy and power play an integral role in how "meaning, difference, identity and subjectivity" are formed to produce what she refers to as "representations of race" (Malik 2002: 26).

With regards to British race relations, Malik contends that generally Britain has been "perceived to have a 'good multicultural record', and its television is often held up as a mark of success in respect to this" (Malik, 2002: 1). Notwithstanding this observation, Malik acknowledges that Britain's colonial past and racist relations with Black people is often revisited in the form of visual representations on British television. Such is the case in 'Black situation comedy' which according to Malik, "relies heavily on 'the situation and on the effects of repetition and familiarity, making the history of 'race sitcoms' and Black comedy a useful barometer of popular opinion on race at specific moments and over time" (Malik 2002: 91). Malik observes, some argue that "comedy needs to offend to be funny" and that in race sitcoms, "reductive ethnic simplifications are maintained, intensified and endorsed" (Malik 2002: 91). Malik illustrates how 'ambivalence' becomes a recurring pattern of the comedy text in its representations of Blackness on British television with the prevalence of racist stereotypes. In doing so, Malik turns her attention to the colonial legacy of the 'Blacks as entertainers' tradition, "established during the Elizabethan era" with caricatures of Blacks appearing "as the butt of the joke" (Malik 2002: 92). She says, "the focal point of ambivalence is the Black television entertainer which we can trace back to 1936 when Buck and Bubbles made their appearance on the opening day of the BBC television service at Alexandra Palace" (Malik 2002: 91). Malik sees the Black entertainment tradition as "an ambiguous form of showmanship" and refers to Hall's comment on the comic figure putting on a show for others. "It is never quite clear whether we are laughing with or at this figure: admiring the physical and rhythmic grace, the open expressivity and emotionality of the 'entertainer' or put off by the 'clown's stupidity'" (Hall in Malik 2002: 92).

Malik notes that by the mid-1960s, television shows "working against the grain of expected liberal caution" began to emerge (Malik 2002: 92). She draws attention to the sitcom *Till Death Do Us Part* (1965) aired on BBC1 between 1966 and 1975. She states that the show signalled a significant change in the way issues surrounding Black people were addressed on British television. According to Malik, "[the sitcom] has been held up as the classic model which points to the knotty issues around racism, comic intention, impact, authorship and context" (Malik 2002: 92). Furthermore, she posits, the sitcom which was edging towards the top of tv ratings and viewed in at least half the homes in Britain at the time, "with its direct reference to racial difference and more particularly to Black people, signalled a drastic break from television's habitually 'polite' and awkward

response towards racial themes thus far” (Malik 2002: 92). The BBC sitcom drew criticism from viewers, Black and White alike, and the BBC came under fire for its treatment of Black people. Notwithstanding the fact that the show had no regular Black characters, Malik argues that “[the character] Alf was referring to Black people in a derogatory way when they had no significant right of reply in the programme or on British television at large” (Malik 2002: 94).

In her article *How Little Britain Does Race*, Malik delves further into her study exploring the relationship between ethnicity and comedy, by analysing *Little Britain* (2003), a popular sketch show produced by and aired on the BBC. The comedy series was first aired as a radio show on BBC Radio 4 in 2000 and then later adopted as a television series which ran for three seasons on BBC1. Despite its popularity with a mainstream audience, the show has been criticised for its heavy use of racial stereotypes with its creators appearing in ‘Blackface’ in various sketches. In her commentary on the BBC comedy sketch show, Malik expresses concern that its stereotypical portrayals of race perpetuate discriminatory cultures and further isolate minority groups that are already marginalised. She states, “middle-class White men [have] been granted a platform to parody less powerful groups in the community when the presence of members of marginalised groups in the mainstream is decreasing” (Malik 2010: 77).

Malik’s detailed analysis of ‘race sitcoms’ on British television, particularly portrayals of Black and Asians, juxtaposed with the politics of Black representation and the institutional context of British productions are helpful in the consideration of Caribbean representation on BBC television. Furthermore, in addition to her analysis of race on British television, Malik recognizes the paucity of available material to study Black representation given the fact that much of the programmes are not preserved to allow for easy access. According to her, while the National Archives stores a vast amount of valuable material, absent in its collection is material which has featured or been filmed by Black filmmakers (Malik 2002: 4). She states, “the impression of an easily accessible, comprehensive and lovingly cultivated television archive on which a critical history could be solidly based is, therefore, largely a myth” (Malik 2002: 4). This scarcity of archival material featuring Black people, particularly those of Caribbean descent is an issue which was encountered while researching for this thesis and will be explained in more detail in Chapter 4.

2.3 BBC Television and Black Britons

As mentioned earlier, the majority of studies that investigate minority representation in British media do not necessarily focus on Caribbean representation in particular, but rather Black representation in general. The work of Darrell Newton appears to be one of the few exceptions, investigating the representation of what he refers to as ‘African-Caribbeans’ on BBC radio and television programmes. In contrast with Malik’s study, Newton’s *Paving the Empire Road – BBC Television and Black Britons* (2013) provides a thorough examination of BBC’s policies and its impact on African-Caribbean representation against the backdrop of race relations in Britain.

Newton's work is particularly useful to this research as he focuses on institutional factors which influenced editorial decisions, in his analysis of the history of Caribbean participation on BBC television from the 1930s to the post-millennium era. In order to examine the internal dynamics of the BBC, Newton consulted the Corporation's archival documents and policy papers as well as transcripts of meetings and discussions with several media practitioners. He noted that as early as 1922, the BBC developed a public service agenda under the directorship of Sir John Reith and attempted to "serve audiences with an intention to acculturate them on every subject deemed acceptable" (Newton 2011: 17).

He notes that the emergence of BBC television coincided with Britain becoming more ethnically diverse following the war and so the Corporation made attempts to include programmes focussing on race and ethnicity as part of its ongoing commitment as a public service broadcaster (Newton 2011: 51). Like Malik, Newton refers to the introduction of the Black Entertainers on BBC television noting that their presence "provided a basis for the first representation of Black people on BBC television" (Newton 2011: 45). Newton noted that early television programmes on BBC featured several Black American performers such as Elisabeth Welch, Adelaide Hall and Winifred Atwell. Of Welch, he says "audiences loved her, and she was in many ways safe within her confines as an African-American entertainer (Newton 2011:45). According to Newton, "Welch's heritage was met with a great degree of acceptability to most White viewers particularly when compared to the problematic aspects of the West Indian immigrant" (Newton 2011: 45). Welch's contemporary Adelaide Hall, however, had a very different experience. In fact, Newton's research revealed that Hall, in an open letter to the BBC Programme Director, accused the BBC of racist practices. The letter implied that a colour bar existed within the BBC and as a consequence she was not hired by the television producer for a particular show (Newton 2011: 46).

In relation to Hall's experience, Newton acknowledges that her encounter was not unlike that of other West Indians who took a cautious approach to the "possibilities of cultural assimilation" (Newton 2011: 47). He does this by discussing the ways in which the concerns of many West Indian immigrants were later reflected on BBC television programmes such as "John Elliot's teleplay *A Man from the Sun* (1956) [which] attempted to highlight the post-war immigration issue" albeit from the fictional perspective of the character Cleve, and other television programmes which analysed "social issues such as the colour bar, in a country where one supposedly did not exist" (Newton 2011: 16). Moreover, Newton identifies the dilemma which faced BBC television bosses, which was the desire to "develop some degree of autonomy" while abiding by the "BBC's exacting standards" (Newton 2011: 52). It is also important to highlight that according to Newton, the BBC's efforts to diversify its television programmes by way of shedding light on the lives of the West Indian immigrants became controversial and was met with a backlash from the White British public. He remarks, "As the service attempted to address the issues of race in later documentaries and teleplays, these matters became more controversial as viewers witnessed immigrants arriving on Empire Windrush" (Newton 2011: 53).

In terms of culturally diverse content aimed at the Caribbean community, Newton draws on a range of BBC television programmes which featured West Indian actors and

performers such as the variety show *Music Makers* (1948), *Bal Creole* (1950) and *Caribbean Cabaret* (1951) to illustrate the ways in which the BBC attempted to create culturally diverse content to address misconceptions about race and to give representation to the growing Caribbean community in Britain (Newton 2011: 53-54). That said, the BBC has also been heavily criticised for its offensive stereotypical representations of Black people on television. An example of this is the weekly variety show known as *The Black and White Minstrel Show* which first aired in 1958 featuring White singers and actors performing in Blackface. The show drew much criticism from the West Indian community, particularly the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination (CARD) who petitioned for the show to be terminated. Clive West a Trinidadian immigrant met with the BBC on behalf of the West Indian community and presented the petition requesting an end to the show stating, “this hideous impersonation is quite offensive and causes much distress to most coloured people” (Grandy, 2019).

Similarly, in his article documenting the history of the BBC, Professor David Hendy says, “*The Black and White Minstrel Show*, which ran from 1958 to 1978 was arguably the BBC’s most glaring failure to understand the damage it could do when it traded in out-dated stereotypes” (Hendy, 2019). Hendy states:

What’s harder to fathom is why, in an era in which tens of thousands of Black people had long been settled in Britain or were trying to make it their home, a BBC which had already managed to reflect something of the reality of Black British life in documentaries such as 1955’s *‘Has Britain a Colour Bar’* and the dramas such as 1956’s *‘A Man from the Sun’*, took so little account of the offence caused by White performers Blacking-up their faces on a peak time TV show. (Hendy, 2019)

Newton echoes the views of Hendy in his assessment of the BBC’s treatment of *The Colour Bar* programme. According to him, documents reveal that several sequences present West Indian immigrants as either misunderstood or miserable about leaving their homelands and settling in Britain. He says, “Of the fifty-one scenes...thirty highlight issues of unemployment, racism, fears of miscegenation, housing issues and labour disputes” (Newton 2011: 74). Furthermore, based on the draft outline, Newton points out the partiality of the programme creators. He states that concerns over the presence of Black immigrants in the city of Birmingham was mainly presented from a White perspective. For example, scenes which were meant to illustrate lifestyle choices depicted the immigrant community negatively, as “West Indians shoot dice, hang out on street corners and sit with White women in pubs as White men scowl” (Newton 2011: 76). While several scenes showed dramatizations and actual interviews with ‘Whites, West Indians, Arabs and an African’, according to Newton, “the programme provides only one actual interview with a Jamaican man (James Walker) on his perceptions of life in the city” (ibid). Newton suggests that the choice to include the view of only one West Indian immigrant on the subject of racism pushes the agenda of those in authority “to frame these issues strategically”, and that the BBC’s reaction to the barring of coloured workers driving and conducting buses in Birmingham, “immediately altered the organization’s

creative ability to frame citizens' reactions and the stories of the West Indian experience in England" (Newton 2011: 77).

Newton concludes his study with findings from reports on the BBC's general treatment of ethnic minorities. In particular, he referred to a document prepared by Professor James Halloran et al on *Ethnic Minorities and Television* that included an evaluation of BBC programmes as it relates to ethnic minorities (Newton 2011: 216). He says according to the report, the Corporation was criticised for its negative portrayals of Blacks and Asians as well as an absence of these minorities in most popular programming. More specifically, Newton singled out the research conducted by Professor Karen Ross which revealed that soap operas and drama series were particularly prejudiced towards ethnic minorities as "only 5 per cent of characters were Black or Asian...[and] when featured, ethnic minorities were usually portrayed as criminals or drug abusers" (Newton 2011: 217). For instance, Ross, he says, cited that "*East Enders* featured a Black West Indian character who was dealing in stolen property" (Newton 2011: 16). As a result of her findings, Ross criticized BBC programmes like *Neighbours* (1985-2008), *Casualty* (1986-) *East Enders* (1985-) and crime drama *The Paradise Club* (1989-90) for negative stereotyping and depicting people of colour as highly problematic (Newton 2011:17). Based on these reports, Newton therefore concludes that these negative portrayals of West Indians "primarily served to reinforce the notion of immigrant life as culturally incongruent to Britishness" (Newton 2011:17).

2.4 Multiculturalism on British Television

Another important text that investigates the ways in which Blacks are represented on British media such as BBC television, is *The Vision of a Nation: Making Multiculturalism on British Television, 1960-80* (2014) by Gavin Schaffer, a leading scholar on British race relations and broadcast media. Schaffer's historical account of multiculturalism on British television builds on studies conducted by prominent researchers like Malik and Newton. In many ways, Schaffer's text is a significant work for this research, as he adopts a behind the scenes approach by engaging television content producers in order to understand the institutional, social and political factors that influenced the production of BBC's television programmes.

In the two decades covered in the study, the 1960s and 1970s, Schaffer discovered that a substantial effort was made by BBC programme makers to encourage integration and improve race relations in Britain. An example of this would be the introduction of the *Immigrants Programmes Unit (IPU)* in 1965. Referred to as 'an experiment in community relations' (BBC General Advisory Council, 1970), the programme illustrated the BBC's attempts to represent minority ethnic groups such as the Caribbean community and promote integration into British society. In a thorough examination of the IPU, Schaffer describes the organization as progressive, given their efforts to promote multiculturalism by creating content specifically aimed at immigrant communities. Despite this, Schaffer argues that to some extent, the IPU also perpetuated racial and ethnic difference particularly in regard to the West Indian community. He states, "following feedback from

Hugh Greene's 1965 conference on 'West Indian' immigrants, the idea of tailored programmes on national television for African-Caribbean immigrants had been discounted" (Schaffer 2014: 52). This therefore led to a complaint from a committee member of Radio London's *Black Londoner's* programme to the BBC Chairman stating that "the views of the West Indian representatives at the 1965 conference had been adopted 'without wide consultation' and were 'never representative of the views of the main elements of the West Indian community'" (Schaffer 2014: 52). This report therefore supports the argument that the Caribbean immigrant community has been to a large extent, misrepresented or underrepresented on BBC television since their arrival in Britain and in the decades that followed.

In an attempt to give a balanced view of immigrant representation on the BBC, Schaffer analyses a broad range of programmes such as news, current affairs, documentaries and situation comedies. It is important to highlight Schaffer's observation that coverage of news and current affairs on BBC television in the 1960s and 1970s bothered audiences of all colours (Schaffer 2014: 71). The broader issue, he argues, "was a growing political anxiety about the influence and power of television and whether it was being used in a fair and impartial manner" (Schaffer 2014: 72). In fact, as it relates to television news and current affairs, media theorists and academics saw biased reports "with increasing frequency as an inherent feature of television as a medium" (Schaffer 2014:72). For instance, Stuart Hall opined that the idea that a broadcaster could be objective with its television content was a "dangerous deception" (Schaffer 2014:72).

Interestingly, Schaffer notes that "the commitment of newsmakers to fairness and balance raised a complex problem when it came to the coverage of race relations and immigration (Schaffer 2014: 75). As a result, he questions whether it was the responsibility of the broadcaster encourage anti-racist views in the British psyche or were news and current affairs editors obliged to be disengaged in matters of race "in the spirit of fairness and balance" (Schaffer 2014: 76). As it relates to documentaries, on one hand, Schaffer contends that programmes such as the 1974 BBC Series *The Black Man in Britain 1550-1950* were created in the spirit of diversity and inclusion, "integrating Black and Asian stories into the White British imagination" to enable them to recognise the reality of multiculturalism in Britain (Schaffer 2014: 78). On the other hand, he analyses the controversial broadcasts in the BBC *Open Door* series, produced by the IPU and aired from 1973-83 and argues that while the series offered a platform for West Indian immigrants to let their voices be heard, it also provided the very same opportunity for those who opposed them, all in the name of 'fairness' and 'balance'. Schaffer opines, the series was "designed to give marginalised groups across British society an opportunity to express their views on television and canvas support" (Schaffer 2014: 143). He asserts that despite making its debut on a late night slot on BBC2 "as one journalist noted, 'the quietest take-off imaginable...unobserved by 99 per cent of the population', ...it could claim the title of the first nationwide access series in the world" (Schaffer 2014: 143). As an initiative to support Britain's ethnically diverse communities and a way to recognise multiculturalism in British society, Schaffer observes that the IPU was "only just part of the BBC, perceiving itself as 'a little guerrilla unit out on the edge'" (Schaffer 2014: 144). He also argues that while "broadcast media was often accused of reinforcing the political

status quo in this period...the Unit operated as a 'free space' where marginalised groups could resist, at least partially, the 'colonialization' of television's editorial policy" (Schaffer 2014: 144).

In his discussion on race comedies in the 1960s and 1970s, Schaffer analysed a range of television shows including the BBC popular sitcom *Till Death Do Us Part* (1965), with its controversial content of racial jokes at the expense of Blacks and Asians. He argued that situational comedies of the 1960s and 1970s provide what he refers to as "a social thermometer" (Schaffer 2014: 181), "a unique opportunity to engage with the racial values" which defined everyday life during that period (Schaffer 2014: 181).

In summary, based on Schaffer's investigation, it appears that significant progress has been made by the BBC in its efforts to promote diversity, inclusion and integration on British television. Despite their crude humour and insensitive representations of immigrants such as West Indians and other people of colour, the BBC continued to run the sitcoms as they were popular with audiences. Schaffer therefore notes that consequently, "sitcom writers have felt a freedom and protection afforded to them by this level of public popularity" (Schaffer 2014: 181).

Overall, Schaffer's study on the historical treatment of race and the representation of marginal groups in public-access broadcasting in Britain is quite relevant to this research and provides an overview fit for the purposes of this thesis. Certainly, it is important to emphasise that although the scholarship discussed in this literature review addresses the treatment of race on British television, it does not fully investigate how the Caribbean community is represented on BBC television in particular and how the work of contemporary filmmakers like Steve McQueen may contribute to the reshaping of Caribbean representation on BBC television.

3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research methodology used to analyse the textual and visual representations of the Caribbean immigrant experience in Britain, in the five instalments of the BBC *Small Axe* (2020) series directed by Steve McQueen. This will begin with a reflection on the qualitative approach using textual analysis which will be applied to analyse the narrative and stylistic elements of each of the *Small Axe* films. Following this will be a justification of the choice of methodology employed in the study, highlighting the steps followed in each stage of the analysis while linking the approach to the primary research question. At the end of the chapter, will be a discussion on the challenges encountered and limitations of this study.

3.1 Research Design

In order to fulfil the main objective of this study which is to investigate Caribbean representation on BBC television through a case study of the *Small Axe* pentalogy, a qualitative method will be used to analyse the content and form of the five installations of the *Small Axe* series. Textual analysis is a qualitative method used to examine content in media and popular culture such as films and television programmes (Fürsich, 2018). The purpose of textual analysis is to interpret the content, structure and functions of the messages contained in texts (Frey, Botan and Kreps, 1999). Fürsich (2018) argues that “text” can be interpreted in several ways. According to Fürsich, the goal of textual analysis is not to find one “true” interpretation but rather, explain all possible underlying meanings inscribed in the text (Fürsich, 2018). The method is closely linked to media and cultural studies and based on semiotic and interpretive approaches to examine the “underlying ideological and cultural assumptions of a text” (Fürsich, 2018).

3.1.1 Rationale of Textual Analysis

Textual analysis differs from other forms of qualitative content analysis due to its critical-cultural focus on power and ideology (Fürsich, 2018). It is often used to study a range of sensitive topics such as prejudice, discrimination and under-representation of minority groups in the media. When performing textual analysis, researchers are particularly interested in deconstructing representations as it relates to race, class, gender and sexuality (Fürsich, 2018).

Given that this thesis is largely focused on the formal and stylistic elements of McQueen’s television series, it is therefore useful to consider the aesthetic qualities of the *Small Axe* films as works of art made specifically for television and engage with the ideas of prominent scholars of ‘television aesthetics’ such as Sarah Cardwell and Jason Jacobs. In her work exploring ‘television aesthetics’ Cardwell (2006) contends that “television is a distinctive art” (Cardwell 2006: 76). She asserts that “the methodology of close textual analysis can enhance television studies, by focusing specifically on aesthetic matters” ...

to provide a better understanding of televisual scenes and their impact on “mood and engagement and their intimate connections with style and form” (Cardwell 2005: 179-180). In the study of television aesthetics, Cardwell proposes:

[A methodology that moves] from a close analysis and critique of thematic, formal and stylistic qualities present in a particular televisual sequence ... to explore some of the questions that arise from the peculiarities of a single work. [The objective is] to capture something of the individuality and distinctiveness of the programme, to evaluate and also address the more ‘theoretical’ questions that the programme raises. (Cardwell 2005: 180)

Like Cardwell, Jacobs (2001) opines that television is “a medium for artistic expression” and that a close analysis of television texts aims to inform and broaden perspectives on why audiences form powerful connections with programmes and why these programmes matter to them (Jacobs 2001: 427). As it pertains to analysing televisual texts, Jacobs asserts that the research methodology would require “a close observation of texts” in order to support the claims made about them (Jacobs 2001: 431). He states, “As with the analysis of all art, understanding our involvement with specific texts requires concentrated study” (ibid). According to him, detailed analysis enables the television scholar to articulate the impact of programmes on the viewer and “only in this way can we develop meaningful criteria for specific instances of television that may then be applied more generally” (Jacobs 2001: 431). Based on these philosophies, it can be concluded that close textual analysis is an effective method for analysing the “thematic, formal and stylistic elements” of television texts (Cardwell 2006: 72), and so this methodology was chosen to investigate Caribbean representation on BBC television through a case study of the *Small Axe* series.

3.1.2 Analysis

In this study, a qualitative approach has been taken applying Media Content Analysis to conduct a close reading of each of the *Small Axe* films to examine how McQueen’s use of narrative and form work together to communicate aspects of the Black British experience in a way that has not been done on BBC television before. A critical analysis of the key message in each film will also be provided by applying the concepts and theoretical framework which underpin this study. In an attempt to answer the research question, ‘How and why might *Small Axe* be considered important in the reshaping of Caribbean representation on BBC television, particularly in relation to the unrepresented or under-represented history of Caribbean migration to the UK?’, the narrative analysis will provide an examination of the story elements of the films such as theme, plot, narrative structure and character. In addition, an analysis of the stylistic composition of each film such as lighting, camera angles, sound, and music will be conducted in attempt to investigate the matter of how, why and to what extent *Small Axe* reorients the

representation of Caribbean people and culture in the UK by means of its form and content.

3.2 Limitations

This section addresses the limitations of this research project as well as the challenges encountered during the study.

3.2.1 Selected Texts

Given the focus of this research is how the Caribbean community is represented on BBC television, the programmes produced by the BBC prior to the *Small Axe* series are primary sources for this investigation. One of the issues encountered in the selection process is deciding which programmes to include in this snapshot of Caribbean representation on BBC television that are wholly representative of the BBC's attempt to address the Caribbean-British experience as well as its commitment to racial balance on television. In order to navigate this, the first wave of BBC television programmes which explored the lives of the Caribbean immigrants in the immediate decades following their arrival in Britain was analysed. The television programmes were selected based on their themes (depicting Caribbean immigrant life in Britain) and status as iconic and ground-breaking as described by critics at that time. It is important to note that an investigation of this nature is largely dependent on the texts selected and is thus subjective.

3.2.2 Limited Access to Primary Sources

During the initial stages of this research, it was increasingly challenging to get access to the BBC programmes which were selected for this study - i.e. *A Man From The Sun* (BBC, 1956), *Rainbow City* (BBC, 1967), *Black Christmas* (BBC, 1977) and *Empire Road* (BBC, 1978 - 1979). Several potential sources were consulted including video on-demand streaming services such as the BBC iPlayer, the British Film Institute (BFI) Player, YouTube, Prime Video and Netflix, to no avail. Furthermore, the programmes in question are not available for rent or purchase on VHS or DVD either. While several films and television programmes produced and starred by Whites are available on these channels, those pertaining to Black people, particularly those of the Windrush generation are not easily accessible as prior to 1989 there was no official archive of Black British television programmes produced by the BBC. Ultimately, access was gained to three of the four programmes through BBC Learning, the educational division of BBC Studios. This allowed for digital access to this valuable content albeit for a limited period. This experience has reinforced a deeper appreciation for this research and a renewed conviction that this project is indeed necessary to contribute to existing scholarship on Caribbean representation on BBC television.

4. HISTORY OF CARIBBEAN REPRESENTATION ON BBC TELEVISION

This section concerns the extent to which the BBC might be considered to have neglected its mandate to serve all audiences by representing diverse groups and communities in Britain. This investigation is pertinent as it relates to the mis- or under- representation of the Caribbean community on BBC television. This will begin by assessing the early days of the BBC, its mission statement and remit as a Public Service Broadcaster (PSB) and its effect on the representation of minority groups such as the Caribbean community. Subsequent to this, consideration is given to the definition of a PSB and the ways in which the Corporation has played a part in representing the West Indian immigrants through its television programmes. This discussion informs the next section which explores how the experiences of the Windrush arrivals have been presented to British television audiences and the extent to which the BBC played a role in advancing distorted representations of the West Indians through its television output. This will be achieved by analysing four BBC television ‘dramas’ which attempted to highlight the experiences of Caribbean immigrants in Britain in the three decades following their arrival at Tilbury Docks.

4.1 The BBC’s mission statement and public purposes

Since its establishment in 1927, the BBC has played a major role in British society and is recognised internationally not only as a reputable broadcaster but also a respected brand. At the time of its creation under the then Director-General Sir John Reith, it was decided that “a Royal Charter was the most suitable structure through which to establish an institution funded by public money but was editorially and journalistically independent of political control” (publications.parliament.uk, 2011).

Reviewed every ten years, the Royal Charter is the constitutional basis of the BBC which “sets out the public purposes of the BBC, guarantees its independence and outlines the respective duties of the BBC Trust and the Executive Board” (DCMS, 2013). The original Charter states that as a public service broadcaster, the BBC is tasked with providing ‘education’ and ‘entertainment’ to the public by means of broadcast. A revised version of the Royal Charter in 1937 added ‘information’ to the BBC’s duties and thereafter the phrase ‘inform, educate and entertain’ (also known as the Reithan principles) was adopted as the BBC’s mission (publications.parliament.uk, 2016).

The BBC has since changed considerably over the years. In 2016 following consultations with Conservative culture secretary John Whittingdale on the BBC’s commitment to impartiality and inclusivity, the BBC made a significant change to its mission statement. Keeping the essence of the objectives laid down by its founding father Sir Lord Reith, the BBC’s new mission statement now states, “To act in the public interest, serving all audiences through the provision of impartial, high-quality and distinctive output and services which inform, educate and entertain” (BBC, 2022).

4.2 The BBC's remit as a Public Service Broadcaster (PSB)

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) as “broadcasting made, financed and controlled by the public, for the public. It is neither commercial nor state-owned, free from political interference and pressure from commercial forces” (Smith, 2012). Taking this definition into consideration, this section will consider the extent to which it can be said that the BBC fulfils its public service remit as laid down in the Royal Charter.

In his essay, *The BBC and UK Public Service Broadcasting*, which gives a critical assessment of the BBC's public service responsibilities, Jeremy Tunstall argues that “BBC ‘Public Service Broadcasting’ has lacked a single neat definition” (Tunstall, 2010: 145). Tunstall says, “UK PSB resembles the British constitution in being unwritten or, more accurately, written in slightly different laws, documents, reports and decisions” (Tunstall, 2010: 145). Meanwhile, British scholar Georgina Born notes the BBC's struggle to strike a balance between ‘serving the public's interest’ and ‘maintaining audience popularity’ is concerned. She observes what she refers to as a ‘paradox’ facing the Corporation to fulfil its mandate as a public service broadcaster while keeping up with the competition by creating television programmes that are popular with its audiences (Born, 2011: 54). In her exposé of the BBC titled *Uncertain Vision*, Born gives an account of the factors which influenced the programming decisions at the BBC from the 1990s to the early 2000s. She argues that the broadcaster's preoccupation with markets and market share has eroded the quality of its output and effectively lowered the standards of British television (Born, 2011: 54). The BBC's need to demonstrate its popularity with audiences, may in effect, according to Born, undermine its ability to be versatile and experimental, and to create programmes that reflect the British public it serves (Born, 2011: 54).

As will be seen in the following section, given the BBC's history of underserving ethnic communities, the West Indian community has played an important role in challenging the Corporation to revamp their programming to give more accurate representation to the West Indian community in Britain.

4.3 Early representation of the Windrush Generation on BBC television

By the early 1950s, the physical fabric of Britain was totally transformed as a result of major waves of immigration from former colonies of the British Empire, particularly in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. At that time, entertainment for the British public was in the form of films and television programmes, and comedies which generally reflected the social and physical landscape in Britain following the war (Quinault, 2018). Schaffer notes that since White producers and programme makers had almost complete control over media content during the 1950s through 1970s, Black representation on British television was minimal, and on the occasions when they were shown on screen, their depictions offered “no obvious window into the day-today realities” of their existence in Britain (Schaffer 2014: 231). As observed by Stuart Hall,

representation was inherently linked with power, “not only by the institutional position of broadcasting itself as an “ideological apparatus”, but more intimately by the structure of access” (Hall in Shaffer 2014: 231).

In their 1965 study on Black and Asian representation, Henri Tajfel and John Dawson complained that it was “extremely rare to see a coloured person in the centre, not only of the screen but also of the relationships presented in the programmes” (Tajfel and Dawson in Shaffer 2014: 232). The authors observed that instead, “Black and Asian actors were reduced to “flitting across the screen in a crowd scene, or a hotel or airport lobby” and argued that a more realistic representation of these ethnic groups “was crucial to settling the Black and Asian community into the British psyche” (Tajfel and Dawson in Shaffer 2014: 232).

Recognising the prevalence of racial tension in the UK, in his address to delegates at the second BBC Conference on Immigration in 1965, Director General of the BBC, Hugh Green stated that television programmes should reflect the diversity that existed in Britain (Shaffer 2014: 232). Although his speech did not lead to a direct shift to positive representation for the Black and Asian community on British television, pressure for a more realist and accurate representation of these minority groups “was mounting at least outside the corridors of television production” (Shaffer 2014: 232). One such way of fostering empathetic awareness and giving attention to the Caribbean experience in Britain was through drama and so, BBC producers began to explore the idea of dramatic teleplays (Hendy, n.d.; Newton 2011: 77). What now follows is a discussion on the BBC’s attempt to give representation to Caribbean immigrants in BBC television dramas such as *A Man From The Sun* (1956), *Rainbow City* (1967), *Black Christmas* (1977) and *Empire Road* (1978 - 1979). These programmes sought to frame the Caribbean immigrants’ version of reality and explored themes such as immigration, xenophobia, racial prejudice and the challenges of being in interracial relationships (Bourne, 2019).

4.3.1 *A Man From The Sun* (BBC, 1956)

First shown to British audiences in 1956, the BBC’s *A Man From The Sun* was one of the first teleplays to show the lives of West Indians new to Britain (Daniels, n.d.). It was also one of the first dramas that documented the difficulties faced by Blacks in Britain and the harsh realities of their experience, “from the perspective of the West Indian immigrant” (Newton 2011: 78). Transmitted live on air, the docudrama was created by White liberal writer and producer John Elliott who wanted to give a truthful account of the lives of the newly settled Caribbean immigrants (Bourne, 2019). After reviewing stock footage of the life and experiences of West Indians in the Brixton area, Elliot consulted with the Black cast to help create realistic characters and set out to produce a dramatized documentary, tackling subjects normally considered too sensitive for actual portrayals on BBC television (Newton 2011: 78).

British art historian Kobena Mercer recognises that in an effort to ““correct” media misrepresentation” and give a voice to Black experiences in Britain, filmmakers in the post-war period have had to adopt a “documentary realist approach” (Mercer, 2006). John Elliott’s *A Man From the Sun* (1956) is one such film that is characteristic of this

“documentary realist aesthetic” (Mercer, 2006). In the opening scene for example, a hand strums a guitar, and the audience is introduced to twenty-five year old Cleve Lawrence, in Jamaica, who speaks directly to the camera in his native accent, while a Jamaican folk song plays in the background.

The cast featured West Indian actors speaking in strong native accents, giving “a relaxed Caribbean inflection to the live dialogue” (Cochrane 2014: 230; Newton 2011: 83). Cleve is presented to the audience as an uneducated man who is unable to read and write. This representation of West Indian immigrants appears to reinforce the stereotype of Blacks as being illiterate and therefore unfit for work in Britain. Later in the film, Cleve appears to acknowledge the value of *integrating* into British society by maintaining his Jamaican heritage while adapting to the new culture and way of life in Britain. An example of this is his decision to hire a personal tutor to help him learn to read and write English. This new skill has enabled Cleve to code-switch between the two cultural groups and so allows him to make a smoother transition into the mainstream society. At the end of the film, a new, ‘educated’ Cleve is able to put his English language skills to use by penning a letter to his mother in Jamaica, this time, without the help of the audience. In the letter, he tells his mother that he is not currently employed but will soon send her some money when he gets a job; and despite England being a very strange place, it is now his home “for better or for worse”.

It was also common occurrence for the West Indian characters to be presented as unkempt and unclean. As Nadia Cattouse stated in an interview, on the set of *A Man From The Sun*, the BBC’s set designer came into the room that her character Nina shared with her on-screen partner and made it look scruffy and disorganised (see figure 1).



Figure 1. Nadia Cattouse in a scene from *A Man From The Sun*. Courtesy of BBC

Nadia said of her experience:

I watched as she messed up the bed clothes, and made the room look as sleazy as possible. This was how she thought people from the Caribbean lived! So, just before we went on the air, when no one was looking, I went in, straightened the bed clothes and made the room look neat and tidy. It was a live transmission, so there was nothing she could do about it! (Bourne, 2019)

Across the UK, racism in the workplace was a common occurrence and oftentimes it was overt and physical (Daniels, n.d.). This intolerance of Blacks comes across succinctly in the film with Whites complaining about “darkies” taking their jobs and their quality of work not being up to UK standards. Oftentimes the characters appear anxious, upset or confused, framing the process of acculturation in their new environment as “difficult and daunting” (Newton 2011: 80). One scene shows the character Winston complaining to his White girlfriend that she is ashamed to be seen in public with him, because he is Black (Daniels, n.d.). Winston is a man who is not only proud to be West Indian but also takes pride in his African ancestry and so he rejects the culture of Britain’s racially segregated society. Given the value that Winston places on his own heritage and culture, it appears that he has adopted a *separation* strategy to help him cope with life in the UK. Later in the scene he tells his girlfriend of his need to go back home to Africa, because he is “tired of being in a country where he is the wrong colour” and so he is “going to West Africa where women are not afraid of being seen out with me”.

Throughout the film, Elliot chose to move the attention away from the “race relations narrative”, opting instead to focus on the characters and their experiences as new settlers in the ‘Motherland’ (Bourne, 2019). In so doing, he explored the sentiments of disappointment, anxiety and confusion felt by the immigrants upon realising that the reality of life in Britain was a far cry from that which they imagined. This was executed in the scenes at the train station when nineteen year old beauty queen Ethlyn arrives in Britain from St. Thomas. All alone, she appears worried and looks around anxiously as she waits for her brother to meet her (see figure 2).



Figure 2. Young woman from St. Thomas arrives in Britain. Courtesy of BBC

In a subsequent scene the young beauty queen appeared quite distressed when late one night, she was being followed on the street by an intimidating White man. She quickly hurries into the middle of a West Indian church service where she breaks down and sobs “I want to go home.... I have no friends here, no place to go”. In that moment, she is consoled by an elderly West Indian woman.

To a large extent, *A Man From The Sun* has made its mark as a ground-breaking television drama with human interest. In many ways, it effectively presented the hardships encountered by the West Indian immigrants who made Britain their home in the post-war period. Audience research reports indicate that many viewers empathised with the characters and their efforts to find work and housing, and consequently, altered their views about Black immigrants in the UK (Newton 2011: 79). However, despite Elliot’s approach, incorporating the aesthetics of a docudrama to give a “reality effect” by displaying a degree of “immediacy, transparency, authority and authenticity”, the film downplayed the harsh realities of life for the new Caribbean settlers (Hendy, n.d.; Mercer, 2006). For instance, the extent to which the immigrants encountered racial prejudice and violent attacks from the White population did not come across effectively. Moreover, the film did not specifically highlight the discrimination against Blacks prior to the passage of the Race Relations Act in 1968, and the frequent signs of “no Blacks” placed on various establishments across the country (see figures 3, 4 and 5)



Figure 3. Notices like this were routinely displaced on places of accommodation in 1960s Britain. Credit: Race Relations Board (1969) BFI/Crown on BFI Player



Figure 4. Prior to the passing of the Race Relations Act (1968) racial discrimination was legal in Britain. Credit: Race Relations Board (1969) BFI/Crown on BFI Player



*Figure 5. Such signs made it difficult for West Indian immigrants to find employment and accommodation in Britain prior after the war.
Photo by © Hulton-Deutsh Collection / CORBIS / corbis via Getty Images*

Given its shortcomings, while *A Man From The Sun* may not be particularly representative of the Caribbean immigrant experience in Britain in the post-war period, the BBC's pioneering effort to give a voice to the under-represented and misrepresented West Indians of that period provided a foundation for much of the television dramas produced in the decades that follow.

4.3.2 *Rainbow City* (BBC, 1967)

The BBC's *Rainbow City* (1967) is the first British television series to be based on the lives of Black immigrants in the UK. Commissioned by BBC Birmingham, the six-part series was written, directed and produced by John Elliot and sought to shed light on the issues at the heart of Birmingham's Caribbean community (Long 2011: 269; Startrader.co.uk, 2021). Head of Programmes for BBC Midlands, David Porter who commissioned the programme said in a later interview, there was "a very strong feeling at the time, that West Indians should be given the chance to be treated as people...whose talents and possibilities were much greater than they had been allowed' to show" (Long 2011: 270). The production was considered to be more of a genuine collaboration with the West Indian community than Elliot's previous projects with the BBC, particularly with the involvement of Horace James of Trinidad as co-writer, associate producer and actor in a leading role (Cochrane 2014: 230).

First broadcast in 1967, when the British landscape had changed considerably since *A Man From The Sun* and racial tensions had increased, *Rainbow City* was considered a bold experiment and heralded as iconic by the *Radio Times* for being the first television drama series to feature a West Indian actor as its main protagonist (Cochrane 2014: 230; Newton 2011: 148). This use of tokenism in a genre that had traditionally excluded the representation of Blacks had been widely acknowledged by the West Indian community, as each of the six, twenty-five minute episodes is also largely supported by a Black cast with soundtracks from Guyanese musician, Ram John Holder (ibid). The Trinidadian actor Errol John plays the lead character, John Steele, who is presented as a man of principles in a professional capacity as a lawyer, an obvious departure from previous representations of Blacks performing manual labour or as entertainers (Long 2011: 271) (see figure 6).

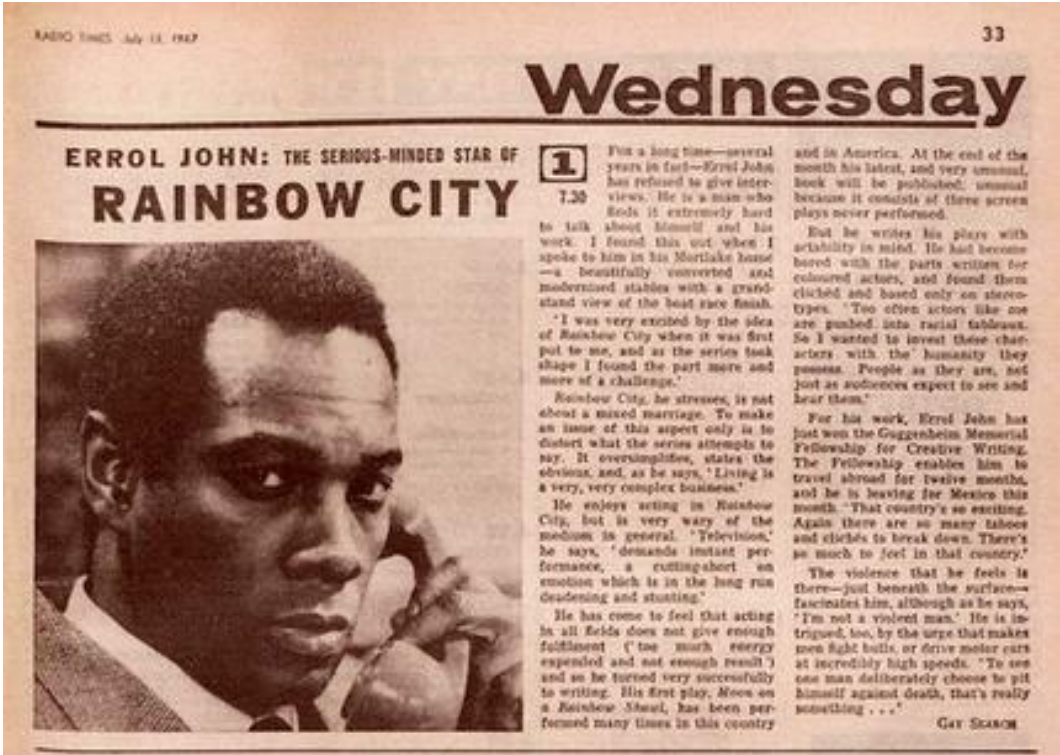


Figure 6. Radio Times 1967 feature on Rainbow City's Errol John – the first Black man to be cast in a leading role in a British television drama series. Credit – Pebblemill.org

John plays Jamaican-born barrister John Steele who practices in Birmingham representing members of the immigrant community on matters involving racial prejudice and police misconduct. Throughout the series, the character of Steele is the clearest illustration of cultural acculturation through *integration*. He is married to Mary (Gemma Jones), a White British woman, and though their marriage and middle-class home are portrayed as almost perfect, together, the mixed-race couple faces challenges not dissimilar to that experienced by members of the multi-ethnic community that they are part of (see figures 7 and 8).



Figure 7. Errol John and Gemma Jones in *Rainbow City* (BBC, 1956)

RADIO TIMES June 29, 1967 35

Wednesday

RAINBOW CITY

A new six-part serial about a Jamaican lawyer and other immigrants living in and around Birmingham



Errol John who plays the lawyer John Steele, and Gemma Jones who plays his wife, Mary

1 TAKE a friend to a pub for a drink; he stops at the door, and you let him lead you to another one where they don't mind serving him although he is a Negro. And that is the heart of it; one of the complaints currently before C.A.R.D. is that a West Indian woman was beaten up by a white man in a London street. So one feels anger and shame; but where does that get us?

7.30

In a world in which increasing millions of human beings are trying to survive together, racial isolates seem not only humiliating but irrelevant. It's easy, of course, to be unprejudiced about racial problems when you're not faced with them, easier to be liberal in Cheltenham than in Little Rock; but racial mixture is what we now have here, and one does find, occasionally and joyously, people who are prepared to be actively pleased and helpful about it.

One of them is David Porter, Head of Programmes in the BBC's Midland Region, which already transmits in Urdu and Hindi for Asian residents. We sat last year in the hotel at Paddington station, and he said: "I want us to do something." What we have done is *Rainbow City*. This is an entertainment serial about West Indians living in, and around Birmingham, and the chief character is a lawyer.

He is much like any other family solicitor, although he happens to be Jamaican, and the people who come to him—mainly other immigrants—have the same recognisable ego and psychic hopes, fears, and difficulties as the rest of us, plus a few problems of their own: these are the bones of our story.

I've never had the least doubt about this serial; mainly, I think, because I've known that there are West Indian actors, writers, and musicians in this country who can lift it right up. Normally, they have little chance of sustained, serious work, but they will be doing it for the next six weeks—and longer if you will have them.

JOHN KILLICK

Figure 8. Radio Times 1967 report on *Rainbow City* - mixed race couple, Errol John and Gemma Jones. Credit – Pebblemill.org

Given the BBC's intention to create more inclusive programmes at the time, the subject of interracial relationships was explored on television dramas during that period as a way of easing racial tensions. Throughout the series, Steele's union with his wife is put under immense pressure from the White community, compelling Steele to defend his marriage and use it as an example of racial unity and acceptance, "to build bridges between communities" (Cochrane 2014: 230; Schaffer 2014: 246). However, in a promotional interview with the *Radio Times*, John disclosed that he found the role somewhat of a challenge and emphasised that despite popular opinion, *Rainbow City* is "not about a mixed marriage...to make an issue of this aspect only, is to distort what the series attempts to say. It oversimplifies, states the obvious and, living is a very, very complex business" (Newton 2011: 150). Furthermore, he explains the aim of the series is to show the humanity of the characters instead of a stereotypical representation of Black people which audiences have grown used to seeing on British television (Long 2011: 270).

The short-lived series was aired for only one season over a six-week period with descriptive episode titles reflecting the challenges faced by Black and Asian immigrants in the UK. In its explanation of the purpose of the series, the BBC stated the objective was to 'establish a number of sympathetic West Indian and Asian characters, in the hope that audience sympathy and liking for them would "rub off" onto West Indians and Asians in general' (Schaffer 2014: 245).

The first two episodes explore the themes of racism and immigration, giving audiences a glimpse of the experiences of the post-war immigrants in Britain. They also provided audiences with a history lesson on the reasons why Caribbean people migrated to Britain particularly following the Second World War. In the second episode, several characters appear to adjust to the British culture through the acculturation strategy of *integration*. They also display their allegiance to Britain as the mother country, with the sister of Jackson (Horace James' character), at one point saying to Steele, "We all one family, same British. They learnt us in school, didn't they? My brother went to fight for them" (Schaffer 2014: 246).

The housing problem faced by Black and Asian immigrants is also a topic covered in the series. One episode in particular highlights the solidarity among the immigrant communities in Birmingham where Steele lends his support to a young Asian man to challenge unfair housing fees through a tribunal.

Despite not being recommissioned after the first season, *Rainbow City* has undoubtedly made its mark on BBC television, by providing West Indians with an opportunity to tell British audiences of their experiences with racism and immigration - issues that are as relevant today as they were in the decades immediately following the war. The cancellation of *Rainbow City* was indicative of the treatment given to other similar television programmes that sought to give representation to the Caribbean community in Britain in the decades that followed (Long 2011: 271). Since its airing on BBC One in the summer of 1967, the series has not been broadcast in its entirety, and at present, only five of the six episodes survive.

4.3.3 *Black Christmas* (BBC, 1977)

With the BBC facing growing criticism for its lack of proper representation of Blacks and other minority groups as well as providing limited opportunities for actors from the immigrant communities, in the 1970s, content producers began to explore new representation strategies. Rather than trying to paint a picture of how British society should be, the new television drama of that era sought to reflect the actuality of British life, thereby giving a more realistic representation of Blacks and Asians (Schaffer 2014: 248). What followed as a result, is a decline in principled, ‘role modelesque’ characters like John Steele and a rise in ‘ordinary’ Black and Asian characters (Schaffer 2014: 248).

That said, in 1973, the BBC created *Second City Firsts*, an anthology of television plays by new writers who were keen to tell stories about contemporary life outside London and give representation to the UK’s Black and Asian communities. These thirty-minute plays were produced at the Pebble Mill Studios in Birmingham (Ravensbourne University London, n.d.). *Second City Firsts* provided a rare opportunity for emerging writers like Guyanese playwright Michael Abbensetts, who eventually went on to become the most prolific Black writer in British television (BFI Screenonline, n.d.).

Fuelled by a desire to portray Caribbean people as a very normal part of British life and to create a drama that would inform mainstream British audiences of the challenges faced by West Indian immigrants in their society, Abbensetts wrote the comedy drama *Black Christmas* (BFI Screenonline, n.d.). The film is based on real events, with chaos and conflict in the Johnson family set against a background of “nostalgia for a distant home” (BFI Screenonline, n.d.). The predominantly Black cast features Caribbean immigrants including Guyanese-born Carmen Munroe (Gertrude) and Norman Beaton (Bertie) as well as Stefan Kalipha (Herman) from Trinidad.

The opening scene paints a picture of racial harmony and domestic bliss on Christmas Eve, as Gertrude and her White neighbour Lily bake a traditional West Indian ‘Black cake’. Gertrude who appears to be culturally integrated, is seen to be holding on to her own West Indian heritage and culture, while interacting with members of the new culture. During the cultural exchange between the two ladies, the Carpenters’ ‘White Christmas’ plays in the background. The choice of song suggests that though Gertrude is far away from sunshine Christmases at home, she is very much settled with the idea that England is her new home, and notwithstanding the cold bleak winter, she is prepared to enjoy a White Christmas and make it just as special as the ones from her childhood.

In the next scene the viewer is introduced to Bertie, the patriarch of the family, who braves the pouring rain and arrives home from his job as a postman, just as the soundtrack ‘Frosty the Snowman’ plays in the background. Once home, Bertie turns on the television; programmes created specifically for Britain’s West Indian community noticeably absent. He settles for a late night talk show and relaxes in his armchair with his thesaurus in hand. Like his wife Gertrude, Bertie is seen to be bicultural, holding on to his strict West Indian upbringing and at the same time open to the dominant culture that surrounds him. His love for the thesaurus suggests that he is keen to improve his vocabulary to help him become more articulate which will allow for better integration in Britain (see figure 9).



Figure 9. Guyanese-born Norman Beaton as 'Bertie'. Courtesy of BBC

The domestic setting in *Black Christmas* is very much a character in its own right. Despite “the uniform diet of bland, White ‘family entertainment’, offered by the ever-on television set” which forms an integral part of the living space, the West Indian decorated front room illustrate the family’s appreciation for cultural authenticity (BFI Screenonline, n.d.). This Caribbean living room décor with its ‘Black cake’, ‘spiced rum’ and other West Indian Christmas delights juxtaposed with the British television showing jolly marching Santas, suggest a harmonious blend of the two cultures and the creation of a new British-West Indian identity (See figure 10).



Figure 10. Bertie takes in a daily dose of British television, void of programmes aimed at ethnic communities. Courtesy of BBC

At a time when Blacks are not permitted to socialise in British pubs and restaurants, the living room forms an important part of their existence – a happy, familiar place of pride, comfort and safety to spend time with family and friends. When Bertie and Gertrude sit together in their front room, they playfully tease each other and let out big belly laughs - a sign that they are both content and in good psychological health, and not necessarily affected by acculturative stress-inducing factors such as perceived discrimination and homesickness despite being in a culture so far removed from what they are used to.

As the family arrive for Christmas, the cracks begin to appear in what initially is a happy, carefree home. Gertrude's brother Herman moans about his wife Dolly who has left him and then later speaks of his sexual escapades with White women. The fact he is involved with British women is an indication that Herman is adjusting to his new life in Britain using the acculturation strategy of integration. Still in tune with his West Indian culture, Herman is shown to cope with his domestic problems by drinking Caribbean rum.

Gertrude's daughter Renee on the other hand is a first generation Briton who appears to be fully assimilated into British culture as opposed to holding on to her parents' culture of origin. While most West Indian women wear dresses and skirts, she wears tailored trouser suits, much to the displeasure of her mother. She is also friends with her parent's White neighbour Lily, and unlike Bertie, her mother Gertrude and her uncle Herman who speak in melodic West Indian accents, Renee speaks in a crisp British accent. She represents the new generation of 'British' - West Indians.

For the most part, *Black Christmas* avoids racial tension, opting instead to create domestic scenes to focus on the familiar theme of family conflict during a Christmas get-together which mainstream British audiences can relate to (BFI Screenonline, n.d.). Lily,

the only White character in the film joins the Johnson family for Christmas lunch and appears to be quite comfortable 'at home away from home'. On the contrary, for Dolly, who yearns for the life she left back home in the Caribbean, the "feeling of living in an unwelcoming society" never goes away (BFI Screenonline, n.d.). While the rest of the Johnson family have all integrated into the dominant society, making new British friends and participating in cultural exchanges, Dolly has adopted the separation strategy to acculturation, rejecting the host culture in favour of her own cultural norms. Following an argument with Herman at the dinner table, Dolly says to Gertrude that she is unhappy in England, and that she "can't sleep, can't eat". She cries, "Christmas here is not the same like Christmas back home...this country brings me pain". In response, an unsympathetic Gertrude tells Dolly that she has a choice – either "go back home" or "learn to bear it". Gertrude says although she thinks about life back home, at this point in her life, "the West Indies is just a dream" and she has made the choice to accept her new life in England. She says to her sister-in-law, "I make do, I make the best of 'tings...England to me now is home. I grin and bear it!"

In the penultimate scene, the family gathers together in the front room for a 'sing-song' of 'Silent Night'. The family is once again united and happy in the spirit of Christmas. The film ends with a lingering shot of the abandoned television finally switched off in the corner of the room. Refusing to make *Black Christmas* a film about race relations, to the point of almost avoiding the issue altogether, Abbensetts' message in the film seems to be that West Indians are ordinary people just like the British – they experience the highs and lows of family life just the same, but what matters is accepting each other's differences, supporting each other in times of need and making lasting memories even in times of adversity. After all, home is family, and family is home.

This novel study of family relationships with a cast of West Indian actors in a television drama which "tried to break away from the image of Black immigrants as a 'social problem'" in 1970s Britain, provided a useful template that Abbensetts would later develop into the BBC series *Empire Road*, which will be discussed in the next segment (Long 2011: 273, Nandi and Chatterjee, 2012).

4.3.4 *Empire Road* (BBC, 1978-1979)

As mentioned in Chapter 3, one of the challenges encountered during the early stages of this research project was the lack of access to the BBC programmes from the 1950s to 1970s. While access was eventually obtained for three of the selected programmes, the *Empire Road* series written and developed by Michael Abbensetts of Guyana remains unavailable. Given the inaccessibility of the series, save for a short clip of one episode on YouTube, this next section will refer to a variety of secondary sources such as scholarly literature and online articles in order to conduct this analysis.

Following the success of *Black Christmas* in 1977, the subsequent year, Abbensetts created a programme showing the ordinary lives of Black people in a multiracial part of Birmingham, "in a soap-opera style drama" called *Empire Road* (Schaffer 2014: 256). According to the British Film Institute's Onyekachi Wambu, *Empire Road* was the first serious attempt on British television to create a drama that addressed Britain's growing

multiracial society (Wambu, n.d). First broadcast in October 1978 on BBC2, the series incorporated a mix of genres such as drama, romance and comedy and sought to give an accurate depiction of the Black experience in Britain (Wambu, n.d).

The action revolved around the lives of West Indians and Asians living on a suburban street in Birmingham, giving representation to a community often overlooked on British television. Abbensetts stated that the storylines are inspired by the experiences of the Black immigrants in Birmingham such as their struggles with settling into life in Britain. The series therefore presents the day to day happenings of Birmingham's multi-ethnic communities as an ordinary part of British life (Schaffer 2014: 258). For Abbensetts, creating authentic stories that audiences could relate to was key, and this was recognised by a *Time Out* journalist who commented that "it was the first drama series that Black people can watch on television without feeling embarrassed or angry" (Long 2011: 276).

The integrated cast featured some of the leading Black actors of the day including Norman Beaton, Nalini Moonasar and Thomas Baptiste from Guyana, Trinidadians Corrine Skinner-Carter and Rudolph Walker and Joseph Marcell from St Lucia (Cochrane 2014: 232) (see figures 11, 12 and 13).



Figure 11. Joseph Marcell as Walter and Rosa Roberts as Miss May in 'Empire Road'. Courtesy of BBC



Figure 12. Marcus (Wayne Laryea) and his Asian love interest, Ranjanaa (Nalini Moonasar). Courtesy of BBC



Figure 13. Norman Beaton as Everton Bennett in 'Empire Road'. Courtesy of BBC

One journalist, Mike Phillips, commented that Beaton's character was "probably the most convincing West Indian character yet to appear on television. He is mean, bad-tempered, intelligent, kind-hearted, convivial and grumpy all at the same time. Just like a real person" (Long 2011: 275). By the same token, Norman Beaton said in an interview that *Empire Road* "is perhaps the best TV series I have been in as an actor"; for in his view, while his previous shows like *The Fosters* employed Black people, *Empire Road* was about Black people – their views, concerns and experiences (Long 2011: 276; Malik, n.d).

Empire Road ran for two series, consisting of five and ten half-hour episodes respectively. The Trinidadian filmmaker Horace Ové was invited to direct the second series, thereby establishing *Empire Road* as a unique production with a writer, director and actors from the Caribbean immigrant community. For many of the cast members, this was the first time that they had been directed by Black film director (Startrader.co.uk, 2021). The series was placed in a pioneering position not only for being the first soap opera to be created by a Black writer for a Black cast, but also for its specific focus on the Caribbean immigrant experience in Britain (Malik, n.d). Ové who brought a Caribbean flair to the production, credited his West Indian heritage as the main reason actors felt comfortable showing their authentic selves in their work (Newton 2011: 155). Of the series, Ové says, "It's a real breakthrough...a window that you can look through on to Black lives" (Schaffer 2014: 257). Meanwhile, Beaton says the production has shone a light on the Black talent that exists in Britain but has been suppressed by those in authority. He says, "For years and years, producers and directors have been saying that there are no Black actors or Black directors. What *Empire Road* has done is expose this as a total and utter red herring" (Startrader.co.uk). For his co-star Corrine Skinner-Carter, the series was long overdue. According to her, *Empire Road* was important to address what she felt was "a White oriented bias of television" (ibid). On the subject of content on British TV, she states:

It's always been a White version of Black people before. People who know how things are, watched it and said, 'Ah, at last'. People who didn't know said, 'Oh! ...It's like that?!'. I always thought it would show people how we feel, as opposed to how they think we feel.
(Startrader.co.uk, 2021)

Popular among viewers and deemed a breakthrough in the diverse representation of ethnicity on British television, following the broadcast of just the first episode, *Empire Road* was branded "the Black *Coronation Street*" by members of the press (Schaffer 2014: 256). In response, the Jamaican Weekly Gleaner stated, "This is no Black *Coronation Street*. Rather, a down-to-earth appraisal of the struggles of West Indians and Asians in Britain" (Startrader.co.uk, 2021). Moreover, Abbensetts expressed his hope that *Empire Road* will not be seen merely as just a Black soap opera, but rather a series that "reflects the realities of contemporary Black Britain" (Schaffer 2014: 257; Startrader.co.uk, 2021).

Throughout the series though the characters express a nostalgia for ‘home’, they were shown to *integrate* into British society and interacted with others irrespective of race or ethnicity, a characteristic which Mike Phillips noted, saying that *Empire Road* is “much more like the real life Empire Roads all over Britain where Blacks and Whites live side by side without the kind of fuss so often highlighted on TV” (Schaffer 2014: 258). Abbensett’s intention for the series was to therefore challenge “both the representation of Black people in British drama and British life more generally” (Schaffer 2014: 258).

Given the BBC’s limited confidence in the programme, the first series was placed in the *Further Education* slot on its lower profile channel, BBC2, and aired on a Tuesday evening at “the unsociable hour of 6:50pm” (Schaffer 2014: 257; Startrader.co.uk, 2021). Subsequently recognizing the potential value in *Empire Road* as a mainstream drama, the second series was given a prime-time slot of 8pm on Thursdays (Schaffer 2014: 257). Despite the show’s popularity among Black, Asian and White audiences, the series was not commissioned for a third season, possibly due to internal politics at the BBC and lack of promotion (Wambu, n.d.). Notwithstanding these revelations, it can be argued that the commissioning of *Empire Road* is perhaps the BBC’s most daring attempt to show its commitment to improving racial balance on its television programmes, particularly with regards to representation of the West Indian community in 1970s Britain.

Collectively, all four dramas from the 1950s to 1970s contribute to the representation of Britain’s West Indian immigrants on BBC television, bringing to light the Black experience in Britain, albeit in a very muted and controlled fashion. Though they initially set out to hold a mirror up to British society, challenging stereotypes and giving an authentic representation of Caribbean people, the end results show a representation of society as opposed to a reflection, as there was a deliberate attempt by writers and filmmakers to “play it safe” by avoiding weighty subjects especially when it came to issues of discrimination and racial prejudice against Blacks. This investigation therefore reveals evidence of not only the pressures placed on Black filmmakers to create programmes that focus on “safe narratives” that were pleasing to TV bosses and quite possibly the larger British society, but also the challenges faced by Caribbean people for recognition of their experiences in Britain over the years, “to be heard and ultimately to acquire a “shared space of representation and history” (Long 2011: 262).

4.4 Caribbean representation on BBC TV - 1980s – 2000s

The decades following the 1970s was a significant period for Black representation on British television and reflected the changing attitudes to race that was taking place in Britain at that time (Hand, 2015). During the 1980s, the BBC’s output included *Grange Hill* (1978-2008) aimed at teenage audiences and featured 14-year-old Terry Sue-Patt, who played Benny Green, a football-loving Black student from a West Indian family and a key character in the drama series. In the show’s debut episode, which aired exactly ten years following Powell’s inflammatory ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech, Green’s character was the first image shown onscreen as he carried a football and walked through the gates of Grange Hill, a fictional North London comprehensive school (Hand, 2015). Despite the show being known for ‘racist’ language which some viewers may find ‘offensive’, it can be argued that the move to give a co-starring role to Sue-Patt at a time when there were

very few Black actors on British television, is indicative of the BBC's interest in promoting and giving representation to diverse communities in the UK (Speed, 2022). In its attempt to reflect the changing face of Britain's communities resulting from post-war immigration, *Grange Hill* also gave prominence to other young Black actors of Caribbean heritage such as Donald Waugh and Ashley Walters who played Hughsey and Andy respectively, and Jacqueline Boatswain who played headmistress Mrs Bassinger.

The launch of Channel 4 Television in 1982, also offered audiences a greater range of programming, particularly in terms of "representing 'unheard voices' from diverse communities" (DCMS, 2022). In keeping with its remit as a Public Service Broadcaster, the Corporation has, since its creation, "established itself as a distinctive broadcaster renowned for offering diverse and innovative content in the interests of communities across the UK" (DCMS, 2022). In 1989, the situation comedy series *Desmond's* written by Trix Worrell made its debut on Channel 4. Set in a barbershop, the series was the first of its kind to be created by a writer of Caribbean heritage, and featured Guyanese actor Norman Beaton as the titular character (Osborne, 2016). Worrell's intention was to subvert pervasive stereotypes about Black men and women on television and so, the West Indian characters were often portrayed as "upwardly mobile members of a multicultural Britain" (Jafaar, n.d.).

The Real McCoy (1991-1996) produced by the BBC is another television show which was considered ground-breaking for not only showcasing underrepresented communities, but for also providing a platform for young Black and Asian comedians in the nineties when multi-cultural comedy on British television was a rare occurrence. The sketch comedy show which was aired for five series on a prime time TV slot, paved the way for "a new generation of Black Caribbean talent to break into the mainstream", such as Robbie Gee, Treva Etienne and Llewella Gideon (Jaafar, n.d.). *The Real McCoy* was popular among British audiences and so following its success, Gee and Gideon went on to star in the BBC's first all-black sitcom, *The Crouches* (2003-2005) along with fellow Caribbean actors Rudolph Walker and Danny John-Jules. *The Crouches* focused on three generations of a black family living under one roof in Walworth, in southeast London. The show received mixed reviews for its depiction of the Black culture and only ran for two series before it was cancelled on BBC One (British Comedy Guide, n.d.).

As shown above, from the period 1980s to 2000s there was a noticeable shift towards more multi-ethnic representation on British screens, which provided an opportunity for Black Caribbean voices to be heard. Though the inclusion of Caribbean scriptwriters also meant that the content reflected a more diverse Britain, it was also apparent that these programmes did not necessarily speak directly to the Black British experience. The following section will therefore explore the ways in which *Small Axe* presents the Black narrative of the Windrush generation from their own perspectives on BBC television and in so doing gives prominence to key moments of Black British identity that has been sidelined for several decades.

5. THE CARIBBEAN EXPERIENCE IN *SMALL AXE*

This chapter aims to provide an analysis of the narrative and stylistic elements of McQueen's five films to explain how and why *Small Axe* is considered important in relation to the reshaping of Caribbean representation on BBC television, particularly in regard to the unrepresented or under-represented history of the Caribbean immigrant experience in the United Kingdom. In so doing, a brief description of each film will be provided, followed by a close analysis of the films' content and form, paying particular attention to character representation as well as McQueen's use of lighting, camera angles, framing and point-of-view. This investigation of Caribbean representation in *Small Axe* will also discuss selected scenes that best illustrate the common issues associated with the Caribbean immigrant experience in Britain such as racial discrimination and prejudice and the acculturation strategies adopted by the Windrush generation and their descendants as they attempt to adjust to life in Britain, as outlined in Berry's fourfold Model of Acculturation (1997).

As Cardwell states, prior to conducting close textual analysis of the aesthetics of a television programme, one must be fully engaged with the content, as "A programme that inspires powerful responses in us gives rise to the need to understand it more fully and to understand why it has affected us thus" (Cardwell 2006: 73-74). As a researcher of Caribbean heritage, I am particularly connected to the *Small Axe* pentalogy and I am therefore committed to this investigation of the films' stylistic qualities to further our understanding of how and to what extent the series repositions Caribbean representation on BBC television.

5.1 *Mangrove*

The first instalment of the *Small Axe* pentalogy, *Mangrove* – a courtroom drama, centres on the true story of Frank Crichlow, Trinidadian immigrant owner of The Mangrove, a Caribbean restaurant located on 8 All Saints Road in London's Notting Hill (BBC, 2020). Opened in 1968, the same year that Enoch Powell made his noxious "rivers of blood" speech, Crichlow's restaurant, like many Black-owned establishments in Britain in the 1960s and '70s, offers patrons more than just traditional Caribbean food and drink; it also serves as a 'home away from home' for West Indian immigrants "in a country that often told them to "go home"" (Jones, 2020; Manning, 2021). It is a refuge and an escape from outside discrimination for London's brightest Black intellectuals, activists, musicians and artists to meet, drink, listen to live music, share ideas and discuss issues of concern to the Black immigrant community (BBC, 2020). Popular with famous Black musicians, Mangrove does not only provide a meeting place for organisers of the Notting Hill street-carnival, but it is also the safe haven where Trinidadians Darcus Howe and Altheia Jones-LeCointe, leading figures in the UK's Black Panther movement meet to discuss matters and write articles of interest to the Black community in London (Manning, 2021) (see figure 14).



Figure 14. The Mangrove restaurant in August 1970, represents a 'home away from home' for West Indians in Britain. Photo Credit: Evening Standard/Getty Images

At a time when racial discrimination and prejudice against Blacks is rampant in Britain, the Mangrove becomes a prime target for police who resent what the establishment represents to the Black community. In the space of eighteen months, the restaurant is subjected to a series of relentless police raids, prompting Crichton and other members of the West Indian community to organise a street protest in a bid to stop the racism and discrimination targeted at their community base (Jones, 2020) (see figure 15).



Figure 15. Immigrants of West Indian, African and South Asian heritage march in protest of police harassment in their communities. Mangrove / BBC

The peaceful protest, led by nine prominent men and women, is met by police aggression, resulting in the wrongful arrest of Crichlow and his supporters including Black Panther leader Jones-LeCointe and civil rights campaigner Darcus Howe (BBC, 2020). The protagonists, known as the ‘Mangrove Nine’ are charged with incitement to riot and affray which leads to a highly publicized trial lasting 55 days. All nine defendants are acquitted of the main charge and receive suspended sentences for the lesser offences in the trial that becomes the “first judicial acknowledgement of behaviour motivated by racism in the Metropolitan Police” (BBC, 2020; John-Baptiste, n.d).

5.1.1 Celebrating the culture and courage of a marginalized community

In *Mangrove*, McQueen articulates the issues of systemic racism and structures of oppression inherent in the British law enforcement system in the 1960s and ‘70s – the over-policing of Black immigrant communities, unlawful arrests, police harassment and intimidation – thereby contextualizing the problems that permeate the West Indian immigrant community in London in post-war Britain (The National Archives, n.d.). In his deliberate critique of the Metropolitan Police, McQueen illustrates that the racial injustice suffered by first generation West Indians and their children during that period is not only perpetrated by the corrupt police institution but also extends to the justice system designed by White colonialists and the British state in general.

Known for shooting on celluloid to give his film a particular aesthetic, McQueen and his DP Kirchner chose to shoot *Mangrove* on 35mm film in widescreen. According to the cinematographer, this film format helps facilitate framing and recreate specific scenes to maintain familiarity of the characteristics of the 1970s West Indian community and evoke for the viewer a particular feeling or sense of time and place. Kirchner describes his approach to the creative and technical process of filming *Mangrove* as simple and organic and emphasises the importance of maintaining the look and feel of the 1970s era to lend authenticity to the film. He says:

Nowadays you can do almost anything thanks to technological advances – everything can be so perfect, slick and pristine that it can lose a lot of that character. We wanted to approach *Mangrove* another way; it needed to feel handmade, which required a different approach to exposing, manoeuvring the camera, and lighting... imperfections are perfections. (Mutter, 2021)

Kirchner also states the importance of adding texture to the film and says, “We wanted it to feel specific to the era...not quite as heavy as 16mm but something that maintained the patina of the era” (Giardina, 2021). McQueen demonstrates his commitment to transforming Caribbean representation on British television by incorporating a range of angle shots, colour grading and low key lighting to create a world that looks as authentic as possible.

Set in 1968, Notting Hill, the opening scenes of *Mangrove* introduce Frank Crichlow (Shaun Parkes) as he strolls through the dilapidated streets of West London with a clear

sense of purpose. Here, an aerial view shot is used to capture Crichlow from above, to establish for the viewer, the film's setting which plays a major role in the narrative and at the same time emphasizes Crichlow's isolation and vulnerability in this adopted land, far away from Trinidad and Tobago, which he now calls home (see figure 16).



Figure 16. Crichlow's isolation in an unwelcoming society is emphasised by the high-angle shot technique. Mangrove / BBC

By incorporating the extreme long shot / extreme wide shot technique in this scene, McQueen not only establishes the ominous setting but also Crichlow's place as an isolated figure within it. The scene gives a full view of Crichlow and simultaneously shows much of the surrounding area of the film's setting – the Westway under construction and immigrant children at play alongside anti-immigrant graffiti telling them they are not welcome in Britain (see figure 17).



Figure 17. The extreme long / wide shot technique is used to establish Crichlow's physical and emotional relationship with his environment while emphasising his isolation in an unwelcoming place. Mangrove / BBC

Using a medium shot, the camera continues to follow Crichlow as he walks down All Saints Road on the way to his Mangrove restaurant. The advantage of this shot, captured at a medium distance from the main protagonist, is to allow viewers to have a clear view of Crichlow and other characters in the scene, thus enabling them to observe his body language and how he interacts with the elements within his surroundings (see figure 18).



Figure 18. The medium shot technique is used to capture details of the setting and the interaction between Crichlow and fellow immigrants on All Saints Road. *Mangrove* / BBC

Unlike other courtroom dramas, McQueen takes an unconventional approach by taking the time in his opening scenes to show the richness of Notting Hill’s Caribbean immigrant community. As a way of amplifying the humanity of the characters, he keeps the focus largely on the West Indians whose lives are enriched by this lively community hub. McQueen therefore demands that audiences outside of the West Indian culture connect with the characters of this vibrant neighbourhood and reflect on the nature of the warmth, solidarity and Black love that exists in this Black community, in the face of racism and discrimination in London. His intention therefore is to compel viewers who are removed from the history being presented to become emotionally engaged in the film and invested in the characters so that they empathise with their plight as outsiders in a White-dominated society. According to McQueen, “It puts everything [into] perspective. That’s the thing about humanity: empathy, who are we, what are we, what have we become?” (Sepinwall, 2020).

The following section will investigate Caribbean representation in *Mangrove* through each of the three leading protagonists and the narrative and stylistic elements employed by McQueen in his attempt to retell the Caribbean experience on BBC television through the perspective of those who lived it. Subsequent to this will be a discussion of how Crichlow adapts to life in Britain and the acculturation strategy used in accordance with the concepts of Berry’s acculturation theory, i.e. assimilation, separation, integration or marginalization (Berry 1997: 9).

5.1.2 Frank Crichlow – The Reluctant Revolutionary

In the film, Frank Crichlow is depicted as a modest, hard-working community activist and restaurateur who just wants to prepare home-cooked West Indian fare like goat curry, his mother’s crab and dumplings and his famous pineapple punch for respectable people “with a particular palette”. Unfortunately for Crichlow, the Mangrove is also an eyesore for bullies particularly one PC Pulley (Sam Spruell), the self-appointed sentry over the Notting Hill community who embodies the quintessence of White privilege and

institutional racism in the London Metropolitan Police force. When PC Pulley first decides to cause havoc at the Mangrove, the scene is composed using a close-up shot, capturing Crichtlow and PC Pulley at close range. This particular shot takes up most of the screen in a tight frame so as to give the audience a clear view of Crichtlow's face and the emotions conveyed through his facial expressions (see figure 19).

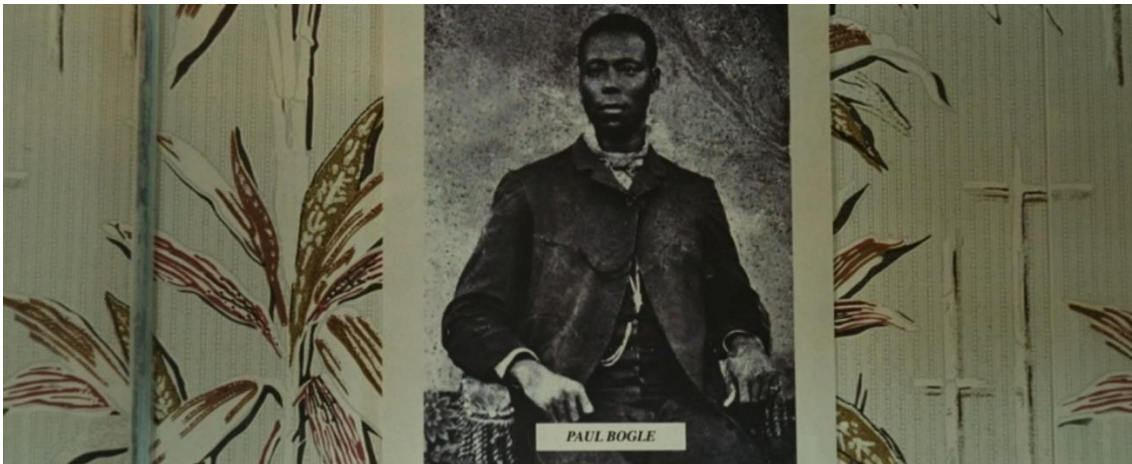


Figure 19. This close-up shot shows the behaviours and emotions of Crichtlow and PC Pulley during a heated argument outside the Mangrove. Mangrove / BBC

Unlike his 2013 film *12 Years a Slave* in which McQueen shows the physical pain and suffering of the protagonists, in *Mangrove*, much of the violent scenes perpetrated by the police away are kept away from the viewers. He however incorporates a range of sound effects and ambient sounds to help accentuate graphic scenes to evoke an emotional response from the audience. Such is the case when, a mere eighteen minutes into the film PC Pulley and his fellow officers descend upon the restaurant in search of drugs. The once calm and friendly atmosphere of the Mangrove is immediately turned upside down. To emphasise the disturbance taking place, a handheld camera is used to shoot this scene with minimum lighting, drawing the audience into the midst of the chaos as if they were there at the restaurant experiencing the police brutality themselves.

McQueen is intent on keeping his audience in a state of contemplation, particularly following scenes depicting unprovoked attacks on the Black community. In so doing, he employs unconventional tactics such as lingering shots of an image in complete silence, devoid of explanation. This is seen when, following a cacophonous raid at the *Mangrove* restaurant, without warning, a still photo of Jamaican activist Paul Bogle, dominates the screen with no sound. First, as a close-up shot of his face, showing a look of disapprobation, seemingly of the attack that has just taken place; and then as a medium shot of the same image, drawing attention to a confident, well-groomed gentleman who claims his space with an upright posture and commanding presence. This arresting image,

held for a few moments longer than expected, is purposely placed to unsettle audiences, and linger in their minds long after the scene changes (see figures 20 and 21).



Figures 20 and 21. McQueen incorporates archival images to capture the audience's attention and evoke a desired emotional response. Mangrove / BBC

During another raid at the Mangrove thirty minutes into the film, the camera is placed at floor level to focus on the disruption caused by the police with plates and glasses being knocked off tables, chairs flying across the room and food splattered across the walls. To accentuate the traumatic stress imposed on Crichtlow and community members at the restaurant, the colour palette transitions from bright saturated colours to more muted tones; arguably McQueen's way of illustrating how a corrupt system attempts to dim the light and disrupt the joy of a vibrant community. Every detail of this disturbing scene is captured in high resolution using Dutch angles, including an unsettling shot of Crichtlow being pinned to the ground by a White police officer (see figures 22 and 23).



Figures 22 and 23. The Dutch angle / tilt is used to capture the pandemonium taking place in the restaurant, resulting in unlevelled frames for dramatic effect. Mangrove / BBC

This restaurant scene is shot using the tilted technique so as to launch an assault on the senses and evoke in the audience feelings of horror and unease. The scene climaxes with a 35- second shot of an aluminium colander rocking back and forth on the kitchen floor (see figure 24).



Figure 24. The lengthy shot of a colander rocking from left to right on a disarranged kitchen floor gives the audience a chance to reflect and exhale. Mangrove / BBC

This lingering shot is a powerful way to draw viewers in, obliging them to ponder upon the vicious onslaught on the Mangrove that they have just witnessed.

5.1.3 Crichlow's Acculturative Process

Crichlow appears to have adopted the acculturation strategy of 'integration', as, while his culinary and musical tastes show that he is keen to maintain his original West Indian culture and identity he appears to be also open to interaction with the dominant culture; moreover, his restaurant welcomes White patrons just as it does Blacks. Furthermore, Crichlow, initially appearing to be a single man, later explores inter-racial relationships and is shown to be romantically involved with a White British woman.

That said, following repeated harassment and brutality at the hands of the Metropolitan Police, it can be argued that Crichlow adopts the acculturation model of 'separation' and is forced to migrate towards 'reactive ethnicity', whereby he places even more value on his West Indian identity, and to a certain extent, distances himself from British norms and culture. 'Reactive ethnicity' is a term coined by Cuban-American sociologist Ruben Rumbaut to describe the phenomenon where immigrants become more connected to their own culture of origin and reject the host culture particularly when they experience discrimination (Rumbaut, 2008). Being racially abused by an institution that is meant to protect and serve members of the British society including immigrants, puts Crichlow under immense pressure and undue stress. In order to give viewers an understanding of the mental and physical exhaustion endured by the businessman McQueen uses extreme close-up shots to fill the frame with his face. This technique is an effective way to convey Crichlow's emotions and state of mind even without dialogue (see figure 25).



Figure 25. This close-up shot conveys to the audience Crichlow's indignance about the corrupt British judicial system. Mangrove / BBC

The mounting pressure of being a victim of relentless police raids leads to Crichlow becoming agitated – he has a loss of appetite and sleepless nights, and the stress begins to show (see figure 26).



Figure 26. Crichlow, the reluctant ‘rebel with a cause’ is weighed down by pressure from the Metropolitan Police. Mangrove / BBC

Berry (1992) refers to the stress that emerges when immigrants face difficulties coping with the acculturation process as ‘acculturative stress’. Furthermore, according to Berry et al (1987), individuals may possess a variety of coping strategies that enable them to “adapt successfully to acculturation (low acculturative stress), while others are unable to cope, leading to high acculturative stress” (Berry et al., 1987: 495). In order to cope with the stressors associated with being an immigrant in a racist society, Crichlow seeks support from other West Indians including members of the newly-formed Black Panther movement. Consequently, the once apprehensive restaurant owner becomes the central figure of a revolution determined to create change and ultimately achieves justice for the West Indian immigrant community that is unprecedented in British history.

5.1.4 Altheia Jones-LeCointe – The Formidable Force

Trinidadian-born Altheia Jones-LeCointe is a trade union activist and leader of the Black Panther movement in Britain. She is presented as a strong, confident and intelligent woman committed to taking a stand against discrimination in London’s Black communities. An example of this is seen when the Black Panthers organised a march to the local police station to protest against the raids at the Mangrove restaurant and Jones-LeCointe addresses the crowd and speaks of the importance of standing up for their rights. In this particular scene McQueen employs the point-of-view (POV) shot to make viewers feel that they are witnessing the events alongside the protesters (see figures 27 and 28).



Figure 27. A handheld camera is situated within the crowd, at a low angle to create a greater sense of immediacy and to give the audience a realistic point of view. Mangrove / BBC



Figure 28. McQueen uses the POV shot to draw the audience in, so they experience the scene similar to the way in which the protesters are experiencing the moment. Mangrove / BBC

Murray Smith contends that the POV shot is an effective device used to align the viewer with the character by providing access to character subjectivity (Smith 1997: 416-417). Smith further states that POV shots are used to engage audiences to the extent that they are emotionally invested in the character (ibid). Here, the point of view (POV) shot is used to put the audience in the mindset of the protesters, enabling them to feel like they

are active participants in the demonstration. The scene is shot with a hand-held camera to accentuate the subjective viewpoint of the crowd and to put the viewers right in the middle of the action. Moreover, the camera is positioned at a low angle, thus making Jones-LeCointe appear powerful and in control as she speaks to her fellow West Indians. This realistic point of view is further enhanced with figures obscuring the view as would be the case in real life, as the viewer is essentially an onlooker in this shot, listening attentively to the words of Jones-LeCointe. In light of the Black Lives Matter protests that have been taking place around the world in recent times, this scene is particularly significant as it demonstrates the struggles of the Black immigrant community in Britain more than fifty years ago, as they campaigned for revolutionary change and for Britain to recognise that Black lives also matter. Commenting on issue systemic racism and racial bias against Black people, McQueen states, “these movies are not about the past”, as they reflect what is going on across the globe at present (Ali, 2020).

5.1.5 Darcus Howe – The Face of the Revolution

Darcus Howe the Trinidadian-born civil rights campaigner, writer and broadcaster, unlike Crichton, is presented as a natural leader. Following the raids at the *Mangrove*, Howe becomes an important figure in the demonstration against police brutality in Notting Hill, calling for Black people to take collective action. In one scene, Howe stands on the top of a car, articulating the need for the West Indian immigrant community to take a stand against further infringement on the rights of Blacks. Here, the point of view is seen from a slit in the back of a police observation van (see figure 29).



Figure 29. McQueen positions the viewer in the role of voyeur, with a restricted view of Howe through an observational slit. Mangrove / BBC

As a way of ensuring that the audience understands the perspective, a Black matte frame is used to emulate the experience of looking through a slot. In this long shot, the tops of police helmets are seen in the foreground while Howe is in the background along with an image of the Grenfell Tower under construction in the far distance. By placing viewers

in the observation van, McQueen's intention is to allow them to view the protest through the eyes of the police, as 'voyeurs' in the lives of West Indian immigrants. An argument can be made that this shot is a literal representation of the limited perspective of a prejudiced police department, as far as the Black community is concerned. The sound quality and volume are also altered to suggest that the audience hear the protesters' chants coming in from a distance. This sound perspective tactic is used to give viewers an idea of the relative importance of the observing police or 'voyeurs' to the film's narrative, and so sound contributes significantly to point of view in this scene. This shot in the observation van is later referred to in the courtroom and becomes a turning point in the trial of the Mangrove Nine.

5.1.6 Revolutionising the Courtroom Drama

While the first half of *Mangrove* is focussed on connecting the audience to this marginalized community by showing the personal lives of the protagonists, richness of the Afro-Caribbean culture and vibrant lifestyle rarely seen on British screens, the second half of the film gives attention to the publicized trial of the Mangrove Nine. An unusual occurrence in traditional courtroom dramas, in which the main story of the legal proceedings often takes place within the first half of the film. This following section therefore analyses the courtroom proceedings to discuss the extent to which McQueen adopts a distinctive film style to present a multidimensional portrait of the Black experience in Britain rarely shown on British television.

To realize his vision for *Mangrove*, McQueen incorporates a number of stylistic techniques, many of which maintain the traditional genre conventions of the courtroom drama. This is particularly true for the courtroom scenes in which cinematography, point-of-view, lighting and framing all work together to transform representation of the Black British experience on BBC television in a way that has not been done before. Each of these techniques will now be examined in detail to determine how they were instrumental in helping McQueen reorient the representation of the Caribbean community on BBC television.

Similar to the opening scene in which McQueen used an aerial view shot to emphasise Crichtlow's isolation in Britain, at the beginning of second half of the film, as the nine defendants make their way into the courtroom, a bird's eye view shot is also used to draw attention to how powerless the immigrants appear as they take on the British state (see figure 30).



Figure 30. McQueen uses the aerial view shot emphasise the defendants' inferiority in relation to the British establishment. Mangrove / BBC

By using an aerial shot, McQueen gives viewers a full view of the imposing concrete structure of the Old Bailey courthouse which rises above the Mangrove protesters as they enter the building. The camera then slowly glides away from the entrance and a pedestal shot is used to show the very top of the building, zooming in on the Royal Coat of Arms – an emblem of the Crown's authority in the British courts (see figure 31).



Figure 31. The Royal Coat of Arms shown above the entrance of the courthouse symbolizes the judiciary's allegiance to the British Sovereign. Mangrove / BBC

McQueen's intention here is to comment on the humanity of the accused as compared to the stone-cold British justice system and its dominance on the lives of the West Indian immigrants. By showing the scale of the building, McQueen also presents the Old Bailey as an intimidating place and a representative of the British monarch that not only stands on the side of the police but also exhibits blatant prejudice against the Black community.

5.1.7 Freedom

Freeing the Black community from social oppression is a recurring theme in *Mangrove*. As an avant-garde filmmaker with a background of making films that explore all aspects of the human body, McQueen is keen to put his artistic stamp on *Mangrove*, often showing abstract shots of feet; arguably a symbol of freedom - freedom from mental bondage, freedom of self-expression, freedom of speech and of the press, to name but a few. This is alluded to in one scene during a street protest when a squad of officers rush out of the police station to observe what was taking place on Portnall Road. In this shot, only the feet of the policemen are shown as they hurry down the steps towards the protest—possibly McQueen’s way of critiquing the Met’s ability to move and act freely without restrictions, while they infringe on the rights of the Black community to express themselves and demonstrate freely and without fear. McQueen once again makes his artistic mark on *Mangrove* when he opens a scene with several feet gathered underneath a table in silhouette lighting, and then tilts the camera upwards to reveal the defendants sitting at the table discussing the events that took place in the courtroom earlier that morning (see figures 32 and 33).



Figure 32. McQueen focuses on the feet of the Met police as they rush out onto All Saints Road, thereby critiquing the ‘freedom of movement’ by those in authority. Mangrove / BBC



Figure 33. The feet of the defendants are shown in a confined space in silhouette lighting, alluding to the restrictions imposed on the West Indian immigrants. Mangrove / BBC

By showing the feet of the defendants grouped very tightly together and locked in this small space in the green room, McQueen is suggesting that their movement is restricted. Later on, McQueen shows the power of unity in the fight for freedom, with repeat cuts of the defendants stomping their feet in unison, as a cry for justice and freedom (see figure 34).



Figure 34. The defendants literally ‘put their feet down’ as they stomp their feet in unison to show their displeasure with the court proceedings. Mangrove / BBC

These rapid cuts of stomping feet are used to convey the idea of the defendants ‘putting their feet down’ in protest against an unfair trial – a fitting metaphor for their situation. Moreover, this scene illustrates the resilience of the Black community and their determination to ‘move’ as a unified force to bring about change even when the system is designed to restrict their movement and keep them oppressed. It appears that the speed and timing of these cuts serve to heighten the emotional intensity of the scene. As Susan Feagin contends, filmmakers often manipulate duration and frequency of images to elicit emotional reactions from the audience (Feagin, 1999). According to Feagin, “the duration of and durational relationships between and among images in a film can affect spectators’ emotional responses to a film in ways that enrich their experiences of it (Feagin 1999: 168).

5.1.8 Perspective

Throughout the film, McQueen uses point of view shots in the most striking and distinctive ways to force his audience to view scenes from a particular perspective, thereby adding depth to the narrative. In the courtroom, an example of this can be seen during Howe’s cross-examination of PC Pulley, when he picks up a piece of paper with a slit measuring two by eight inches, the same size as the slot in the police observation vehicle used during the street protest (see figure 35).



Figure 35. Howe shows the court a two by eight inch slit as he questions PC Pulley's credibility during cross-examination. Mangrove / BBC

In his attempt to expose the police officer's "conspiratorial lies", Howe asks PC Pulley to "please confirm that this is the size of the slit in the observation van", to which PC Pulley responds, "It's roughly the same I guess, yes". Howe smiles and to demonstrate his point to the jury, he puts the paper against his face and through the slit, looks at PC Pulley, the jury and then the defendants, including his partner Beese (see figures 36 and 37).





Figures 36 and 37. These POV shots are used to allow viewers to align themselves with Howe during his cross-examination of PC Pulley. Mangrove / BBC

In this scene, McQueen puts the audience in the place of Howe, allowing them to not only consider what it feels like to be a Black immigrant and judged by a predominantly White jury, but to also feel the frustration and resilience of the nine defendants as they fight earnestly for their freedom in a criminal justice system that is clearly biased against the Black community.

5.1.9 Keeping the focus

Another key feature in *Mangrove* is the use of long, uninterrupted takes. McQueen purposefully incorporates a series of long takes and lingering shots in an effort to draw viewers deeper into the story, allowing them to experience the film as if they are part of it. A representative example of this can be seen during the trial when Howe delivers a passionate monologue in his final attempt to fight for his freedom. In this compelling scene with Howe, McQueen cuts from a close-up shot of Beese as she gives her partner a look of encouragement, to a close-up shot of Howe who smiles briefly before composing himself. McQueen then opts for a wide shot, framing all nine defendants in the dock just as Howe begins the delivery of his closing statement to the jury. Designed to immerse the audience into the world of the protagonist, this first extended take in the scene lasts approximately forty seconds.

Another example where McQueen uses a long, uninterrupted take is when he shows Crichlow's disposition during the reading of the verdict. In this scene, McQueen holds the camera on Crichlow for approximately one minute and thirty seconds, first as a mid-shot and then gradually zooms in for a medium close-up shot to show tears of relief streaming down Crichlow's face when he hears that he and his Mangrove supporters are all acquitted of the serious charges (see figure 38).



Figure 38. McQueen employs a long take with a medium close-up shot to show Crichlow's raw emotions to encourage audience empathy. Mangrove / BBC

In this powerful scene, McQueen summons the audience to connect with Crichlow and identify with the raw emotions he releases, thus evoking a sense of emotional catharsis.

McQueen also employs framing to comment on the film's ideology with regard to the spirit of community and solidarity that exists amongst the West Indian immigrants. An example of this is when the nine defendants are in the dock providing moral and emotional support to each other as they take on the British state in their fight for justice. Here, McQueen uses a wide shot to frame the characters, emphasising the power of unity and togetherness in such a highly political legal battle (see figures 39 and 40).





Figures 39 and 40. In these frame compositions, McQueen compels the audience to view the Mangrove Nine as a united group and reflect on the importance of community to achieve Black progress in Britain. Mangrove / BBC

In an interview with *British Cinematographer*, Kirchner explains the creative thought behind the framing techniques used in the courtroom. He says, “This was the way we wanted to frame the nine characters – as a community. We knew there would be many characters in one frame, the community versus the system, which a 2.35:1 aspect ratio would allow us to do,” (Mutter, 2021).

In *Mangrove*, McQueen pushes the boundaries of Caribbean representation on British television. As a visionary filmmaker with a vested interest in telling authentic stories of the Black experience in Britain, he has taken an important position, employing the conventions of the courtroom drama genre to frame Britain’s Caribbean diaspora to connect his protagonists with viewers who identify as Black Caribbean and beyond. *Mangrove* illustrates McQueen’s penchant for long uninterrupted takes, tight frames and a creative use of point of view for dramatic effect. As a result, McQueen provides a rare opportunity for viewers to experience a fresh version of a courtroom drama where London’s West Indian immigrants are in control of their own narratives thereby reshaping Caribbean representation on BBC television.

5.2 *Lovers Rock*

While four of the five *Small Axe* films depict the difficulties experienced by first- and second- generation West Indians in their attempt to settle in London during the 1960s and through the 1980s, *Lovers Rock*, the second film in the series is a joyous celebration of young, Black love at a house party in Ladbroke Grove (Clarke, 2021). An ode to the sensual music genre Lovers Rock – the lovechild of reggae and soul – the film is a fictional story of a young Black couple who meet and fall in love at an all-night birthday Blues party. The narrative centres on the blossoming romance between second-generation Jamaicans, Martha (Amarah-Jae St. Aubyn) and Franklyn (Micheal Ward), in a safe space where they can express themselves freely and indulge in their own culture at a time when the ‘colour bar’ meant that Black Londoners, particularly Black men, were not welcome in White-owned nightclubs in post-war Britain (BBC, 2020; Craig, 2020). *Lovers Rock* validates the existence of Black joy in London’s West Indian community and the young

immigrants' determination to express love for each other and Black culture without apology in a society which discriminates against them because of their Blackness (see figure 41).

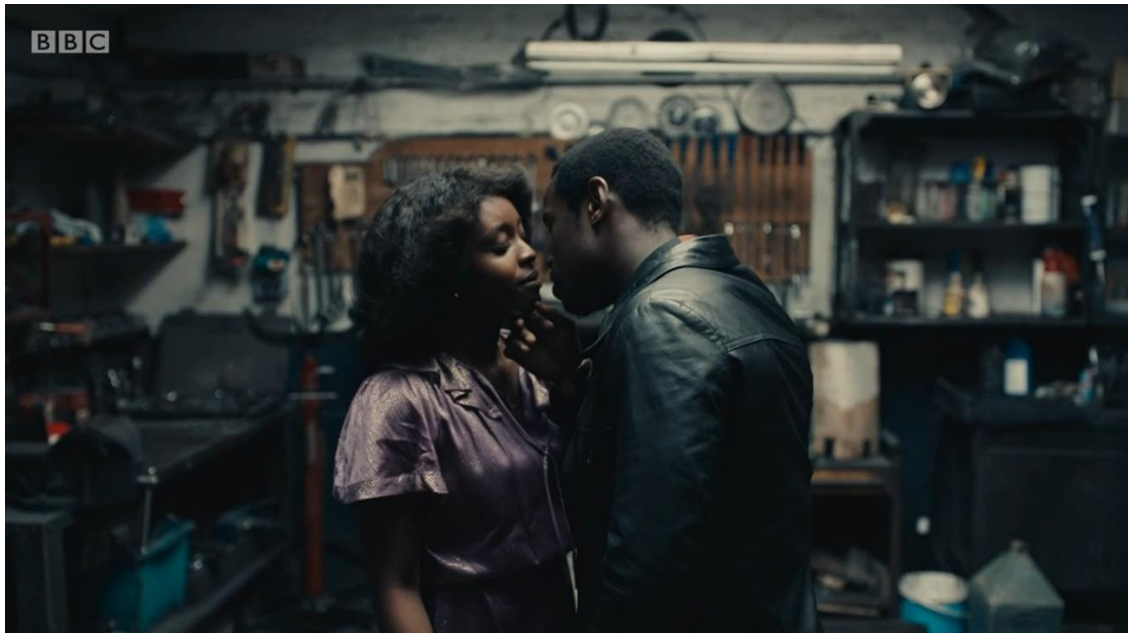


Figure 41. *Martha and Franklyn are the epitome of young Black love in a racially biased society.* Lovers Rock / BBC

5.2.1 A personal invitation to a private party

Lovers Rock gives viewers an all-access pass to a typical 1980s Blues party, where West Indians reconnect with their roots and culture and temporarily escape from the social oppression and microaggression in Enoch Powell's England. The main action takes place on the living room dancefloor, over the course of one evening, and unlike the other *Small Axe* films which are uncompromising and direct in their representations of racial injustice against the West Indian community, *Lovers Rock* sits at the other end of the spectrum, showcasing a rarely seen aspect of British-Caribbean life that is not defined by ongoing struggle. In the film, which applauds the self-reliance and revolutionary spirit of West Indian immigrants to create and protect their own 'happy place' in Britain, McQueen chooses to deflect from the political undercurrents and trauma and instead focuses on the dynamics between young men and women and the unadulterated love for self, others and the music of Black liberation (Collins and Collins, 2020).

5.2.2 The sensuality of *Lovers Rock*

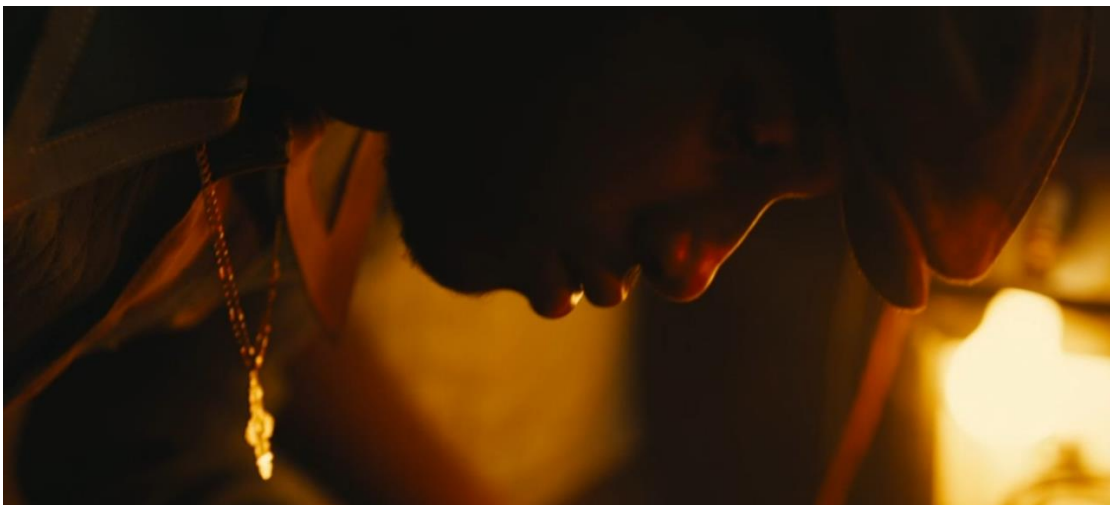
In *Lovers Rock*, McQueen combines immersive storytelling with an original aesthetic style to create a Black romantic drama that offers viewers a rare opportunity to experience an aspect of West Indian culture through a marginalised group who felt the need to create their own cultural sanctuary as a way to rebel against an oppressive British society and

escape to a place of pure joy. In so doing, the film sheds light on the restrictions placed on London's Black community following their arrival in Britain, and how they found "respite and rapture" in the safety of their own homes (Oloukoï, 2021).

Here, McQueen explores the soulful and sensual mysticism of a typical West Indian house party by incorporating a number of aesthetic elements such as lighting, colour, camera angles, movement and music to trigger emotional responses in his viewers. In so doing, he puts his unique stamp on *Lovers Rock* and repositions representation for Britain's Black community on a mainstream platform. This section will therefore discuss the cinematic techniques used by McQueen to present audiences with an unfiltered version of Black culture and a Black love story rarely seen on British television.

5.2.3 A warm, soulful glow

McQueen's creative use of lighting on the dancefloor serves to convey the intimacy and private atmosphere of the house party and create a warm and welcoming environment for audiences experiencing this youthful party vibe for the very first time. For the viewer who is no stranger to this unique aspect of Black culture, the soft, muted interior lights create a sense of belonging. For instance, when the MCs are shown in the corner of the room spinning the decks playing 'ole skool' reggae, the DJ booth is dimly lit with incandescent light bulbs, emitting a warm-yellow glow over the selectors and their vintage turntables (see figures 42 and 43).





Figures 42 and 43. *McQueen uses a warm, soft light in a number of scenes at the house party to create a cosy and inviting space.* Lovers Rock / BBC

By incorporating a warm colour palette for the interior scenes, McQueen steps outside of his usual dark tonal style to give West Indian audiences a generous dose of nostalgia of days gone by, drenched in sweat in hot, smoke-filled sticky rooms and dancing to lovers rock hits of the '80s. According to Michael Flaherty, nostalgia is a technique often employed to evoke memories and connect with a sense of belonging in the past that is used to 'warm up' and give vitality to the present moment (Flaherty, 2012). One can therefore argue that in light of the longstanding systemic obstacles hindering the progress of the Black community in Britain, McQueen uses nostalgia to establish temporal agency and create a sense of belonging and identity amongst West Indian audiences (Flaherty, 2012). McQueen's deliberate use of warm interior lighting also heightens the emotive aspect of the film and functions as a commentary on the importance of this private, comfortable space for immigrants, shielding them from the outside forces created to alienate them.

5.2.4 A cold, distant world

To highlight themes of racial intolerance and isolation, McQueen deviates from the warm yellow tones and uses a cool colour palette to punctuate the negative aspects of the film. This is illustrated in one scene during the day when the DJs carry equipment into the house to set up for the night event, and they are gawked at by a group of White neighbours. The lighting and colour scheme then changes to a combination of daylight and a cool green, suggesting a cold environment from the negativity of external forces (see figure 44).



Figure 44. *The transition from warm hues on the inside to cooler tones outside reflect the change in the atmosphere as the Black youths prepare for the Blues party. Lovers Rock / BBC*

Once the DJs enter the house, the atmosphere is warm and friendly once again. This inside space with its warm glow, according to Kirchner, is a safe place for Black immigrants:

One of the big things for me was, here was an instance where night-time is the sacred place, the special and welcoming place, and daytime and daylight is this oppressive thing...you can notice throughout the series, this oppressive daylight, being the White light that is constantly trying to invade this space. (O'Falt, 2021)

This oppressive light that Kirchner refers to is apparent in the scenes depicting some element of threat or a sense of isolation. Such is the case when a young woman is assaulted and McQueen incorporates cooler tones such as blues and greens to replace the warm amber hues, thereby creating a visual contrast to the euphoric depiction of the Blues party taking place inside (see figures 45 and 46).



Figures 45 and 46. *McQueen changes the colour scheme from warm hues to cool blues and greens to signify the troubled atmosphere in the scene.* Lovers Rock / BBC

5.2.5 The art of seduction

As a way of enhancing the sensual elements of the film, McQueen uses soft lilacs and pinks to create an otherworldly sensation and provide audiences with further insight into the emotional state of the characters. The scenes lit in these delicate hues which signify romance and intimacy, take place mainly on the dancefloor (see figures 47 and 48).



Figures 47 and 48. *McQueen uses pastel hues to accentuate the passion and romance taking place on the dancefloor and to evoke an amorous response from the viewer. Lovers Rock / BBC*

According to the cinematographer, the romantic mood on the dance floor was achieved by constantly tweaking the light and colour off the ladies' coloured frocks and the men's smart suits. He says, "we had the ability to play the light against the costume, and that was something that was happening [in] real-time as the song evolved. It was basically a

conversation between light and costume. Every moment, the lights are constantly changing” (O’Falt, 2021).

As illustrated above, depending on the situation, the lighting and colour schemes are continuously adjusted to enhance the visual aesthetics and connect the audience with the story that is being communicated in *Lovers Rock*. Another technique employed by McQueen to create an immersive experience for the viewer, is the movement of the camera. With the creative use of camera angles, tight close-up shots and lingering takes, McQueen captures the most intimate moments between the characters to give viewers the feeling that they are present with the lovers in this private house party. This next section will discuss these camera techniques in more detail to examine the ways in which McQueen frames the Black community in their pursuit of happiness and in so doing, reorients Caribbean representation on British television.

5.2.6 The power of visual storytelling

A large part of the drama in *Lovers Rock* is being told through the lens of a handheld camera, which weaves in and out of the crowd, both on the dancefloor and out in the yard like a typical guest at the party. It appears that McQueen and his cinematographer chose to situate the camera as a character in the story so as to carry the audience along as participants at the event, thereby providing them with an immersive experience. According to McQueen, this tactic was adopted with the intention of ensuring that “there’s no difference between people in the frame and the person holding the camera” (O’Falt, 2021). In so doing, viewers are made to feel that they are guests at the party and are obliged to dance and sing with the revellers and share in their joy. While shooting the party scenes with a handheld camera is an unusual style for this particular genre, it permits McQueen to create a level of intimacy and evoke feelings of euphoria in the audience. Using a panning shot, McQueen sweeps the camera around the room, imitating the gaze of an onlooker taking in the scene as it unfolds before them. He incorporates long takes with wide shots, holding the camera in the space at times, in a similar fashion to someone scanning the room with occasional pauses (see figures 49 and 50).





Figures 49 and 50. *The deliberate use of lingering shots gives audiences a good view of the action unfolding before them.* Lovers Rock / BBC

McQueen then cuts from mid-shots showing the characters' body language and how they interact with the surrounding environment, to show close-up shots of the revellers as they slow dance together, heightening the emotion in the scene (see figures 51 and 52).





Figures 51 and 52. *The close-up shots of the characters show them wrapped into each other's arms, losing themselves in the music and numbing the pain of racism which lurk on the outside, if only for one night. Lovers Rock / BBC*

The camera angles, long takes and tight close-up shots in *Lovers Rock* all contribute to McQueen's central concerns of shaping the representation of London's West Indian community on British television. For instance, to highlight the intimacy between the characters, the camera is kept at a low angle, capturing powerful moments of human connection (see figures 53 and 54).





Figures 53 and 54. *McQueen uses low angle shots to draw attention to tender touches and subtle but powerful body language which heightens the sexual tension on the dancefloor. Lovers Rock / BBC*

In *Lovers Rock*, McQueen has employed the conventions of the romantic drama genre in creative and distinctive ways to shift the conversation as it relates to Black representation on British television. The ultimate centrepiece in the film however, is the music of the West Indian immigrants and so, this next section will discuss the hypnotic sounds of lovers rock, dub reggae and disco in *Lovers Rock* and the ways in which McQueen explores the relationship between a disenfranchised people and their music.

5.2.7 The Power of Music

Reggae music plays an important role in defining Caribbean identity and here, McQueen pays homage to lovers rock, a subgenre of reggae with particular appeal amongst women and rarely featured on British television. The music in *Lovers Rock* plays a starring role in the film, with iconic hits from some of the most celebrated artistes in the genre. Throughout the drama, non-diegetic music is used to establish the tone and emphasize the mood of a scene, while diegetic music is incorporated into the narrative to express the sentiments of the West Indian community and add another layer to their story of resilience, romance and rapture. Given McQueen's interest in drawing the audience into the world of the characters, this section is particularly concerned with how the filmmaker employs diegetic music as an effective narrative device in *Lovers Rock*.

McQueen's use of diegetic music underscores the power of music to not only evoke emotion but also, to comfort and unite a marginalised community. This can be seen in the opening scene at the party, when the DJ plays a lovers rock tune, and the ladies immediately take to the dancefloor (see figure 55).



Figure 55. *Lovers Rock* showcases the independence and confidence of West Indian women during the 1980s era. *Lovers Rock* / BBC

According to Mykaell Riley, before the lovers rock era, at these parties, “it was predominantly a male dance floor” (Gordon, 2020). Rather than presenting the young women as wallflowers at this important gathering however, McQueen repositions the representation of Black women on British television, by showing them to be independent and empowered. An example of this is when Martha is harassed by the smooth-talking, macho Bammy, the audience sees a confident and strong-minded Black woman who refuses to be objectified and respectfully declines his advances (see figure 56).



Figure 56. *Martha* who does not appear to be intimidated by smooth talking *Bammy*, handles herself in a controlled and dignified manner. *Lovers Rock* / BBC

At a time when reggae tunes were dominated by male voices, lovers rock opened the way for female vocalists with a soft, erotic style, putting listeners at ease and in the mood for romance. In the dancefloor scenes, McQueen uses diegetic music exclusively and in a more extensive manner than is typical in traditional romantic dramas. In one of the most sensational sequences in *Lovers Rock*, lasting just over ten minutes, McQueen puts the spotlight on Janet Kay, arguably the queen of lovers rock, known for her 1979 hit single, 'Silly Games'. The showstopping sequence begins with the DJ introducing the classic record, hyping up the ladies who become increasingly giddy with anticipation of their anthem song. In that moment, the camera pans around the room showing the lovers in their own private bubble, dancing seductively to the soul liberating sound of Kay as she sings of the pain and heartbreak associated with unrequited love (see figure 57).



Figure 57. *The dance scenes focus on the intimate moments between the characters.* Lovers Rock / BBC

According to McQueen, 'Silly Games' had to be the showpiece at the party because it is open to a myriad of interpretations. He says: "Falling in love [is] the bravest thing you could possibly do...because you're opening yourself to hurt" (Gordon, 2020). When Dennis Bovell wrote the song in 1978, it was in reference to a young woman who was in love with a man, however, Bovell states that in *Lovers Rock*, McQueen took a personal story to make a political statement. He says, "The song became a kind of spiritual and a kind of protest: the authorities playing silly games with the people. I thought, Steve, how did you see that? I never saw that song as a protest" (Lynskey, 2021). However, McQueen admits that the song was the inspiration for the film and became the main soundtrack, as it speaks to the issue of leading others on under false pretences (Lynskey, 2021). According to the director, "In many ways, ['Silly Games'] was the basis for the entire film. It is about intimacy and desire and asking someone to take off their mask" (Lynskey, 2021).

Halfway through this arresting sequence, in the midst of the slow sensuous dancing, the music fades and the lovers and rockers captivated by the moment, continue to sing acapella. The vibe is spiritual, almost like a church service with the congregation

experiencing a musical ecstasy and the viewer is left with little choice but to feel part of this mystical journey. This, McQueen admits, is a spontaneous moment, “completely organic”, where the characters, entranced by the music, “kept right on singing, as if experiencing a spiritual awakening” (Bbc.co.uk, 2020). “There was definitely a sense of spirituality in that room” he says and describes his role in this sequence as “merely a witness with a camera” (Bbc.co.uk, 2020; Sepinwall, 2020). Again, during the soul-baring acapella performance, like several scenes in *Mangrove*, McQueen’s camera lingers on the movement of the dancers’ feet on the wooden floorboards, signifying moments of intense rapture in this transportive event and their freedom to move without inhibition in this sacred space.

Later in the scene, the rhythm changes to a rich compilation of instrumental dub tracks with explosive base lines and thunderous drumbeats, compelling the men to instantly claim the dancefloor warrior-style, as if engaging in a communal release of pent-up emotions. In this moment, the story of the Black experience in Britain dominates the screen with the gathering of proud men feeding their souls with positive vibrations and reclaiming Black joy in the absence of the White racist gaze. In essence, Blackness emancipated from White oppression. Moreover, this sequence is arguably McQueen’s way of incorporating ironic stereotypes in *Lovers Rock* so as to subvert racial ideologies about Black males being threatening and aggressive. He therefore challenges media stereotypes of Black men and disrupts dominant discourses on Black masculinity by showing the revellers so consumed by the music that they express themselves through erratic movement and wail, not at each other, but at ‘Babylon’, a system designed to rob them of their masculine identity.

Both sequences discussed above illustrate the power of love and togetherness in the Black community and at the same time, underscore the relationship between a disenfranchised people and their music, redemption songs that uplift and unite especially during difficult times. McQueen recognises the significance of these cathartic moments and says, “They are two pieces of the same story. Seventies dub reggae was masculine in many ways and the women needed their own sweet music as a response and a respite. Lovers rock [is] soul really, delivered over a reggae rhythm” (O’Hagan, 2020) (see figure 58).



Figure 58. *Lovers Rock* highlights the power of music to bring joy and togetherness in the West Indian immigrant community in London. *Lovers Rock* / BBC

In this rapturous film, McQueen pays homage not only to young Black love and reclaimed freedom but also the powerful reggae infused music that brings hope to disenfranchised people weighed down by systems of oppression - a radical move rarely seen on BBC television (see figure 59).



Figure 59. *The film delivers messages of hope for London's young Black community. Lovers Rock / BBC*

It can be said that McQueen's direction combined with Kirchner's cinematography work harmoniously to create a rich visual grammar while revisiting the conventions of the romantic drama genre. As a lover of music, reggae-infused music in particular, with regard to *Lovers Rock*, McQueen reveals, "For me, this is my musical. This is the musical I've always wanted to do" (BBC.co.uk, 2020).

5.2.8 Martha and Franklyn's Acculturative Processes

Despite being a second-generation West Indian immigrant, Martha appears to be well connected to her Caribbean musical heritage. She also epitomizes a positive blend of both the host culture and her own culture of origin wearing permed hair instead of her natural curly hair and at the same time speaking Jamaican patois with her peers. It can therefore be argued that she displays bicultural tendencies, having adopted the acculturation strategy of integration.

Similarly, Franklyn, a second-generation immigrant like Martha, also appears to be integrated into British culture. Though he speaks in Jamaican patois, he is shown to effortlessly navigate and display his dual identity in conversation through codeswitching. This can be seen in one scene, when the young lovers are making out at Franklyn's workplace and are interrupted by his White employer. At this point Franklyn instinctively abandons his Jamaican patois and speaks to his supervisor in a cockney accent. As explained above, as part of the acculturation process, immigrants may compartmentalize their identities and adapt their behaviours or speech patterns in order to fit in. In Franklyn's case, he appears to revert to the cockney dialect, not necessarily to conceal his

Jamaican identity, but to break down any possible language barrier and to be easily understood by his employer.

According to a report conducted by Brown and Zagefka (2016) on acculturation in the United Kingdom, despite the fact that many second-generation immigrants are British citizens, “they must also navigate between their family’s original culture and that of British mainstream, society, and they can choose to endorse both, neither or just one to varying degrees” (Brown and Zagefka, 2016). These aforementioned carefully crafted scenes therefore reveal the immigrants’ strong attachment to their West Indian identity and their enthusiasm to embrace their original heritage, and so while they may interact with the dominant culture on a day-to-day basis, it appears that on a group level, in this particular setting, they have adopted the acculturation strategy of separation by placing high importance on their culture of origin. Berry (1992) and other influential acculturation theorists contend that this approach to acculturation often occurs in societies that are racially or culturally segregated.

5.3 *Red, White and Blue*

Red, White and Blue, the third film in the *Small Axe* series, tells the true story of second-generation West Indian Leroy Logan (John Boyega), a forensic scientist who is driven to join the Metropolitan Police force with the intention of reforming the institution from within after his father is assaulted by police officers. As a young Black man with ties to the local community, Logan is one of the first Black officers to join the Metropolitan police and has hopes of being an advocate for good policing and building a bridge between police and the Black immigrant community in 1980s London (BBC, 2020). He soon faces opposition from his own family and becomes a victim of sustained racial abuse in the very establishment he wishes to transform. The film recounts Logan’s experiences of isolation and racism in the Met and his resolve to be a force for change in the institution which uses him as a poster boy in an attempt to recruit more ‘Afro-Caribbean’ officers in the police department following the 1981 Brixton riots (BBC, 2020).

This section will provide an analysis of the formal elements in *Red, White and Blue* to argue that McQueen uses the police procedural format to contribute to the current conversation regarding police reform and abolition, incorporating the conventions of the genre by paying particular attention to detail, camera movement, framing, sound and music to show the humanity and resilience of West Indian immigrants in the face of police racism, thereby reshaping Caribbean representation on BC television. This will be followed by a discussion on the acculturation strategies adopted by Logan as a British man of West Indian parentage in his attempt to adjust to life in Britain while straddling dual cultures and identities.

5.3.1 Corrupt systems of justice

Set in 1980s London, *Red, White and Blue* is based on the first year of Leroy Logan's 30 year career in the Metropolitan police force, at a time when racism was widespread across the UK. Given that McQueen's *Small Axe* films are primarily concerned with highlighting the less familiar aspects of British history involving the experience of West Indian immigrants, it can therefore be argued that *Red, White and Blue* draws attention to racist ideologies associated with the Union Jack, the corrupt systems of justice in Britain and the enduring resolve of London's West Indian community to challenge these systems of oppression. As stated above, McQueen employs the police procedural format to add his voice to the current dialogue surrounding the Black Lives Matter movement and to specifically address the issue of systemic racism in Britain. In his commitment to provide a platform for Black voices and to shed light on the Black British experience, particularly that of the Windrush generation and their descendants, McQueen exposes state structures to explore the challenges of being a Black minority fighting racism in a White-dominated police establishment. The following analysis will therefore illustrate the tactics employed by McQueen to expose overt racism and bias in London's Metropolitan police rarely seen on British screens.

5.3.2 *Red, White and Blue* in film

In order to give a unique perspective to Logan's story, *Red, White and Blue* was shot on 35mm film in 3-perf, as this format produces a distinctive texture and grain, resulting in an understated look that captures the essence of Logan's character (Film and Digital, 2020). Kirchner notes McQueen's use of film in his previous work and says the preference to shoot on film as opposed to digital for *Red, White and Blue* was "a natural part of the conversation" (Film and Digital, 2021). With regards to the thought process behind the use of film to tell Logan's personal story, Kirchner says, "we wanted the story to have the texture of 35 and the texture of the world and the time and the place, but not be quite as grainy, and also not be in a wide screen aspect ratio" (Film and Digital, 2021). McQueen therefore opted for a tight aspect ratio of 1.85:1 often associated with modern cinema, to provide an intimate portrait of Logan. This widescreen aspect ratio does not only add more depth to the scenes, but also allows for framing that metaphorically reflects the constraints imposed on a Black police officer in a White-dominated police establishment (Ide, 2021) (see figure 60).



Figure 60. *McQueen uses a medium aspect ratio of 1.85:1 as a stylistic device to focus the audience's attention on Logan and immerse them deeper into the story. Red, White and Blue / BBC*

Despite the fact that the *Small Axe* films are made for television, McQueen chooses to use the 1.85:1 format with slight letterboxing as part of the image for *Red, White and Blue*, to give it a more 'cinematic' look in order to enhance the audience's experience so that they are immersed in Logan's world during the first year of his journey in the Metropolitan police force.

5.3.3 Music as a narrative device to convey feelings

Like the other films in the *Small Axe* series, in *Red, White and Blue* music plays an integral role in setting the tone and conveying the emotions of the characters. In this instalment, McQueen incorporates an array of music genres of the era to establish the desired atmosphere in a scene. An example of this can be seen when Kenneth and his son are in the car on their way home and Jim Reeves' 'This World Is Not My Home' begins to play. Here, McQueen uses a medium close up shot to frame both father and son so that the audience has a good view of their facial expressions while the music plays. The young Logan drops his gaze to the car stereo and so the audience is made aware that the music is diegetic, coming from the car's audio system. Reeves was an American country singer, and this song is one of his most popular renditions often sung in Christian churches. The song speaks of 'home' – that special place which is welcoming and makes a person feel safe and content. The lyrics, 'This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through, my treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue' suggests that the current place in which the characters dwell does not feel like 'home' but rather a temporary abode, and that beyond this, is a place which is meant to offer intangible treasures of humanity such as love, comfort and protection. Just as young Logan lowers his eyes towards the source of

the music, the audience hears, ‘The angels beckon me / From heaven’s open door / and I can’t feel at home / In this world anymore’ (see figure 61).



Figure 61. *Young Logan* lowers his gaze to the source of the diegetic music. Red, White and Blue / BBC

In this scene, it appears that McQueen uses music as a narrative device to communicate to the viewer the characters’ feeling of alienation in a foreign land, and desire for the familiarity of ‘home’ and the joy that it offers. At a time when West Indian immigrants were made to feel unwelcome in Britain and often told to “go home”, McQueen recognizes the role of Rastafarians in keeping the community together. He believes, “if Bob Marley didn’t exist, a lot of people would have had breakdowns” (Webb, 2021). The director credits the Jamaican Reggae artist with giving hope to a disenfranchised people living “in an environment that wasn’t particularly inviting” and says, “That’s why from day one, the series was called *Small Axe* (Webb, 2021). According to McQueen, the meaning behind Jim Reeves’ song is one that resonates with West Indians especially those of the Windrush era. He explains further:

Home was not where you were living, but the place where things were always better. Rastafarians constructed their own faith around that belief, not least because their surroundings were so unwelcoming and oppressive. If Rasta had not provided that sense of togetherness, I think there would have been deep psychosis among young people from the West Indian community back in the 1970s. (O’Hagan, 2020)

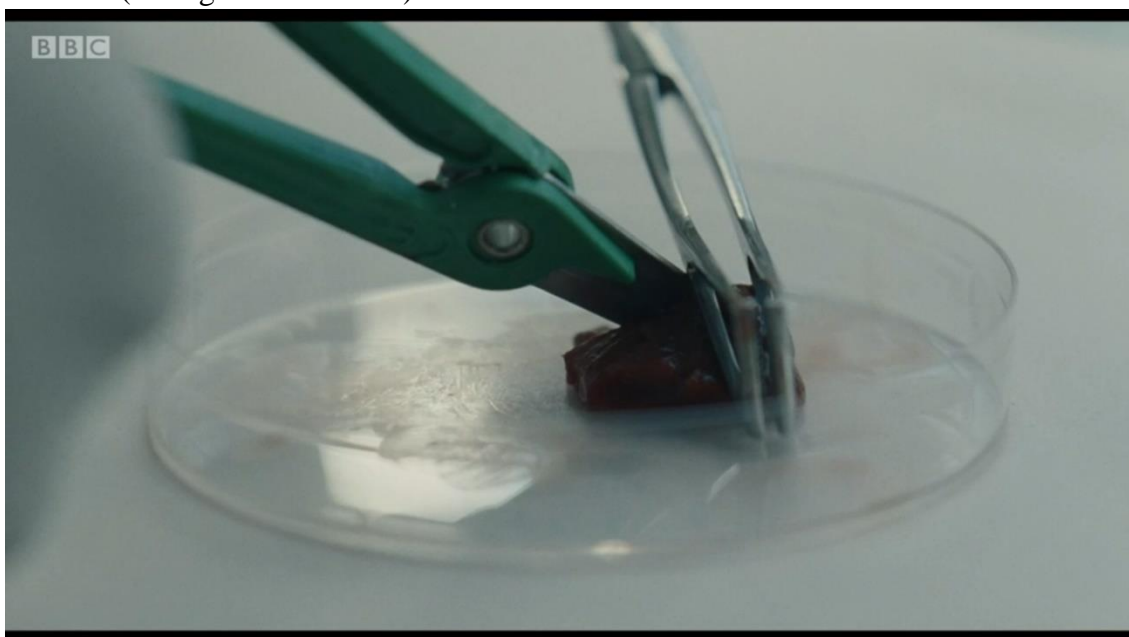
Commenting on the significance of music in his *Small Axe* series, McQueen says, “Music is the life source of these films” (Ide, 2021). The soundtracks chosen for the film series are heavily influenced by music McQueen was exposed to as a young child in a West Indian household in 1970s London. Jim Reeves, like other popular artists of the 1960s, features prominently in *Red, White and Blue* with another track, ‘It’s No Secret’,

giving reassurance of deliverance to those who believe. The choice of music reminiscent of his childhood is arguably McQueen's way of paying tribute to his elders. The *Small Axe* director highlights the significance of Reeves' music to the Windrush immigrants and says:

I had to put Jim Reeves in there. I remember on Sundays my dad would play those tunes and put his feet up. He was huge in the West Indian community. I think it's to do with hope, which is a big thing in American country music. Without the hope they found in music, a lot of people I know would not be here now. (O'Hagan, 2020)

Later on in the car scene, the young Logan changes the radio station and 'Tainted Love' by soul singer Gloria Jones blasts from the car speakers. The song describes a relationship in which one person is unfulfilled and entertains the idea of running away in order to be liberated. The lyrics state, 'The love we share seems to go nowhere / And I've lost my light... Sometimes I feel I've got to / Run away / I've got to / Get away from the pain you drive in the heart of me'. Here, McQueen uses diegetic music as a narrative device to convey to the audience that there is an underlying strain in the father-son relationship. The viewer will later bear witness to this apparent 'tainted love' between the two characters, when young Logan decides to abandon his career in forensic science to join the Metropolitan Police force.

In another scene, McQueen once again makes creative use of non-diegetic music to reveal the character's state of mind in order to develop empathy with the audience when Logan is shown working in solitude in a forensic lab. At the beginning of this scene the audience hears the non-diegetic sound of Al Green's 'Tired of Being Alone', with its opening verse, 'I'm so tired of being alone / I'm so tired of on my own / Won't you help me, girl / Just as soon as you can'. As the music plays McQueen shows close up shots of Logan's scientific experiments in a series of fast cuts to convey the intricacies of his research (see figures 62 and 63).





Figures 62 and 63. *The audience hears non-diegetic music while McQueen shows close-up shots of Logan conducting a scientific experiment. Red, White and Blue / BBC*

These shots are followed by a mid-shot of Logan sitting at his workstation. Apparently unenthused, he sighs heavily before removing his headphones. At this point, the music suddenly fades, and the viewer realizes that Logan was listening to the very same music on a portable device (see figure 64).



Figure 64. *The moment Logan removes his headphones the music fades, indicating to the audience that he was also listening to the 1970s single by Al Green. Red, White and Blue / BBC*

In his 1970s classic, Al Green expresses feelings of loneliness, regret over lost love and hope of finally being happy once again. As Logan sits at his workstation in the lab, the audience gets a clear sense of his alienation, and an appreciation for the thoughts that cloud his mind in this isolated space. In this specific scene, McQueen incorporates music in a way that blurs the distinction between non-diegetic and diegetic music to underscore a moment in the narrative where Logan questions his purpose. The music lingers until the end of the scene in which the young scientist stands in his lab's doorway and looks around at the empty workstations before pausing for a brief moment to reflect, as if questioning whether this is where truly belongs. Here, McQueen uses a long shot to give the audience a full view of the lab, void of human connection, and to emphasize Logan's apparent disconnection from his work environment (see figure 65).



Figure 65. A *long shot* is used to show Logan as a distant, isolated figure in his research laboratory. *Red, White and Blue* / BBC

The following sections will explore other stylistic devices in *Red, White and Blue* and at the same time highlight further examples of McQueen's use of diegetic and non-diegetic music to promote his concerns of shedding light on an aspect of the Black experience in Britain that has been side-lined for many years.

5.3.4 Transparency, reflectivity and sound

Other cinematic techniques employed by McQueen in *Red, White and Blue* include the point-of-view (POV) shot and the mirror shot to suggest Logan's dual consciousness as well as to convey moments of reflection and self-examination. In addition, quite similar to *Mangrove*, the director also continues to use silence to create and amplify tension in the scene. This is especially evident when the narrative centres on Logan's internal struggles as a Black British man and the fraught relationship that he has with his father Kenneth, which worsens when the young man decides to join the Metropolitan Police

force. This section will look at the three aforementioned techniques McQueen incorporates to engage viewers as active participants in the film as well as to convey the collision of two worlds, thereby adding depth to the narrative.

In one scene following a farewell dinner for Logan as he embarks on his new career in law enforcement, McQueen underlines the emotional strain between father and son as they sit in silence for the duration of the journey to the training school (see figures 66 and 67).



Figures 66 and 67. *The prolonged silence in the car has the effect of creating a space for the viewer to reflect on the sheer weight of this emotionally charged moment.*
Red, White and Blue / BBC

Following Kenneth's private moment of reflection where he comes to accept Logan's decision to join the Met, McQueen positions the audience to observe the interaction between Logan and his father (see figure 68).



Figure 68. *McQueen keeps the viewer at a distance to observe Logan and Kenneth as they embrace each other while non-diegetic music continues to play in the background. Red, White and Blue / BBC*

McQueen captures this private moment between father and son using a long shot to frame Kenneth and Logan in the centre of the screen. By showing this intimate connection in an open setting, the director draws attention to Kenneth's public display of affection and support for Logan, thus encouraging the audience to see Black masculinity in a different light. It can therefore be said that McQueen underlines the need for collective introspection as it relates to perceived masculinity, and advertently destigmatises male intimacy, particularly among Black Caribbean men.

In *Red, White and Blue*, McQueen also comments on the 'outsider' status of police officers especially in marginalised communities. As Colin Barrett, author of the British police procedural *A Shooting in Rathreedane* states in an interview with *The New Yorker*:

Like a criminal, a cop is at heart an outsider. No matter how embedded, they are within a community, no matter how acutely they understand the customs and mores and psychological temperament of that community, indeed, even if they originally come from that community...their cop-hood renders them ultimately apart. (Leyshon, 2021)

An example of the police being positioned as outsiders can be seen during Logan's training, when the recruits wear riot gear and are visible to the audience through plexiglass shields. As they prepare to invade a building the hostile instructor demands that they "subdue and disarm the berserker" (see figure 69).



Figure 69. *The plexiglass shields used during police training reinforces the 'us' vs. 'them' mentality.* Red, White and Blue/BBC

In other words, rather than teaching new recruits how to de-escalate hostile situations with minimal force, they are given military-style training and are encouraged to act as warriors to enforce the law in the Black community.

In the film Logan often speaks of the importance of bridging the gap between his people and the Metropolitan police and in one scene in particular by way of illustration, McQueen emphasises this divide. This is seen when a uniformed Logan visits the Greater London police station, and he is shown on one side of the counter facing a more senior officer on the other side. A glass panel separates the two men (see figure 70).



Figure 70. In this shot, a glass panel separates Logan and the senior officer, to illustrate the pervasive gap that exists between Blacks and the Metropolitan police. Red, White and Blue / BBC

Here, McQueen frames the characters using medium close-up shots, thus enabling the audience to observe the men's body language as they communicate with each other through the glass panel. By incorporating reflections of both police officers as well as the surrounding environment, McQueen provides the audience with a new sense of context, inviting them to join Logan as he considers his insider/outsider status in the Metropolitan police department. This sense of estrangement is later explored in a later scene when Logan suffers racial abuse from one of his own people from the Black community, who accuses him of being a traitor. Under detention in a holding cell, the man yells at Logan, "what, you one of them, yeah? One of them? You one of them? You fucking traitor. Fucking coconut, Oreo biscuit!" (see figure 71).



Figure 71. McQueen shoots this scene through a slot in the jail door as a way of not only demonstrating Logan's position as a free man but also his authority as a Black man in blue. Red, White and Blue / BBC

This visual motif is reminiscent of similar images in *Mangrove* shot through a letter box. However, unlike *Mangrove* where the Black community stood together in the fight for justice, in *Red, White and Blue*, Logan, a Black man in blue uniform is perceived as a deserter of his people. Here, McQueen uses the technique of a frame within a frame to not only direct the viewer's attention to the Black man in a holding cell so as to enhance the dramatic impact in the scene, but also to create an 'observational perspective'. The irony in this shot is the reverse point-of-view shot which shows Logan, as Black man who is not locked up behind bars, but rather a free man on the outside looking in. Furthermore,

Logan is a member of the Metropolitan Police Force and so he is presented to the audience not as a powerless man but a Black man in authority.

Another cinematic technique that McQueen frequently employs in *Red, White and Blue*, is the mirror shot to convey to the audience the characters' dual identities, state of contemplation and self-awareness. When Logan first arrives at the police training school, he has a private moment with himself in his new room. There, in a state of introspection his reflection is shown in a mirror on the wall. In the reflected image the viewer sees a pensive young man, coming to terms with his new reality; that is, abandoning his career as a forensic scientist and taking the first step on a new path to stamp out a racist culture in the Metropolitan police force (see figure 72).

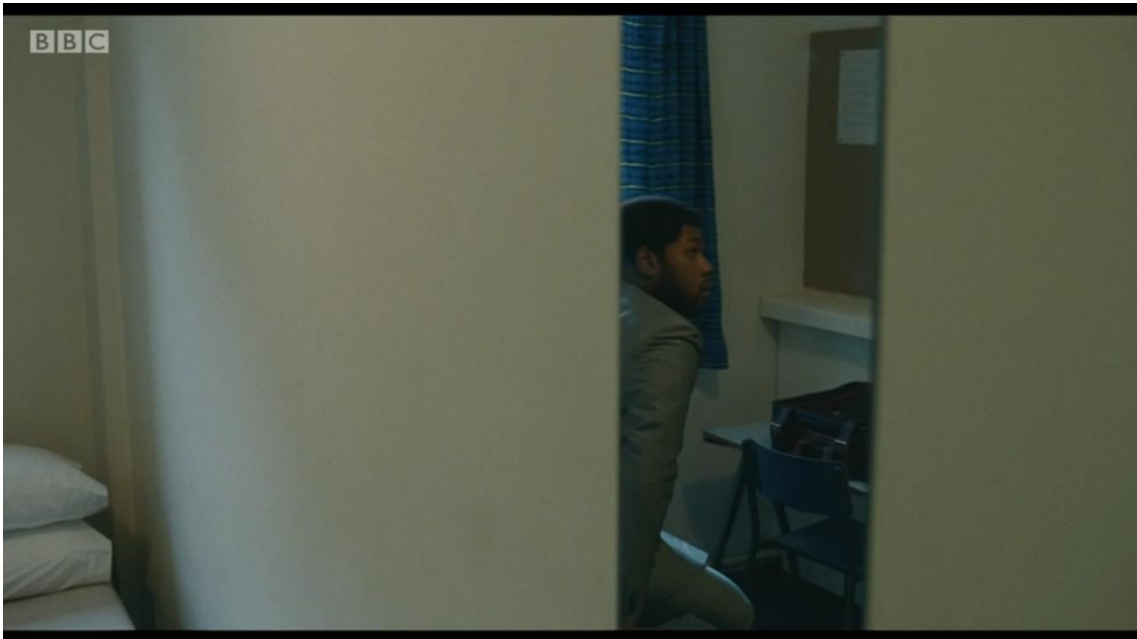


Figure 72. *The mirror shot shows Logan questioning his purpose and invites the audience to do the same.* Red, White and Blue / BBC

In his autobiography *The World is Ever Changing*, film director Nicolas Roeg speaks of his fascination with mirrors and suggests that showing a scene through a mirror indicates a “mystery or a revelation” (Roeg, 2013). Roeg who incorporates the mirror shot in his films to explore notions of ‘self’ and ‘identity’, further argues, “mirror shots are the essence of cinema...There’s a certain truth to mirrors...the mirror is [like] an eye that never blinks and never stops seeing” (Roeg, 2013). That said, it can be suggested that McQueen invites the viewer to connect with Logan as he comes to terms with his ‘truth’ - his beliefs and morals, by considering the dialectic of the self being reflected, and the reflection of the self.

The mirror shot is again employed when Logan puts on his police uniform for the very first time and observes his reflection in the mirror. This continuous take with no dialogue lasts for 39 seconds and is first framed as a medium close-up shot so the audience can observe Logan’s body language. McQueen then switches to a chocker shot to show the

new officer's facial expression. As opposed to a mere reflection of the character, this lingering shot is one of literal self-reflection where Logan is shown in deep contemplation staring at his new 'self' in the mirror as if coming to terms with the fact that he is now positioned to change the racist culture in the London Metropolitan Police force (see figure 73).



Figure 73. *McQueen uses a chocker shot to show Logan staring at his reflection as if considering the 'burden of representation' as a Black uniformed member of the Metropolitan Police force. Red, White and Blue / BBC*

According to Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytical theory on the formation of the self, the forming of one's identity takes places through a process of "spectator identification" in what is referred to as the "mirror stage" (Lacan, 2007). Lacan's theory proposes that up until the age of six months a child lives in a state of unconsciousness, however, between the age of six and eighteen months, this child will first encounter its own image in the mirror and at that point begins to draw a distinction between the 'self' and the 'other' (Lacan, 2007). In Lacan's view, at this very moment of awareness of one's reflection, the ego is established (Lacan, 2007) and the purpose of the ego is to "refuse to accept the truth of fragmentation and alienation" (Mambrol, 2016). Roeg's suggestion that the mirror reveals the truth, thus beckons the viewer to ponder on Logan's new sense of self as well as his true purpose and consider his decision to not only bridge the existing gap between the Met and the Black immigrants in London, but also transform the British institution that has failed the Black community, particularly his father.

In another scene, McQueen uses the mirror image as a visual motif to link Logan and his father as they struggle with duelling identities and to convey ideas of duality, revelations and reflections (see figure 74).



Figure 74. Logan and his father Kenneth have a powerful moment of realization. *Red, White and Blue* / BBC

As the men navigate systemic racism in London in their own respective ways, it becomes apparent that they both seek the very same thing – to be treated equally by those in authority and not be discriminated against because of the colour of their skin. The scene shows both men facing each other's reflection in the restroom mirror, thus suggesting the dual consciousness of Kenneth and Logan in their quest for police reform.

5.3.5 Continuous takes for maximum impact

Another technique that McQueen uses in *Red, White and Blue*, in a similar fashion to *Mangrove*, is the long take; and in some cases, incorporating silence for emotional impact. McQueen demonstrates that the use of uninterrupted takes for prolonged periods devoid of music, dialogue and background sounds can draw in audiences to connect with the action taking place in the film. The following section will discuss McQueen's deliberate use of long takes with a range of close-up, medium and long shots accompanied by diegetic sounds as well as silence to heighten emotion in the film.

One of the very first images shown during the first quarter of the film, is that of a foetal ultrasound, during Logan and Gretl's visit to the maternity clinic. In a long take lasting 17 seconds, McQueen uses a close-up shot to show an active foetus in utero, gently moving to a symphony of womb sounds, the most dominating being a foetal heartbeat (see figure 75).

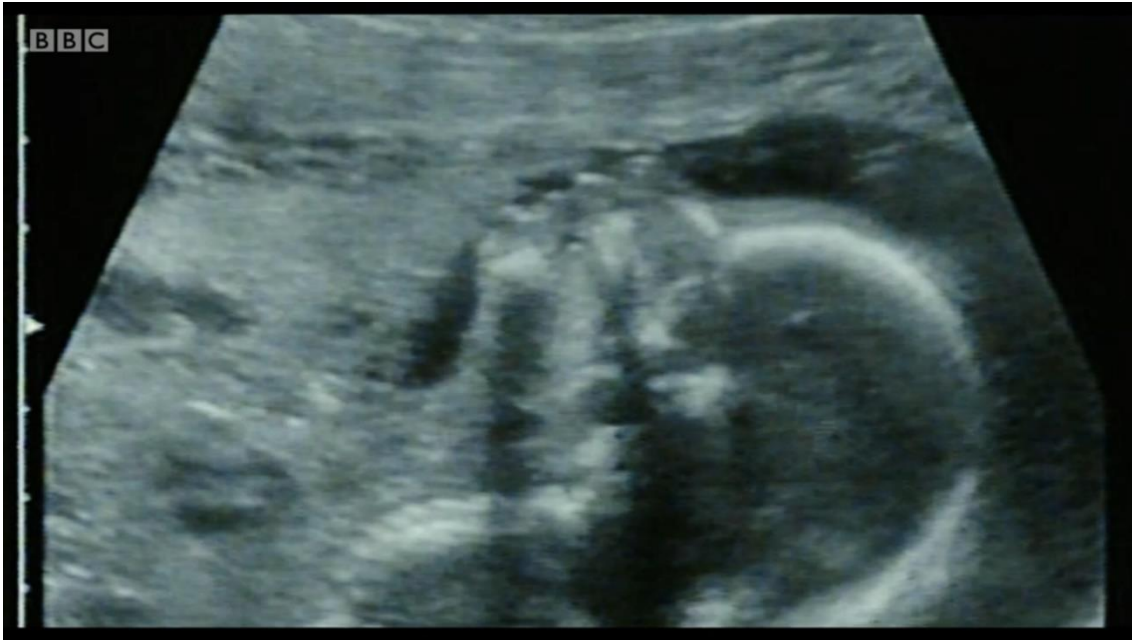


Figure 75. A lingering take of a foetal ultrasound suggests the beginning of a new life ahead for Logan. Red, White and Blue / BBC

This image immediately follows the scene where Logan had a heated argument with his father who chastised him for “throwing away” his PhD and joining the Metropolitan Police force. In response, Logan says to Kenneth, “at least this way, Dad, I can change things”. It can be argued that by showing the ultrasound image, McQueen’s intention is to not only suggest Logan’s endurance to embark on a new journey and like a new-born baby, embrace the possibilities that lie ahead, but also his resolve to effect change within the Met to help enhance the relationship between the police and the Black immigrant community for the benefit of future generations, including his unborn child. This image also serves as a stark reminder of *Mangrove’s* Jones-LeCointe’s statement to her fellow protesters in which she explains that she is determined to take a stand for equality and justice for the present generation as well as for her “unborn child”.

Later on, following the completion of Logan’s assessment for a promotion within the force, the scene ends with him looking upwards, his face expressionless, in a long take that lasts six seconds (see figure 76).



Figure 76. *In a long take McQueen uses a close-up shot to focus on Logan's facial expression just as he completes his assessment for a promotion within the police force. Red, White and Blue / BBC*

In the background, the audience hears the diegetic sound of a ticking clock which fills the void in the examination room. The scene then cuts and transitions to an image of a stunted tree as an establishing shot that lasts 10 seconds, to introduce a group of Black youths at a community centre in Logan's former neighbourhood (see figure 77).



Figure 77. *McQueen uses a long take of a barren tree to illustrate a community in need of support in order to thrive and bring forth fruit. Red, White and Blue / BBC*

It appears that McQueen uses the image of the stunted tree to invite the audience to question whether Logan will be successful in his promotion exams, thus enabling him to be in a better position to cultivate a fruitful relationship with the youth in the community and to help them realise their full potential. Furthermore, it can be argued that this scene refers back to the series title, suggesting that Logan is a big ‘tree’ in his own right, positioned to create ‘small acts’ leading to lasting change in the British justice system.

In addition to the long take, McQueen uses silence for dramatic effect. Silence in films often functions as “an agent for emotional development” and plays a significant role in not only enhancing the emotional tone of a film but also “capturing the sincerity behind the performances on screen” (ECG Productions, 2017). One particular scene in which McQueen combines silence with a long take to create an emotional response in the viewer is with Logan sitting in his room reflecting on his purpose in the force and staring at his police uniform. The sequence begins with a close up shot of Logan sitting on the bed and then cuts to a close up of his face looking upwards as he blinks back tears, in a take that lasts seven seconds (see figure 78).

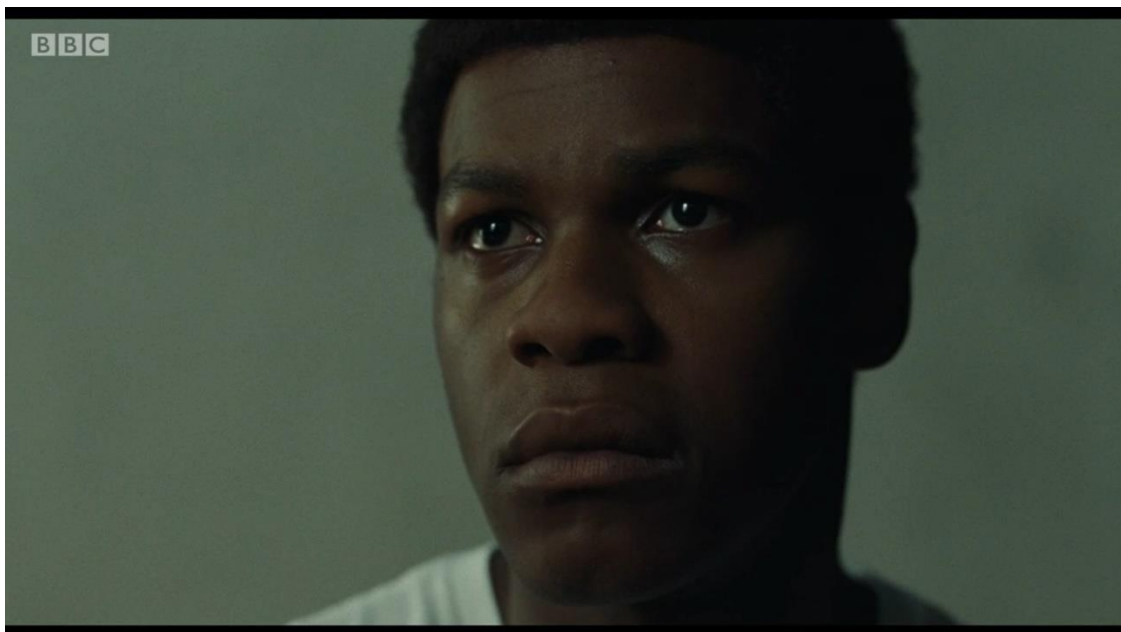


Figure 78. A long take shows Logan in a dispirited state as he holds back tears. Red, White and Blue / BBC

McQueen then uses a pedestal shot to follow Logan’s gaze and then lingers on the police uniform in a take that lasts 11 seconds. The scene then culminates with another close up shot of Logan’s face with tears streaming down as he blinks furiously. This final take continues for 17 seconds and is filmed in complete silence, a technique used by McQueen to compel the viewer to empathize with Logan (see figures 79 and 80).



Figures 79 and 80. McQueen combines a series of long takes with silence to emphasize the exhaustion felt by Logan having continuously experienced institutional racism in the Met. Red, White and Blue / BBC

At the end of film, as the credits roll, McQueen puts his final mark on *Red, White and Blue*. The last image he leaves with the viewer is a black and white photograph of a young Black boy on a bicycle with a Union Jack flag. This famous picture was taken by Jamaican photographer Vanley Burke in Handsworth, Birmingham in 1970 (Fagan, 2015) (see figure 81).



Figure 81. *The final image in Red, White and Blue leaves the viewer to consider what it means to be Black British.* Red, White and Blue / BBC

It appears that McQueen's intention here is to invite the audience to not only reflect on Logan's duality as a Black British man in the 1980s but also the difficulties he encountered in the Metropolitan Police force as result of his dual identity. In so doing, McQueen therefore reinforces the notion that despite West Indians becoming an integral part of the British social fabric, racism still persists and police misconduct against Blacks is still prevalent across Britain.

5.3.6 Leroy Logan's Acculturation Strategies

As a first-generation Briton of Jamaican parents, Leroy Logan is presented as a Black British man determined to overcome the challenges posed in navigating two distinct cultural identities. Despite his strict West Indian upbringing, he is shown to be culturally integrated into British society with White, West Indian and Asian friends. However, like many British children born of West Indian parents, Logan also has a strong connection to his Jamaican heritage (see figure 82).



Figure 82. In a wide shot, McQueen emphasises family bonding at the dinner table.
Red, White and Blue / BBC

In one scene during a family meal, he explains to his St Lucian aunt Jesse how to prepare Jamaican jerk and in another scene with Asif, he speaks of ‘Jamdown’ and enlightens his South Asian colleague on Jamaican culture.

In terms of speech, while his father Kenneth, a first-generation West Indian immigrant speaks Jamaican patois with a thick Jamaican accent, more often than not, Logan speaks English in Received Pronunciation (RP) and is often seen codeswitching to either a Jamaican or cockney dialect as a way of connecting to the person he is talking to. Although Logan is a second-generation migrant who appears to have adopted British values and cultural practices, the fact that he grew up in a West Indian household means that he has been largely exposed to his own heritage, culture and language and this may account for his seamless ability to codeswitch. As explained by Schwartz et al. (2010), “The presence of a large and influential heritage-culture community may also encourage young people to retain the heritage language, values and identity at least into the second generation if not beyond” (Stepick, Grenier, Castro & Dunn, 2003 as cited in Schwartz et al., 2010).

Berry’s acculturation theory suggests that immigrants’ adoption of the integration strategy often paves the way for the most favourable outcomes as it relates to settling in the host country, especially among young people (Berry, 1980 as cited in Schwartz et al., 2010). One can also argue that given Leroy’s biculturalism and English being his native language, he appears to be better adjusted to British culture than his colleague Asif who is of South Asian heritage. As a result, he seems to be more resilient and better able to cope with racial abuse and discrimination in the police force, such as not receiving backup from colleagues when he calls for help in the pursuit of a suspect and being overlooked for promotions and having the N-word written on his locker door (see figure 83).



Figure 83. Logan experiences sustained racial abuse from his White colleagues. Red, White and Blue / BBC

5.4 Alex Wheatle

Like *Red, White and Blue* which centres on the life of the son of Windrush immigrants, *Alex Wheatle*, the fourth instalment of *Small Axe* is a character portrait of an award-winning writer of the same name. The coming-of-age biographical drama features first-time actor Sheyi Cole in the title role and is based on actual events that happened during Wheatle's early years as a young boy in Britain. After spending most of his childhood in a predominantly White, oppressive British care system, Wheatle later moves to a youth hostel in the multicultural district of Brixton where he feels part of a community for the first time. There, he connects with his West Indian roots and culture and develops a passion for music and DJing. He is later imprisoned during the infamous Brixton uprising of 1981 forcing him to confront his abusive past and reclaim the Afro-Caribbean heritage and identity that he was denied as a child (BBC, 2020).

The following section will provide an analysis of the formal elements in *Alex Wheatle* such as titles, flashbacks, voice over narration, music and long takes with little or no dialogue to illustrate the ways in which McQueen reorients Caribbean representation on BBC television. The focus of this section is to discuss how McQueen incorporates established tropes of the biopic genre in this film and investigate the functions and significance of each stylistic device to advance his central concerns regarding the politics of Black identity in Britain. This will be followed by a discussion of the acculturation strategies adopted by Wheatle as he searches for his own personal and cultural identity in 1980s London.

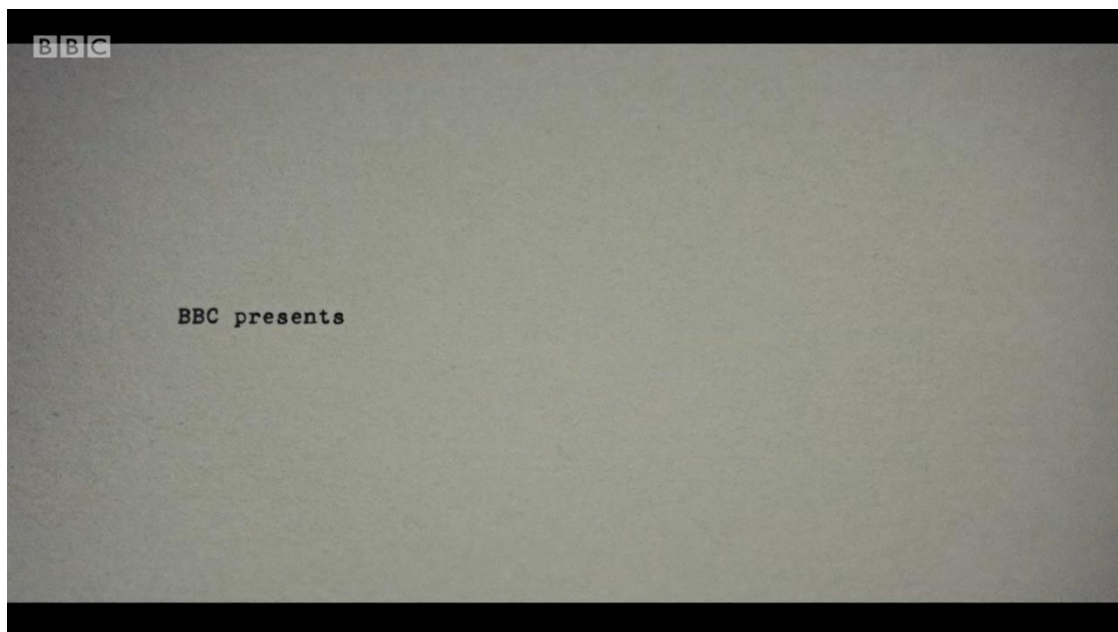
5.4.1 Incorporating conventions of the Biopic genre

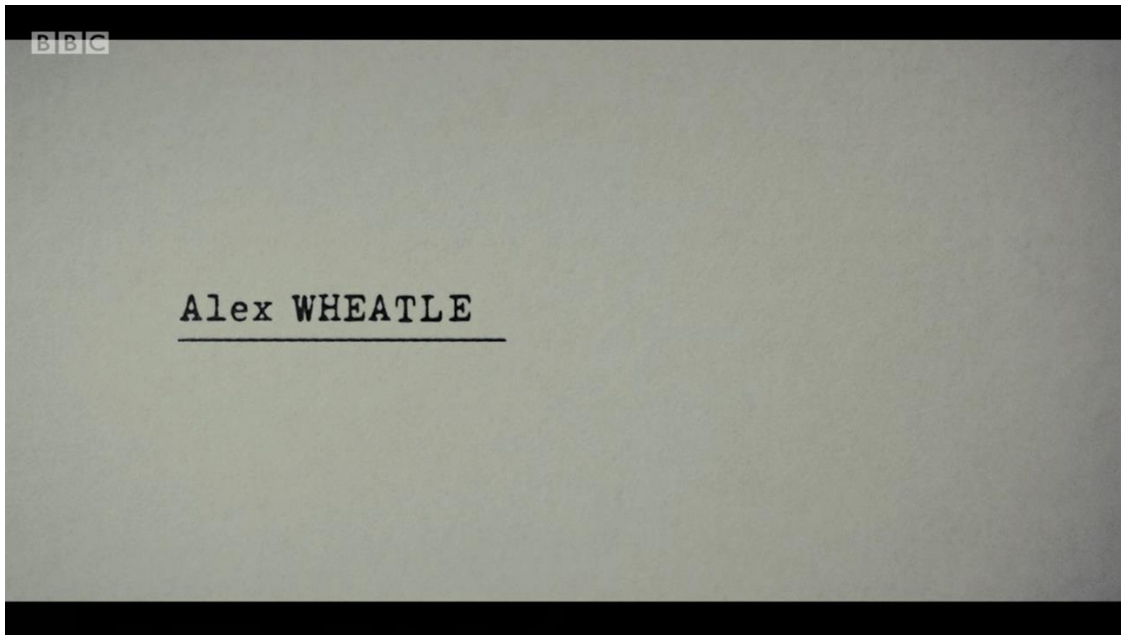
Alex Wheatle largely falls within the margins of the biopic template. Within 66 minutes, McQueen incorporates several elements of the biopic film genre to not only heighten the emotional tension in the film, but to also inform the viewer of the protagonist's experiences as an isolated figure with a complex relationship with his personal identity (Mills, 2017).

In his seminal work on biographical films, *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History*, Custen identifies several conventions of the biopic genre to include intertitles, voice overs, flashbacks and montage (Custen, 1992). In addition to this, Custen also recognises the theme of friendship as part of the common formula of the biopic genre. The following section will therefore explore the ways in which McQueen employs cinematic and generic conventions of the biographical film in *Alex Wheatle* to enlighten audiences on the importance of Wheatle's contribution to the national story of Black British history.

5.4.2 Paying homage with Title Cards

In keeping with the established convention of engaging title cards in biographical films, McQueen introduces *Alex Wheatle* with a dramatic title sequence designed to set the tone of the film. The plain, bold, intertitles are presented in the Courier font, often associated with writers. Within seconds of appearing on the screen, the card titles in this typewriter style font against a White background suggest to the audience that this installation of *Small Axe* involves the story of a writer, or someone involved in the literary arts (see figures 84 and 85).





Figures 84 and 85. The Courier font used in Alex Wheatle's opening title sequence foreshadows the subject of the film and so sets the viewer's expectations. Alex Wheatle / BBC

With the creative use of typography, texture and lighting, opening titles are designed to not only visually capture the essence and generic style of the film, but also to provoke an emotional response in the viewer (Braha and Byrne, 2011; Custen, 1992). Here, the second opening title card serves to introduce the audience to the film's protagonist, *Alex Wheatle*. One can posit that the underlining of his name is intended to emphasize Wheatle's importance as a writer worthy of having his experience as a Black man in Britain recorded for posterity. Furthermore, the underscoring of '*Alex Wheatle*' asserts not only the value but also the relevance of Wheatle's story in the literary and cultural records of Black British history, and so arguably, this is McQueen's way of paying homage to the writer.

While opening title cards serve to excite the audience and build anticipation, closing titles are often used to provide the viewer with additional information about the protagonist not covered in the timeline of the film. Biopics seldom cover the entire life of the protagonist and instead focus on significant events or a specific period in their lifetime, and so closing titles serve the purpose of filling in the blanks for the viewer. McQueen therefore retains tradition by using title cards at the end of the film to reveal further information about Wheatle's life that has not been explored in the biopic (see figures 86 and 87).

BBC

Alex was reunited with his mother,
brother and sisters in America and
his father in Jamaica.

BBC

Alex Wheatle has written over
15 novels for young adults.

He has received many awards
including an MBE for services
to literature.

Figures 86 and 87. The closing titles inform the audience of a later aspect of Wheatle's life not included in the film. Alex Wheatle / BBC

The scope of the film is limited to a small chapter in the life of Wheatle as a guileless teenager in London during the 1980s and so, the closing title cards are used to inform the audience of Wheatle's life post adolescence.

5.4.3 Creating distance with voice-overs

Another characteristic of biopic-storytelling according to Custen is the use of voice-over narration. The voice-over technique is often used in biopics at the beginning and / or end of the film to firstly, establish the setting and give background details about the main

character, and as the film comes to an end, it serves as conclusion to the story, providing information about the fate of the protagonist which has not been explored in film. In *Alex Wheatle*, the authoritative voice comes from a phlegmatic welfare official, who, within the first three minutes of the film introduces the audience to ‘Alex Alphonso Wheatle’ based on information gleaned from his care records. This formal narration certainly creates an affective tone that draws the audience closer to Wheatle, thus inviting them to reflect on his reality as a young Black child in Britain, suffering verbal and physical abuse at the children’s home (see figures 88 and 89).



Figures 88 and 89. A young Wheatle suffers abuse at the hands of his housemother at a children’s care home in Surrey. Alex Wheatle / BBC

The voice-over narration is again employed at the end of the film when Wheatle, by then a young adult, reads through his personal files for the very first time (see figures 90 and 91).



Figures 90 and 91. A non-diegetic male voice-over functions as an epilogue in the film when Wheatle reads his childcare records from South London's Lambeth Council. Alex Wheatle / BBC

5.4.4 Traumatic Flashbacks

In this biographical portrait of Alex Wheatle, McQueen uses a series of extended flashbacks as an expository mechanism in *Alex Wheatle* to inform the audience of the

extent to which Wheatle's traumatic past has impacted his life. Film critic Maureen Turim defines the flashback in the general sense as "simply an image or a filmic segment that is understood as representing temporal occurrences anterior to those in the images that preceded it" (Turim, 2015). In her study on the history of the flashback as a narrative device in films and the development of modern cinema in particular, Turim states that "the flashback is a privileged moment in unfolding that juxtaposes different moments of temporal reference" (Turim, 2015). She further notes that flashbacks in film often merge both "images of memory" and "images of history" to give "large-scale social and political history the subjective mode of a single, fictional individual's remembered experience" (Turim, 2015).

In the opening sequence, McQueen shows a medium shot of a teenage Wheatle, disrobed in a prison cell, anxiously scanning the grim room in a long take that lasts approximately nine seconds (see figure 92).



Figure 92. A medium shot shows Wheatle looking distressed in a prison cell as if he has been through a traumatic experience. Alex Wheatle / BBC

The scene then transitions to a panning shot of a now clothed Wheatle as he is escorted by a prison guard to his cell block. There he meets his Rastafarian cell mate Simeon (Robbie Gee), who takes a personal interest in Wheatle's well-being and seeks to know more about the young, troubled man (see figure 93).



Figure 93. A medium close up shot is used to show Wheatle upon meeting his cellmate, with a blank expression, similar to that of the opening scene. Alex Wheatle / BBC

Simeon's attempts to introduce himself and welcome Wheatle to his new abode are ignored. A long take is then used to show Wheatle staring blankly. At this point, a flashback is used recall a traumatic event in Wheatle's childhood where he was punished and called a "horrible, nasty little boy" for bedwetting during his time at the children's home in which he spent his formative years (see figures 94 and 95).





Figures 94 and 95. Scarred by psychological and physical trauma, Alex has recurring flashbacks of the abuse he suffered at the children's home. Alex Wheatle / BBC

Wheatle's annoyance at the prospect of being stuck in the same living quarters with Simeon who suffers from bowel incontinence, coupled with restlessness resulting from incessant flashbacks of his traumatic past, prompts him to attack the "dirty fucking Rasta" for "stinking up the place". A scuffle ensues between the two cellmates in which Simeon reacts by wrapping his arms around Wheatle defensively, and yelling, "calm yourself, youth...All right, listen, my youth. I want to hear...what is your story?" To which a struggling Wheatle responds, "My story? ... I ain't got no fricking story!" The scene which follows is another flashback which shows Wheatle as a teenager, sitting in a classroom where he is introduced to Reggae music for the very first time.

Reggae music, the viewer will learn, plays a significant role in Wheatle's development in the search for his cultural identity. In this subjective flashback, the viewer witnesses Wheatle's first connection with his West Indian culture as he listens to *Satta Massagana* by Jamaican roots reggae group The Abyssinians on his friend's transistor radio. In this very moment of cultural awakening, the two teenagers are ridiculed by a White student who criticizes their music, and a fight ensues. This results in Wheatle being punished by his teachers who call him 'monkey' before restraining him in a straitjacket and shoving him down on the floor in an empty room (see figure 96).

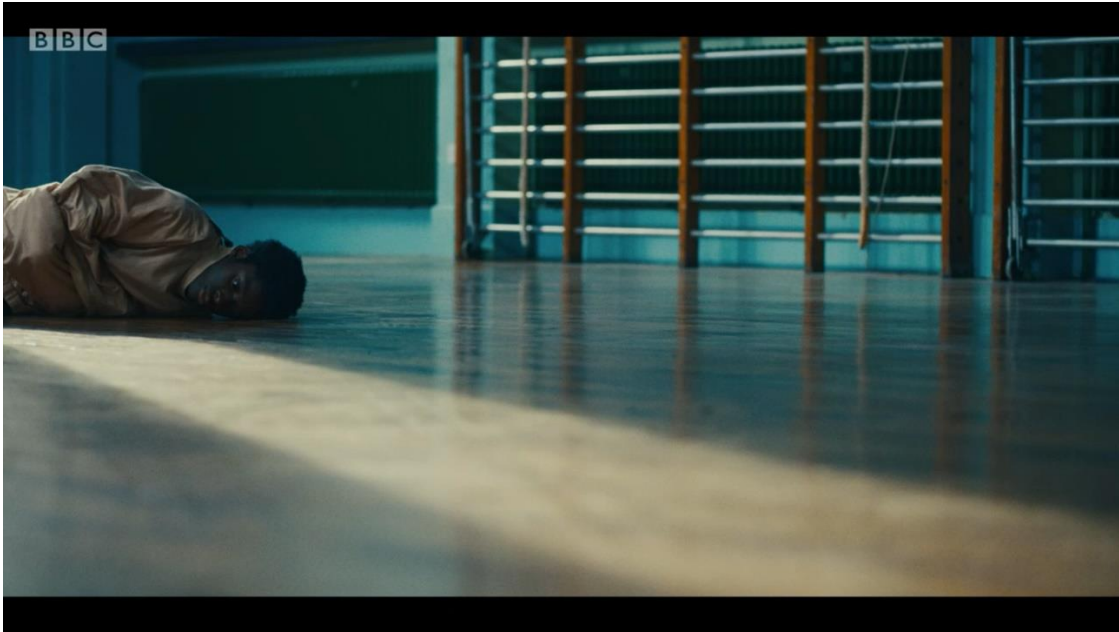


Figure 96. A low angle shot is used to show Wheatle in a broken state on the floor.
Alex Wheatle/BBC

In this compelling scene, McQueen and his cinematographer Shabier Kirchner employ a variety of filmic techniques such as lighting, camera movement and sound to heighten emotion in the scene in order to engage the viewer. In a long take that lasts one minute, thirty-three seconds, the scene begins with a ground level wide shot showing Wheatle lying motionless on the floor with a slant of soft golden sunlight illuminating the room. The camera then zooms in slowly and then lingers on Wheatle's face for 19 seconds to reveal a boy dispirited and devoid of emotion (see figure 97).



Figure 97. A close up shot shows Wheatle in a lost and broken state on the wooden floor.
Alex Wheatle / BBC

This is one of McQueen's most powerful sequences in the film and it is shot in complete silence, to unsettle the audience and compel them to suffer along with Wheatle as they focus solely on the young man's face. This image of Wheatle is identical to a later scene when he is arrested outside a nightclub in Brixton, handcuffed and thrown into a police van (see figure 98).



Figure 98. An isolated Wheatle bears the brunt of police harassment and brutality like many other Black youths in 1980s London. Alex Wheatle / BBC

Both images above are reminiscent of an unsettling scene in *Mangrove* in which McQueen uses the low angle technique to show Crichlow being pinned to the ground following a police raid at his restaurant. Arguably, this is another of McQueen's deliberate attempt to depict the realities of the race-related struggles that Caribbean immigrants faced in Britain in the years following their arrival in the UK, which are rarely seen on British screens. McQueen further engages the viewer as the camera slowly pulls away from a straitjacketed Wheatle then reverts to a wide shot and ending the scene with the non-diegetic instrumental music of Eric Coates' 'By the Sleepy Lagoon'.

Alex Wheatle is structured in a non-linear fashion, transporting the viewer back and forth in time. In another flashback sequence, Wheatle is seen being driven away permanently from the Shirley Oaks children's home as non-diegetic music plays in the background. As Wheatle drives through the multicultural neighbourhoods in Brixton, a broad smile crosses his face, as for the very first time, he sees people who look exactly like him. The inclusion of reggae music here is to foreshadow Wheatle's love for roots music and its subsequent influence on not only his identity but also his writing career.

5.4.5 Roots, Reggae Music

As in the other instalments of *Small Axe*, *Alex Wheatle* engages audiences with its unique musical catalogue of dub and roots reggae. Here, McQueen incorporates thought provoking reggae music to inform the viewer of Wheatle’s political and cultural awakening and the discovery of his self-identity. Music has played a critical role in the young man’s journey of self-discovery, particularly when he first arrived in Brixton and appeared to have very little knowledge about his origin and identity. In one scene where Wheatle gets a ‘blow out Afro’ makeover at a local barbershop, following a discussion with an elder about his ancestry, a naive Wheatle quietly stares at his reflection in the mirror and appears lost in introspection as he comes to terms with the truth about his own identity (see figure 99).



Figure 99. Wheatle has a cultural awakening as he reflects on the truth regarding his racial, ethnic and cultural identity. Alex Wheatle / BBC

In this scene McQueen uses non-diegetic music to comment on the systemic oppression of Black people, with Dennis Brown’s ‘Wolf and Leopards’ playing softly in the background. The sequence then ends with a black power nod between two the barber and a passer-by and this very moment, Wheatle witnesses the solidarity that exists within the Black community in Britain and comes the realization that for many years he has been largely disconnected from his own people and denied a place in the community in which he belongs.

Another main characteristic of the biopic genre as identified by Custen is the significance of secondary characters in the life of the protagonist. Custen contends that “the presence of an older figure, the bearer of conventional wisdom” essentially assumes the role of mentor to the main character, thus providing support to overcome hardships (Custen 1992: 69). McQueen faithfully adheres to the convention of male bonds by including supportive male characters in the *Alex Wheatle* narrative. Similar to Simeon,

who is a pillar of support to Wheatle, the street-smart, beret-wearing Dennis becomes the youngster's friend and mentor, educating him on how to walk and talk like a Black man. In all of his teachings on how to be Black and survive the streets of London, it is Dennis' lesson on the historical and cultural significance of reggae music to the Caribbean community that has the most impact on Wheatle's transformation (see figure 100).



Figure 100. The Soferno B Record Shack is a haven for lovers of reggae music. Alex Wheatle / BBC

At Wheatle's very first visit to the local record shop, McQueen uses a point-of-view shot in slow motion to follow the young man's gaze as he marvels at the records on display and the casual interactions taking place between the Rastafarian elders and their customers (see figures 100 and 101).



Figures 100 and 101. A POV shot is used in slow motion to emphasize Wheatle's gaze as he absorbs the sights and sounds in the record shop. Alex Wheatle / BBC

In another scene his cell mate Simeon digs deeper to know how Wheatle ended up in prison. The young man simply says to his new friend, "I took a wrong turn", then smiles and adds, "for me, it was always about the music". Amused by Wheatle's admission, Simeon shares his knowledge of reggae music and engages him with Bob Marley's 'Trench Town Rock', singing, "One good thing about music / When it hits, you feel no pain". The sequence begins with Simeon singing, prompting Wheatle to jump to his feet and sway along to the rhythm and ends with the diegetic sound turning non-diegetic and continuing into the next scene where Wheatle is shown picking up records at the store and putting more on layaway (see figure 102).



Figure 102. Wheatle's love for roots reggae music helps him connect with his true self and reclaim his identity. Alex Wheatle / BBC

Wheatle later combines his passion for music and writing and begins to articulate his personal story and that of other Black Caribbean youths through his music. One of his most impactful songs is *Uprising!* penned as a tribute to the thirteen young victims of the 1981 New Cross Massacre (see figure 103).



Figure 103. Wheatle performs Uprising – dedicated to 'all the revolutionary foot soldiers' who showed their support during the Brixton uprising. Alex Wheatle / BBC

5.4.6 Montage

In *Alex Wheatle* McQueen incorporates a tonal montage to promote his central concern of bringing to light the narratives of Black people in Britain “that for too long have remained in a cultural embargo” (Bernard, 2020). At about the two-thirds mark, the montage sequence *Wheatle* highlights the prevalence of racial and ethnic tensions in Britain during the 1980s by exposing a dark and macabre aspect of Black British history. Here, McQueen shows a lingering montage of Black and White photos depicting the horror of the 1981 New Cross fire tragedy in which 13 Black youths were killed (see figures 104 and 105).



Figures 104 and 105. A photo montage of the 1981 New Cross Fire functions to create an emotional effect on the viewer. Alex Wheatle / BBC

During the montage sequence McQueen once again incorporates the voice over, a common feature of biographical films. Here, McQueen's call for the recognition of the Black experience in Britain is punctuated by the powerful spoken word performance of 'New Cross Massakah' by Jamaican-born dub poet Linton Kwesi Johnson. The voiceover in Jamaican patois functions to engage the audience and keep them connected to the narrative by situating them in the middle of the chaos that took place during the early hours of "that cold Sunday morning" in January (see figure 106).



Figure 106. The morning scene of the New Cross Fire in 1981 sets the tone of the narrative. Alex Wheatle / BBC

The slow montage sequence continues with images of the funeral service for the 13 victims. McQueen's use of archival photos in this sequence is to create an authentic historical representation of the Black British experience for the viewer and consequently evoke feelings of pain and sadness (see figures 107 and 108).



Figures 107 and 108. McQueen incorporates funeral scenes in the montage to elicit a range of emotional effects such as melancholy on the viewer. Alex Wheatle / BBC

The sequence later shows images of the Black community marching throughout the streets of London in protest against violence inflicted on Black people- a stark reminder of the Black Lives Matter demonstrations which intensified across the globe following the murder of George Floyd in 2020 (see figures 109 and 110).



Figures 109 and 110. Protest marches in London are reminiscent of the 2020 global demonstrations in support of the Black Lives Matter movement. Alex Wheatle / BBC

Over these Black and White images, the sombre voiceover continues to lament for the tragic loss of young lives in the “New Cross Massakah”. It appears that the intention here is to create emotional impact and urge the audience to reflect on the current global movement for Black lives, one of the largest civil rights movement in history (Woolerton, 2022). One of the final images in this montage sequence shows a young man holding up a placard, denouncing racial prejudice and discrimination from the office of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (see figure 111).



Figures 111. One Black youth holds up a placard protesting against racial prejudice from Prime Minister Thatcher. Alex Wheatle / BBC

These street demonstrations following the New Cross fire leaves an important legacy for the Caribbean community in London as it exposed the extent of systemic racism that Black people in Britain have suffered since their arrival – social discrimination, state neglect, racial violence and abuse from the police. More than forty years later the prevalence of institutional racism continues to erode public trust especially within the Black community spurring them on to keep united in their resolve for equality and justice in Britain.

5.4.7 Acculturation strategies in Alex Wheatle

Despite being born in Brixton to Jamaican parents, the fact that Wheatle spent most of his childhood in a White care home in Croydon meant that his upbringing was far removed from that of a child raised in a traditional West Indian home. With lack of exposure to and engagement with the Black British community Wheatle adopted a distinctly White British identity. Based on Berry's model of acculturation, it would appear that during his preadolescent years Wheatle adopted the acculturation strategy of 'assimilation' as a result of having been denied his own cultural identity. Consequently, young Wheatle has adopted the most extreme form of acculturation whereby he has identified with the cultural norms and values of the dominant culture over his own culture of origin. Research on acculturation suggest that "the extent to which members of the host culture stigmatize ethnic minorities and the extent to which individuals are aware of stigmatization will influence acculturation" (Lechuga and Fernandez, 2011). Given the fact that Wheatle has been a victim of repeated abuse as a child, one can argue that he may have subconsciously adopted the values of the host culture in order to fit in with his peers at the Shirley Oaks children's home. This thus accounts for his adaptation of the

cultural practices of the dominant culture. Following Wheatle's move to Brixton, where he is introduced to the Black British community, he is then exposed to his own heritage and culture and at this point his self-transformation begins. With the help of his support system, Wheatle begins to embrace his own heritage and culture. Despite this transformation however, he still speaks with a Received Pronunciation (RP) English accent and switches to Jamaican patois depending on the circumstances.

Wheatle's ability to effortlessly switch between cultures and connect linguistically with his fellow hustlers suggest that as a result of being immersed in the West Indian culture in Brixton, he has gradually adopted the acculturation strategy of integration. At this point, Wheatle appears to have found a sense of belonging within the Afro-Caribbean immigrant community and is therefore finally able to embrace his own heritage and cultural identity.

5.5 Education

Education, the final instalment in the *Small Axe* series sheds light on the British scandal of systemic racism and exclusion in schools during the 1970s. The coming-of-age film follows Kingsley Smith (Kenyah Sandy) a 12-year-old boy who is perceived as having learning difficulties, labelled as 'disruptive' by his teachers and subsequently placed into a school for the 'educationally subnormal'. The prevalence of racism in British schools is later brought to the attention of Kingsley's unsuspecting parents by a group of West Indian women who discover a clandestine "segregation policy" denying Black children the opportunity to receive a good standard of education (BBC, 2020). Determined to save her son from a prejudiced school system, Kingsley's mother Agnes (Sharlene Whyte) joins forces with two education campaigners who set out to challenge the racist educational system and its treatment of Black students; and consequently, rescue children especially Black boys who are 'trapped' in an exclusionary school system. The film functions as a reminder of Britain's history of racial segregation in schools and over the course of 63 minutes McQueen provides overdue representation to Black youths by shedding light on the treatment of immigrant students during a prominent decade in British history. McQueen's choice of cinematic techniques in *Education* plays a significant role in drawing attention to the experience of West Indian children in ESN schools and therefore advances his central concern of reshaping Caribbean representation on British television.

The following section will provide an analysis of the formal elements employed by Steve McQueen in this 63-minute drama, to tell a story of inequalities in education that resonates across Black communities in Britain to this day. The focus therefore will be an investigation of McQueen's choice of film format, camera shots and angles, music and long takes to reposition Caribbean representation on BBC television. Following this will be a discussion of the acculturation strategies adopted by Kingsley as he struggles to find his place in a flawed educational system that is designed for students, particularly those of West Indian backgrounds like him, to fail. This discriminatory policy is explained in a

booklet written by Grenadian educator Bernard Coard titled *How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Sub-normal in the British School System* (see figure 112).

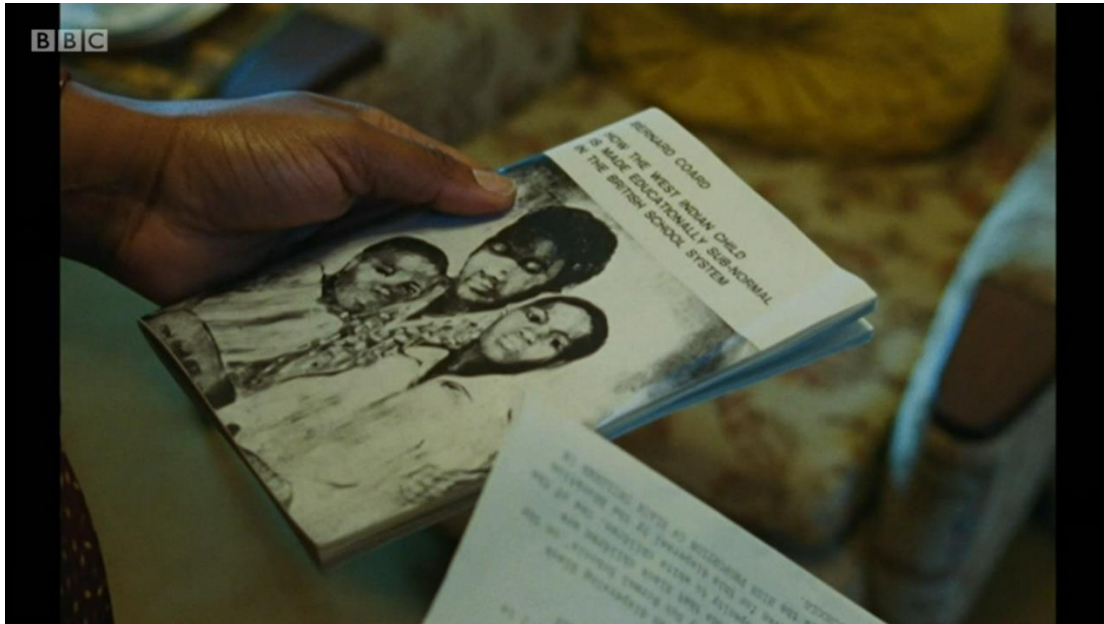


Figure 112. *The 1971 seminal book written by Grenadian educator Bernard Coard helps educate Black parents on the true nature of ESN schools.* Education / BBC

5.5.1 *Education*'s visual aesthetics

McQueen's *Small Axe* series has broken new ground on BBC television for many reasons, not least because the films shed light on various aspects of British history that rarely get told, and *Education* is no exception. In this semi-autobiographical film, McQueen gives audiences an 'education' on the evils of systemic racism in the British school system during the 1970s when the national curriculum appeared to overlook the needs of Black immigrant students. Based in part on real-life stories of children of West Indian migrants as well as the personal experience of McQueen who was himself singled out as intellectually incompetent, *Education* is McQueen's way of giving a voice to those who felt and continue to feel trapped in a biased education system. Speaking of his own experience as a student in London during the 1970s and 1980s, McQueen says:

All I can do is talk about me and the people who were around me when I was in education and how some people just did not make it because of the education system...I got through because I could draw; that was the only reason. I had a talent that was undeniable...Looking back at how people were treated, it was sheer and simple racism. We knew it but we had no voice. We had no power. No one would listen to us. (Weale, 2021)

Today, according to McQueen, "people are talking about it...these kids have a chance because now they have a voice" (Weale, 2021).

5.5.2 Paying homage with celluloid film

Recognising the importance of this story for other Black children whose education and future are controlled by a system steeped in prejudice, through the eyes of a 12 year old child, McQueen presents an emotional and tender portrait of the young and vulnerable immigrants of London's West Indian community. In so doing, McQueen opts to shoot *Education* with 16mm film to create a simple and authentic image with a unique grain structure, similar to the films produced by the BBC in the 1970s (Hunt, 2020). Director of Photography Shabier Kirchner comments on McQueen's choice of film format. "This story is very personal to Steve on multiple levels," he says. He continues:

To inform the look, we talked about 16mm-originated BBC *Play for Today* dramas from the early 1970s...We decided to film *Education* on 16mm because of its more prominent grain structure, and we shot it all handheld to make it feel immediate, raw, real and personal. (Cinelab Film & Digital, 2021)

Despite the fact that 16mm film had not been used to create content for transmission on the BBC for over 20 years, the decision to use this format was, according to Kirchner, "a personal one" for McQueen (Mutter, 2021). He says, "there's something about the grain that feels so alive and personal and [so] Steve wanted to pursue it" (Mutter, 2021). This format therefore gives *Education* a similar look to the BBC television plays of the 1970s, but with a 1:1.66 aspect ratio as opposed to the 4:3 of standard television during the 1970s (Stafford, 2021) (see figure 113).



Figure 113. McQueen shoots 'Education' using 16mm film with an aspect ratio of 1:1.66 as a stylistic device to resemble that of a 1970s television play. Education / BBC

McQueen's use of 16mm film also allows him to achieve a home-video style movie for this tender portrait of childhood and institutional racism. This has the effect of drawing audiences into Kingsley's world in a way that is intimate and immediate. According to Kirchner, *Education* is set during a period when filmmakers were making films using the 16mm format, and so "Steve wanted to pay homage to that era of filmmaking and imagine what it might have looked like if a filmmaker from the community was telling this story through film at that point in time" (Mutter, 2021). Kirchner shot *Education* on an ARRIFLEX 416 16mm hand-held camera with an ARRI Zeiss Master Prime lens which enabled him to get closer to the 12 year old boy to capture his childhood innocence in a world which he does not quite understand (Cinelab Film & Digital, 2021). An example of this is when Kingsley is sat in class during an English lesson where the students take turns reading from John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. The camera then pans across the room and lingers on White and Asian students who appear to be fully engaged, reading with very little difficulty. When it is Kingsley's turn, the camera slowly glides away from the students and focuses on the young boy who sits still without saying a word (see figures 114 and 115).





Figures 114 and 115. *The camera slowly floats across the classroom lingering on each child reading aloud before staying focussed on Kingsley.* Education / BBC

In this poignant scene McQueen shows a close-up shot of the young boy seemingly embarrassed with no guidance and support from his teacher. An image which undoubtedly sets the mood and tone for the rest of the film (see figure 116).

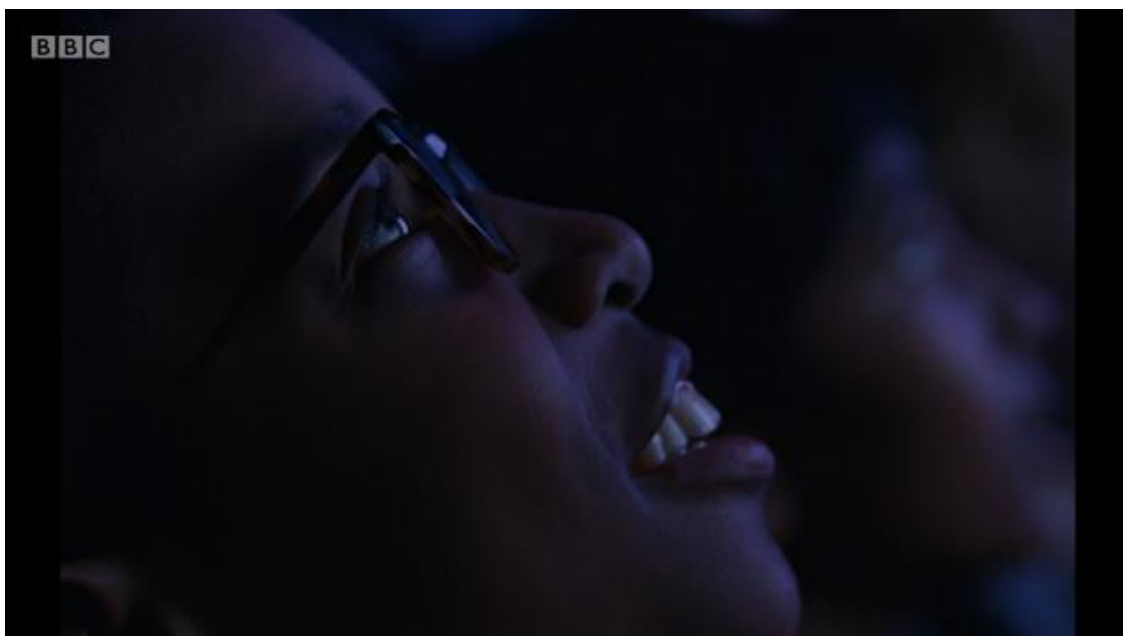


Figure 116. *A close-up shot of Kingsley helps establish an emotional connection between the young boy and the viewer.* Education / BBC

Here, McQueen capitalizes on the close-up shot technique to emphasise Kingsley's vulnerability as a young boy taken away from mainstream education only to become a victim of educational segregation. In this scene, McQueen invites the audience to witness

how the West Indian child struggles with the stigma of being “educationally subnormal”, a label that it likely to cause trauma and have profound consequences well into adulthood.

McQueen also uses the close-up shot to communicate the emotional experience of the character as illustrated in one scene when Kingsley, who has hopes of being an astronaut one day, appears to be fascinated by a celestial experience during a school educational trip to a planetarium (see figures 117 and 118).



Figures 117 and 118. *McQueen's close-up shot of Kingsley's face as it lights up during a school trip to the planetarium can have a powerful effect on the viewer.* Education / BBC

Given that filmmakers use camera angles and specific shots to engage the emotions of the viewer, it can be said that in *Education*, McQueen incorporates close-up shots to

heighten emotional engagement with the audience and help them connect with Kingsley by focusing mainly on his facial expressions in isolation from the scenes.

In the aforementioned scenes, Kingsley's face dominates the screen, thus compelling the audience to empathise with the 12-year-old boy and drawing them into his world to connect with his feelings of powerlessness and empowerment. According to Carl Plantinga, filmmakers often draw attention to characters' facial expressions to not only communicate emotion but also to evoke an empathetic response in the viewer ((Plantinga and Smith 1999: 239-255). By using a range of camera angles and close-up shots McQueen therefore frames underrepresented subjects to give prominence to the lived experiences of West Indian immigrants in Britain through the eyes of a child.

5.5.3 Muted tones and subtle hues

Another stylistic device which is central to McQueen's visual language in *Education* is the use of colour. In order to promote his primary concern of reorienting Caribbean representation on British television, McQueen uses specific colours for sets, props and costumes while maintaining the conventions of the coming-of-age genre. He therefore employs a specific cinematic colour scheme to not only reflect the mode of the era, but also the inherent themes that connect the core elements of the narrative. Furthermore, the colours used in the film are also designed to "define the characters and their dramatic needs" (Sarkar, 2021). The following section will be a discussion of how McQueen incorporates muted colours to give plausibility to the narrative and in so doing intentionally reshapes representation on BBC television for the West Indian community.

In keeping with the visual aesthetic of 1970s films, in *Education*, McQueen incorporates muted colours to not only promote historical contextualization with regards to the popular hues during that specific period, but also to create an emotional tone that engages the viewer on a visceral level (Frost, 2019). The prevalent colour palette includes pale neutral brown, mahogany brown, taupe and burnt orange, with soft lighting, giving the film an authentic 70's look. By using warm colours for interior scenes in the Smith family home, McQueen obliges the audience to identify with the comfort and security of the working class home setting in which Kingsley lives with his parents and older sister, Stephanie (Tamara Lawrence). Kirchner's camera soaks in the fine details of the period, from the brown carpet, light-brown patterned curtains, and beige and brown sofa with orange cushions in the front room to the cream-coloured tablecloth with orange prints and brown apron hanging on the wall in the dining room of the family's semi-detached home (see figures 119 and 120).



Figures 119 and 120. A warm colour palette is used to convey the time period of the seventies and the comfort and security felt by Kingsley in his family home. Education / BBC

The earthy tones are also seen in the costume designs which tell a convincing story of the fashionable colours at the time. For example, Agnes is often seen wearing mahogany brown dresses and a brown tweed overcoat with a complimentary matte lip colour. The other West Indian women in the film, education activists Hazel Lewis (Naomi Ackie) and Lydia Thomas (Josette Simon) are also dressed in analogous colours featuring shades of brown, orange and camel (see figures 121 and 122).



Figures 121 and 122. *Specially selected costumes in solid and patterned earth tones take audiences back to the 1970s.* Education / BBC

McQueen's intention with the costume selection in *Education*, is to comment on an aspect of Black British culture that "hasn't been given a lot of attention" on British television before (Grove, 2020). According to the film director, several elements of the West Indian experience in Britain "unfortunately, hadn't been given enough space in the canon of British film [and] in some ways [it] was me wanting to fill that gap, that hole which was there" (Grove, 2022). Commenting on his collaboration with costume designer Jacqueline Durran who oversaw the costume department on all five films, McQueen says:

We just did a lot of research and what is exciting for Jacqueline is that these images have never been seen before on the screen, you know. This is a history that had never been visualized in cinema. It was an amazing sort of discovery for her. But also of course, we loved that we introduced it to her to help us work and make it a reality. (Titze, 2020)

For Sinéad Kidao, costume designer on *Education*, when it came to the characters' costumes, it was about giving an honest and accurate representation of the person, time and place. She says, "in London at that time clothing told so much about who a person was, what kind of music they listened to, what area they were growing up in. Recreating that truthfully was incredibly important to us" (Gant, 2020). Kidao explains further, that sourcing wardrobe pieces appropriate to the period has been a meticulous process. According to her, "it's all about reading the script and finding out who these people are. And then imagining what they would have worn within the parameters of what existed at the time" (Gant, 2020). That said, the prevalence of warm colours in *Education* accentuates key themes and messages reflecting the emotional state of the characters as well as the environments in which they live. Consequently, this helps McQueen to achieve his aim of showcasing a rarely seen aspect of the Black experience in Britain on mainstream television, thereby contributing to a positive shift in Caribbean representation on BBC television.

5.3.4 Continuous takes

Throughout the *Small Axe* series, McQueen has employed a number of stylistic techniques to advance his central concern of repositioning Caribbean representation on BBC television. One such filmic technique is the long or continuous take which has the effect of drawing the audience deeper into the story, allowing them to feel as if they are experiencing the events taking place along with the characters. An example of this is seen following Kingsley's refusal to go the "special school" that he has been assigned to. He is shown lying in a bathtub filled with water, contemplating his fate. In the scene which lasts 46 seconds, McQueen first shows a mid-shot of Kingsley lying in the tub and then the camera slowly zooms in to show a close-up shot of his face submerged in the water. These camera shots and angles are designed to show the intimate details of Kingsley's facial expressions to add emotion to the scene (see figures 123 and 124).



Figures 123 and 124. *A long take emphasises Kingsley's loneliness and frustration at the idea going to Durrants School.* Education / BBC

McQueen then cuts to a close-up shot of Kingsley sitting upright in the bathtub with a look of hopelessness on his face. In this lengthy take which lasts 58 seconds, Kingsley slowly slides back down into the bathtub and submerges himself under the water (see figure 125).



Figure 125. *McQueen shows a close-up shot of Kingsley's face to force the audience to feel his pain and loneliness and empathise with his situation.* Education / BBC

His face fills the frame as he lies still under the water, until he suddenly jumps and bolts upwards at the sound of someone banging on the door. Another close-up shot of Kingsley's face shows his anxiety at the prospect of being banished to a "school for idiots" (see figure 126).



Figure 126. *A close-up shot of Kingsley helps connect him with the audience on an emotional level.* Education / BBC

In the above examples, McQueen employs both the long take and the close-up shot to communicate to the audience Kingsley's state of mind at one of his lowest points in the narrative when he feels that the British education system has failed him. The lighting and camera movements in the scene in question emphasise the young protagonist's pain and loneliness in a cruel world. In a similar fashion, when Kingsley is shown sitting in the bathtub, McQueen's distinctive use of camera shots and angles accentuate the range of emotions felt by the young boy such as loneliness and hopelessness and so function to compel the audience to initiate conversation about institutional racism and empathise with the experience of Black students labelled as 'subnormal' in the British school system.

Another example of the long take and probably the most significant in *Education* takes place at the 'special' Durrants School where Kingsley is sent to with other West Indian children labelled as 'educationally subnormal'. To create an even more immersive experience for the viewer, in addition to the long take, McQueen incorporates diegetic music to enhance the mood of the scene as well as closeups to allow for intimacy between the characters and the audience. In the chilling sequence which goes on for three minutes and thirty-six seconds, a cigarette-smoking teacher (Stewart Wright) strums a guitar while continuously serenading a class of bored students with the 17th century folk song 'House of the Rising Sun' about a young man's experience of debauchery in a brothel in New Orleans (see figure 127).



Figure 127. A continuous take is used to draw in the viewer to be part of the class during a lengthy rendition of 'House of the Rising Sun'. Education / BBC

Aside from the fact that the teacher gives a lacklustre, self-indulgent performance, the choice of song has little cultural relevance to the majority of students who come from West Indian backgrounds. This therefore underlines not only the failure of the education system to offer Black immigrant students a comprehensive learning environment that fosters academic, social and emotional development, but also the lack of a curriculum

that includes lessons on Black history. The result therefore is a classroom of uninspired children falling behind in their educational development due to inequalities within mainstream education (see figures 128 and 129).



Figures 128 and 129. *Kingsley and other Black Caribbean students banished to 'educationally subnormal' (ESN) schools, are victims of institutional racism and educational disparity in 1970s Britain.* Education / BBC

The choice of song with its morbid content and the singer's unnecessarily lengthy performance in this unsettling sequence is arguably McQueen's way of incorporating grim and ironic humour to build tension in the scene. Contrary to the *Lovers Rock* sequence in which McQueen goes against convention by employing a single take of above-average length during an acapella of Janet Kay's 'Silly Games' to illustrate the power of love and solidarity in London's West Indian community, this depressing

sequence in *Education* clearly demonstrates the alienation felt by Black students who were ‘written off’ and cruelly cast aside in ‘subnormal’ schools.

5.3.5 Acculturation strategies in *Education*

As a British-born child of West Indian parents, Kingsley appears to be fully integrated as he navigates between two distinct cultures (see figure 130).



Figure 130. *Kingsley's social interaction with White and Asian students suggest that he is fully integrated into British society.* Education / BBC

Although he interacts with other students at school, adopting the language, behaviour and culture of British society, at home he is exposed to traditional West Indian values in which prayer forms an important part of family life. A major remnant of European colonialism is the influence of the Christian faith on West Indian societies. Many people of West Indian heritage have a strong belief in God or some supreme being and in diasporan communities in particular, immigrants often turn to the church for support and guidance to cope with the acculturative stress they experience in their new home country. Religious statues are known to help Christians stay grounded in prayer and worship and are a prominent feature in West Indian homes (see figure 131).



Figure 131. *A religious statue of a saint hangs on the wall of the Smith's family home.* Education / BBC

Having been raised in a West Indian household, Kingsley appears to have adopted the acculturation strategy of integration whereby he accepts the values of the receiving culture while still retaining that of his own heritage culture. Following a difficult day at school, where he gets into trouble and is punished by his teacher the young boy gets down on his knees to show gratitude and ask God for guidance and protection for himself and his family.

Despite being integrated into British society, Kingsley is discriminated at school solely based on the fact that he is Black and comes from a West Indian immigrant family. As a result of being victimized the British education system, Kingsley is likely to suffer from acculturative stress which may eventually have a negative impact on his academic success. According to research conducted by Schwartz et al. (2010), children of ethnic minorities “may not be accepted as full members of the receiving society, which suggests that acculturative stressors and discrimination may remain salient beyond the first generation” (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008 as cited in Schwartz et al., 2010).

McQueen's range of stylistic elements such as film format, camera shots and angles, music and continuous takes in *Education* as discussed above, is driven by his need to promote a positive shift in representation of the Caribbean community on British television. Here, McQueen not only interrogates what it means to be a young Black child growing up in Britain, but also comments on the realities of the Black British experience for West Indian immigrants and their children, during the decades immediately preceding the Windrush era. In light of this, McQueen has shown his commitment to framing his subjects in a way that exposes the struggles of the Black community and the injustices that have been inflicted upon them, which has for many years been largely omitted from British national history.

6. CONCLUSION

This concluding chapter will begin by discussing the extent to which the BBC has in the past, neglected its mandate to serve all audiences by representing diverse groups and communities within the UK in relation to the mis- or under- representation of Caribbean people in Britain. Next will be a discussion on how the BBC mandate as a Public Service Broadcaster in the 21st century is considered for the *Small Axe* series. Following this will be an examination of the ways in which *Small Axe* provides representation for the very same ethnic community seventy years following their arrival in Britain. This will include a discussion on the extent to which Steve McQueen has, through the *Small Axe* series, reshaped Caribbean representation on BBC television. The chapter concludes by considering the contribution of this thesis to research on the topic of Caribbean representation on BBC television and proposes direction for further studies on this particular subject.

As noted by researchers such as Malik, Newton and Schaffer in the Literature Review, historically, the BBC has, to an extent, lapsed in its efforts to improve representation and promote diversity on television for Caribbean immigrants and other ethnic minorities in Britain. This study revealed a recurring pattern on BBC programmes included the prevalence of racist stereotypes poking fun at Black immigrants. The tradition of ‘Black caricatures as entertainers’ was regarded as offensive and a misrepresentation of the Black community in Britain. Furthermore, the existence of the ‘colour bar’ meant that Blacks were seldom hired for onscreen roles and on the rare occasions that they were, White TV bosses ensured that they were simply in the background of a crowded scene and never positioned in the centre of the screen (Tajfel and Dawson in Shaffer 2014: 232).

Given the BBC's failure to provide adequate representation for West Indian immigrants in the decades immediately following their arrival into Britain, it appears that from the late 1970s onwards, the BBC has taken steps to honor its mandate to serve all audiences by providing content that is more inclusive and reflective of the multi-cultural communities across the UK. To this present day, the Corporation continues to demonstrate its commitment to diverse programming and there is evidence to show that some progress has been made to give more on-screen representation to Black communities, thus signifying a major overhaul in British television. In its five-year diversity strategy launched in April 2016, the BBC states that its Diversity Creative Talent Fund is geared towards the development of scripts and “new writers from Black, Asian and other ethnic minority backgrounds”, and so the broadcaster has produced shows such as *Black Earth Rising* (2018) and *I May Destroy You* (2020) both of which starred Michaela Coel, a British actress and screenwriter of Ghanaian parentage (Diversity UK, 2016). It can therefore be said that the *Small Axe* series forms part of the BBC initiative to provide a platform for under-represented communities and to showcase and promote diverse narratives of the Black experience in Britain.

An argument can be made that the shortcomings of previous BBC programmes about West Indians prompted McQueen to take a more unconventional approach to present the Caribbean experience in Britain in a way that resonates with West Indians and other immigrant communities. McQueen observes that the struggles of Caribbean immigrants

in London have been largely absent from British screens, and so, according to him, as a West Indian, “you start to think of yourself as not part of the narrative. But I knew I was real, and I knew I existed. And I wanted to make that very clear” (Yamato, 2020). While the *Small Axe* films may be regarded as merely ‘immigrant’ stories, McQueen insists that they are in fact national histories. He states, “these stories are of the United Kingdom, of Britain. This is very important that I say this: These stories are British stories” (Yamato, 2020). That said, through the *Small Axe* films, McQueen has shown his commitment to bring to the fore over 20 years of neglected histories of the collective struggle of Britain’s West Indian community. By documenting Britain’s history of institutional, systemic and structural racism and its impact on the Black community, McQueen has therefore changed the narrative by giving a voice to the West Indian community to tell their own personal stories of life in Britain.

The *Small Axe* series consists of five self-contained but inter-connected films, celebrating the spirit of unity and resilience in Britain’s West Indian community. The films each shed light on the missing narratives in Black British history, and work together as a whole to not only critique British colonial institutions, but also honour Black activists who fight against oppressive systems in Britain. At a time when there is an increased call for Black representation onscreen, *Small Axe* has made its mark as one of the most significant representations of the Caribbean diasporic community seen on British television to date. In the struggle for proper representation for ethnic minorities onscreen, the series holds cultural significance for the West Indian community particularly in the UK.

For McQueen, it was important that this pentalogy was made for television for accessibility reasons. He says, “This [series] was always made for television, for the BBC, because I wanted my mother to see these stories on TV” (Ford, 2021). Given the BBC’s current efforts to honor its mandate as a Public Service Broadcaster to provide content that reflects and represents the diverse communities in Britain, *Small Axe* is an important milestone for the broadcaster, as the high-end TV drama series explores topics specific to the Black British experience from the perspectives of West Indians in a way that resonates with their community. The release of the five films suggest that Caribbean representation on BBC television has evolved in a positive direction, thus paving the way for more progress as it relates to placing the Caribbean community front and center on British screens.

Throughout the series, McQueen stays true to his established style of empathetic filmmaking and visual storytelling, evoking from his audience, feelings of immediacy and intimacy with each subject, as seen in *Hunger* (2008) and *12 Years a Slave* (2013). To achieve his vision of ensuring that the spirit of unity, resistance and Black power are artistically communicated throughout, McQueen experiments with camera angles, lighting, framing and sound to bring to the public consciousness the socio-political conditions of West Indian immigrants in London, as a means to critique the British power structures responsible for their oppression. By employing a range of stylistic elements including silence, diegetic and non-diegetic music, and point-of-view in *Small Axe*, McQueen adopts a rich visual style to connect with his audience on a visceral level. Contrary to previous BBC programmes in which Blacks were positioned primarily in the background, in *Small Axe*, the West Indian community is given centre stage to be

protagonists of their own stories. In so doing, McQueen commands the viewer to reflect upon the history of the Black struggle in Britain and the undying spirit of hope that unites West Indian immigrants in the fight for racial justice and equality in every facet of British society.

Considering the BBC's history of reinforcing as well as perpetuating pervasive stereotypes of Black women and men it can be concluded that *Small Axe* has reshaped Caribbean representation on BBC television by rejecting gender stereotypes of not only Caribbean women but also Caribbean men. At a time when Black women are mostly unseen in rebellious organizations during the struggle for equality in post-war Britain, Althea Jones-LeCointe is seen to play a prominent role in the Black Panther movement advocating for upward mobility for women and deliberating "ways to sustain women's recruitment and define women's roles in the organization" (Johnson, 2014). Given McQueen's deliberate move to give due attention to the central role of Black women in the struggle for gender equality and racial justice at the time, it can therefore be said that *Small Axe* not only expands representations of Black women on television by subverting the stereotype of the 'angry Black woman', but also provides a platform for West Indian women to be protagonists of their own narrative on a mainstream platform. In the same vein, McQueen undermines negative stereotypes of Black males through the character of Darcus Howe. In *Mangrove*, McQueen gives attention to the intimate moment between Howe and his partner Beese to enable the audience to observe the couple, their body language and how they interact with each other. Both characters are often shown in the same frame so the audience can see Beese's reaction to Howe as he speaks, as well as the way Howe responds to his wife. It can thus be concluded that McQueen's intention here is to show a vulnerable side to Howe so as to subvert the old racist stereotype of Black men as "irresponsible, hypersexualized, hustlers and violent" lovers (Staples, 1982). By presenting a tender portrait of Darcus Howe in these intimate scenes where he is attentive to the needs of his partner, McQueen therefore seeks to transform audiences' perception about West Indian men. Commenting on the importance of authenticity in the *Small Axe* series, McQueen says, "I think it is my duty to tell the truth about the Black experience as I see and have lived it" (Grove, 2020).

What is more, is the fact that McQueen has made a deliberate attempt to break the 'colour bar' on BBC television by providing audiences with a rare representation of Caribbean culture and identity on British television. By showcasing both established and emerging Black talent in *Small Axe*, McQueen raises questions not only about the lack of diversity and inclusion that exists within the British film and television industries but also the side-lining of stories relating to the Black British experience. As a Black filmmaker himself, he acknowledges the barriers that exist for Black talent in particular and calls for change to address the issue of underrepresentation in UK film and television. McQueen thus makes history on BBC television, shifting representation in the industry by providing a platform for Black actors to be in control of their own narrative. As such, it can therefore be said that *Small Axe* is a ground-breaking celebration of Black British talent such as *Mangrove*'s Shaun Parkes (Frank Crichlow) and Malachi Kirby (Darcus Howe) to name but a few.

As evidenced above, this study has addressed key questions with regards to the extent to which the BBC has neglected its mandate to serve all audiences due to its history of mis- or under – representation of Caribbean people in the UK, and the extent to which *Small Axe* is considered important in reshaping Caribbean representation on BBC television by means of its form and content. As a result, this thesis has addressed the gaps identified in the existing scholarship on media representations of Blacks in Britain. With its specific focus on the BBC representations of the Caribbean immigrant community in Britain, this thesis has made an original contribution on the subject of the role played by the BBC in shaping behaviour in British society as it relates to the representation of Caribbean immigrants in the United Kingdom. In light of the recent campaigning for equal rights, the resurgence of the #BlackLivesMatter movement and a call for more diversity and racial representation on television, this thesis has also contributed to the literature and discourse on Caribbean representation in the current landscape of BBC television programming.

To conclude, as a researcher of Caribbean heritage, I feel hugely connected to the subject of Caribbean representation in film and television and the impact of these representations on people of Caribbean descent. I am particularly interested in the issue of inclusive content - representing diverse voices and stories of the Black / Caribbean experience in Britain, from the arrival of the Windrush generation to this present day, as these experiences have been side-lined for over seven decades. Based on the *Small Axe* case study as presented in this thesis, it can be said that Steve McQueen has adopted a distinctive visual style to reshape and reposition Caribbean representation on BBC television. This development is significant as it demonstrates that matters of race and representation in the media are given prominence, paving the way for those traditionally mis – or under – represented to finally have a voice. This study therefore lays the foundation for future research focussing on media representations of immigrant communities and the correlation between media, power and representation. Such studies will drive a paradigm shift for more diversity in film and television, with authentic representations of the Black experience not just in the UK, but the USA and other countries around the world.

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