

**The Politics  
of  
Loving Blackness in the UK  
By**

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# Abstract

Can 'loving blackness' become a new discourse for anti-racism in the UK and the broader black diaspora? This thesis will critically assess the concept of 'loving blackness as political resistance' as outlined by the African American feminist bell hooks (1992). The thesis will show the ways in which blackness has been both negated and denigrated in western cultures and thus constructed in opposition to notions of love and humanness. Conversely, love and blackness are also rehabilitated in different ways by Black diasporic populations in Britain through the transnational space. The transnational space can provide opportunities for constructing, networks of care, love and anti racist strategies that affirm the value of blackness and Black life. However, the transnational space can also be fraught with risks, dangers and exclusions providing Black and migrant populations with uneven forms of citizenship and belonging to western neo-liberal states. Loving blackness within a transnational context can help to create a dynamic space to affirm blackness against racial exclusions and dominations whilst providing a lens to suggest alternative ways of being human.

**This thesis is dedicated to**

Cassandra and Wilfred Palmer

Thank you for your gifts of love and intelligence. Rest in Peace.

To mom, Elethia 'Sweet' Palmer

For your unwavering love, beauty, kindness and humour

To dad, Oswaldo Palmer

For your political passion and intellect

And

To Amani

My precious beautiful daughter

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To Rance, without your wit, laughter, love and friendship life would be a lot less bright, so thanks 'Trubs'. And to my beautiful girl, I love you and dedicate this thesis to you knowing you have so many beautiful gifts bare. Love you forever.

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## **The Politics of Loving Blackness in the UK**

### **An Introduction**

#### **Background**

This thesis explores the ways in which concepts of blackness and love are often divorced from each other within the social context of white privilege and white supremacy. It will show how blackness has been denigrated, within the context of contemporary Western culture and constructed in opposition to notions of ‘love’ as an idea that measures the value of our humanity and human worth. In turn, this thesis is equally interested in the ways in which love and blackness become rehabilitated by Black<sup>1</sup> diasporic populations in Britain through the transnational space. The transnational space has historical, social, political and cultural significance for Black working class populations in the UK who remain largely excluded in different and uneven ways from how the neoliberal nation imagines and narrates itself, specifically through concepts of race and national forms of belonging and citizenship. The transnational space thus provides and sustains lineages of kinship and political bonds, whilst creating new opportunities and new risks for new and old migrant communities. In this sense, throughout this thesis I will also be scrutinising the notion of ‘Black Britain’ in relation to the transnational to consider its meaning and significance for changing migrant populations in the UK.

The theoretical heart of this thesis stems from my engagement with the transnational space in the context of the UK in relation to bell hooks’s essay, ‘Loving Blackness as Political

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<sup>1</sup> I am using the terms ‘Black’ or ‘blackness’ to mean primarily people of African Caribbean and more generally people of African descent within the global Black diaspora. I also recognise that in the UK, these terms have incorporated a non-white, non Western definition of blackness as a broad symbolic and political location against forms of racism, imperialism and racialised subjugation by groups who may not define themselves as being of African descent but who wish to establish political positions of solidarity with other racially subjugated groups. This thesis welcomes an open and fluid definition of blackness that affirms humanity across the complexity of Black experience and Black life.

Resistance' published in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (1992). hooks argues that blackness has become the quintessential signifier of what oppression means in the United States. Citing the Black theologian James Cone, hooks urges us all to stand against white supremacy by choosing to value, and indeed to love blackness (hooks 1992). Loving blackness becomes an act of psychological and political decolonisation, a process that challenges the dehumanisation of Black and Brown subjects in their contact with white supremacy. Thus loving blackness becomes a discourse on anti-racism, which seeks to move beyond the racial dehumanisation of blackness to reclaim Black life (hooks 1992).

However, hooks's discussions on loving blackness as well as the writings of Cornell West (1992), who also engages with discourses on love in his essay 'Nihilism in Black America', emerge from a specific national and racial arrangement within the US. Here, African Americans have been victimised within a turbulent national history of racist acts of exclusion, discrimination, segregation, enslavement and impoverishment. Subsequently, hooks's and West's response to racism are predominantly concerned with the racial healing of America as a nation. I am arguing that racial wounds need to be healed beyond the US and that such healing would need to take place on a global scale. Therefore, in this thesis I will be utilising hooks's concept of loving blackness beyond American shores to situate it within a Black transnational formulation to include historical and contemporary experiences of Black migrant and diasporic populations that reside in the UK. In this space, blackness is conceived beyond narratives of national commitments and much more along transnational networks of diaspora and migration. By mobilising loving blackness in this way, I am arguing that there is a need to recognise that blackness is also a *global* quintessential signifier of what oppression means. As such, the concept of loving blackness has an important role to play in developing anti-racist strategies to combat racism as a global phenomenon. Furthermore, I am identifying

racism as a global problem that manifests itself along nationalistic commitments whilst also transcending these national boundaries to structure and govern our global social order.

### **Black feminist methodologies and personal narratives**

For this thesis, I have used methodologies from Black feminist discourses and theories on love and care as anti-racist strategies within a transnational context. Thus, the contours of my research methods arise from an intellectual exercise that ties together Black feminist concepts of love and their political/personal interface as tools to dismantle structural and psychic manifestations of racism. At different points within this thesis, I also deploy the trope of ‘personal experience’ as a Black feminist epistemological location to underscore my methodological engagement with the transnational space and its impact upon Black/Caribbean communities in Britain. Before I move on to discuss what I mean by the term ‘transnational’ and how I am choosing deploying its use throughout this thesis as a method of enquiry, I will briefly discuss the importance of ‘personal experience’ as a form of ‘knowledge validation’ within the tradition of Black feminism and why I see ‘experience’ as an important site not only for Black feminism but also for subjugated knowledges within transnational discourses.

As a declaration of solidarity with Black women across varying, social, class and geographical locations, Black feminists have used autobiographical narratives and personal experiences of Black women to validate a Black female epistemological worldview (hooks 1990, Collins 1991, Reynolds 2004, Lorde 2007). The main objective for using Black female ‘experiences’ as an epistemological framework is to recognise and acknowledge the ways in which systems of oppression have worked to subjugate the intellectual ideas and thinking of Black women both inside and outside of formal academic institutions (Collins 1991). In the United States, Patricia Hill-Collins (1991) argues that African American women have created

viable and independent, ‘yet subjugated knowledge concerning our own subordination’ (Collins 1991, p.13). She further reasons that Black feminist intellectuals in the US have been engaged in the struggle to reconceptualise all aspects of Black female oppression through the reclamation of a Black feminist intellectual tradition (Collins 1991). Collins locates the suppression of Black feminist thought within what she describes as a seamless web of economy, polity and ideology that ‘function as a highly effective system of social control designed to keep African American women in an assigned, subordinate place’ (Collins 1991, p.7). Thus the exploitation of Black women’s labour through slavery and service occupations, past practices of political subordination by forbidding Black women the vote, the exclusion of African American women from public office, alongside a long history of systematic educational disenfranchisement, have each contributed to the subordination of Black women and consequentially, the subjugation of Black feminist thought. So too has the ideological terrain where representations of Black women are narrowly conceived between ‘the mummies, Jezebels, and breeder women of slavery to the smiling Aunt Jemimas on pancake boxes, ubiquitous Black prostitutes, and ever-present welfare mothers of contemporary popular culture’ (Collins 1991, p.7). Collins thus argues that in light of systematic forms of subordination, Black women intellectuals have played a central role in reclaiming a Black feminist intellectual tradition by discovering, recovering, analysing, documenting, narrating and reinterpreting the experiences of Black women’s lives. She writes,

At the core of Black feminist thought lie theories created by African American women which clarify a Black women’s standpoint – in essence, an interpretation of Black women’s experiences and ideas by those who participate in them ... Reclaiming the

Black women's intellectual tradition involves examining the everyday ideas of Black women not previously considered intellectuals (Collins 1991, p.15).

As Collins makes clear, Black feminist intellectual thought is not narrowly defined or confined to the formal academic setting, but located within the everyday experiences of Black women. Thus concrete experience becomes a criterion of knowledge and meaning (Collins 1990). Utilising the concept of 'experience' could be seen as an ill conceived epistemological method which repeats the earlier mistakes of white feminists by simply reducing and essentialising women's experiences under a common understanding of 'white Western womanhood'. An essentialist understanding of 'womanhood' would not take account of the specific nuances and variations, discontinuities and differences experienced by all women across the boundaries of race, class, sexuality, region and global geographical location. Within Black feminist discourses it is commonly asserted that Black women live at the oppressive intersection of race, class and gender. Indeed, Black British and African American feminists have argued that white feminism had failed to adequately account for Black female experiences of interlocking forms of oppression (hooks 1982, Amos and Parmar 1984, Mirza 1997, Collins 1990, Carby 1999). Equally, Black feminists have also warned against the dangers of using one singular Black female voice to represent the experiences of all Black women. As hooks reminds us, 'all too often in our society, it is assumed that one can know all there is to know about Black people by merely hearing the life story and opinions of one Black person' (hooks 1990, p.11).

Within this thesis, I utilise the Black feminist trope of 'experience' within a transnational framework to explore subjugated yet concrete experiences of racism. I see 'experience' as an important site not only for Black feminism but also for subjugated

knowledge within transnational discourses. The transnational space has produced its own forms of subjugated knowledge through, for example, the ways in which Black diasporic communities in the UK experience the transnational as an immediate everyday reality. This thesis seeks to recognise and acknowledge the ways in which interlocking systems of racial, national and transnational oppressions work to negate blackness and the violence of racism. At the same time our contemporary transnational situation facilitates alternative ways for Black diasporic communities in the UK to experience the transnational space as a site for recovering, creating and sustaining a sense of validation and human worth.

In the following section I will discuss my own personal ‘experience’ in relation to how the transnational space emerged as a methodological strategy within this thesis. Whilst the transnational can be the site of institutional forms of global governance, of global financial markets and global trade, I am approaching the idea of transnationalism from the perspective of the everyday cultural practices of Caribbean communities in Britain. From this perspective, I am interested in the ways everyday experiences are shaped by transnational political, cultural and social economies.

### **The transnational space and personal narrative as a methodological reflection**

The various ways in which I can choose to define myself, as working class, African, Caribbean, female, from Birmingham, remains for me a site that is constantly contested. My specific locality is a space where my Black female Caribbean heritage has consistently remained at odds and unsettled with my country of birth. I have never really been sure about how it feels and what it means to be British, and so this is one label that I have struggled to embrace. This is despite the fact that in the UK during the mid 1980s, for a few years after the urban uprisings in Handsworth, Toxteth and Tottenham, being Black and British in the

academy, in literature and the arts as well as popular culture, seemed a site of possibility and optimism. However, as a young Black girl from the Midlands during this period, my sense of Britishness was less likely to be shaped by the Black British cultural renaissance in London (Mercer, 1994), and more likely by the everyday institutionalised racism and social neglect that seemed to shape and pervade the ‘bog standard’ secondary education my friends and I received in our north Birmingham school.

Growing up in a society in deep denial of how racism is manufactured in different forms and how racism subsequently debilitates the life chances and everyday wellbeing of its non-white citizens often meant that African Caribbean communities would turn to other cultural sources for ‘soul’ survival. In this sense, what could be called the ‘transnational space’ became a vital and primary source of cultural, political and psychic repair and sustenance. Within Birmingham, for example, Black vernacular cultures had created alternative social realms in the form of pirate radio stations such as The Peoples Community Radio Station (PCRL) and Sting FM, two of Birmingham’s most longstanding ‘free’ radio stations. These radio stations served as vital public audio spaces which through a mixture of Black musical traditions, talk shows, news and live phone-in debates connected our community to the postcolonial geographies of the Caribbean and Africa, to the diasporic cartographies of North America, and back to other regional localities within the UK.

When I began to think about the role of pirate radio stations in Birmingham as transnational agents, they helped me to think further about the transnational space as a method of interpretation for this thesis. Although I knew at this point in my research that I was not going to do a specific project on pirate radio stations in Birmingham (as necessary and important as this would be), I was increasingly interested in Caribbean communities in Britain and how we utilise the transnational space to stay culturally connected to blackness. These

local connections were routed in complex ways to divergent Black diasporic territories that produced Black transnational identities. As the child of parents and grandparents who migrated to the UK from Jamaica, the transnational space is tied to longer histories of Empire, African enslavement and colonial rule within the English speaking Caribbean. The transnational space also connects social movements of resistance to slavery, oppositional anti-colonial movements in the Caribbean and Africa as well as subsequent histories of Caribbean settlement in Britain. As Karen Fog Olwig and Jean Besson write,

A long history of colonial conquest, externally controlled social and economic systems, and large-scale and extensive population movements characterise the Caribbean region. Contemporary Caribbean society thus emerged within a complex framework of extensive and exploitative interconnections on a global scale, and intimate inter-cultural and unequal social relations at the local level (Besson and Olwig 2005, p.1).

In Birmingham, my own genealogy, like many more people of Caribbean descent, is an extension of this narrative of global interconnections that Besson and Olwig outline. At the start of this research, I began to observe that these transnational connections to the Caribbean and to the Black, predominantly North American, diaspora were being sustained not only through Black music cultures and the legacies of enslavement, imperialism and colonialism, but also through transnational kinship networks of love and care. These kinship networks of love and care connected migrant families in Birmingham to parents, siblings, children, aunts and uncles in the Caribbean. These networks were also entangled in complex ways to other structural models of transnationalism, in particular to global financial economies that facilitate



remittances and the flow of global capital through money transfer services such as Western Union, MoneyGram, Jamaica National and Swift Cash. In this sense, whilst the circulation of hard currency through money transfer services form part of what Arjun Appadurai (2004) has called the ‘finanscapes’ of global capitalism, they are also one of the few ways in which migrant families can demonstrate acts of care and love through sending remittances home when living and working abroad. In a similar way to Appadurai, I am interested in the implications of this ‘disjuncture’ within our interconnected global cultures. Thus, in this thesis, I am particularly interested in transnational arrangements where marginalised and exploited groups find ways to survive their marginality by creating and generating alternative social realities through the very global and local mechanisms that structure and maintain their marginal status. As Appadurai writes,

The complexity of the current global economy has to do with certain fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture and politics which we have barely begun to theorize (Appadurai 2004, p.221).

The disjuncture of the transnational space produces unexpected and contradictory outcomes. In this sense, this thesis recognises that whilst the transnational space has been utilised as a site of love, recovery and repair that transcends nationalistic forms of racism and exclusion, it is also a site that historically and contemporarily produces the conditions for racism, marginalisation and exclusion to exist. Caribbean communities in Britain and the cultures they produce are important examples of such transnational disjunctures.

It is from the interconnection and disjuncture of personal experiences which are intimately tied to broader social, historical, political, financial and cultural economies in

complex and contradictory ways, that I deploy the use of the term ‘transnational’ throughout this thesis. Thus the transnational space is utilised to analyse debates on historical and contemporary forms of racism and anti-racist strategies, post-racialism, diversity, multiculturalism, ‘mixed-race’ histories and identities, changing configurations of ‘Black Britain’, Black popular culture and the idea of ‘loving blackness’ itself. I approach the transnational space as being part of the intimate as well as immediate everyday realities and social histories of Caribbean communities in the UK. And clearly, transnational histories and narratives of migration, kinship networks, colonialism and imperialism as well as oppositional movements to colonialism and imperialism, resonate and connect directly with many more migrant communities in Britain, including settled groups of South Asian descent who arrived in the UK via India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Kenya and Uganda. And indeed, communities of African descent from Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Somalia to name but a few, who equally share histories of migration to Britain, and long, specific and complex historical encounters with the British Empire. In this sense, I am also deploying the use of the transnational space to draw our attention to the burgeoning complexity of Black and Brown populations in Britain, whose intricate and multifaceted histories are connected in very specific ways to Empire as well as to more recent trends of globalisation and ‘new migration’ to Britain which, in turn, have given rise to new forms of racisms which this thesis will explore. Whilst this thesis cannot do justice to the specific complex histories of South Asian and continental African transnationalisms, I do wish to acknowledge in small but significant terms how these diasporas are entangled within changing notions of what it means to be ‘Black *and* British’. I wish to demonstrate that the transnational space itself is a potent force in changing and redefining what it means to be ‘Black and British’ and poses a set of challenges and opportunities for future forms of anti-racist politics.

The anti-racist tools I have in mind relate specifically to making a link between two terms that white supremacy has wanted to keep separate: love and blackness. This thesis will analyse the ways in which ideas of blackness have been denigrated in Western culture and written in opposition to notions of ‘love’. In order to challenge anti-blackness discourses, rather than writing race out of the equation, as discourses on ‘colour-blindness’ and ‘post-racialism’ might do, I am suggesting the need for a counter-narrative to blackness as a site of lovelessness. This means not deconstructing race or blackness but reconstructing a discourse that links blackness and love in ways that affirm Black humanity. The work on repairing the bond between love and blackness has already begun amongst the writings of Black feminists working in the US which I will now discuss.

### **Love and Black feminism**

I am a feminist, and what that means to me is much the same as the meaning of the fact that I am Black: it means that I must undertake to love myself and to respect myself as though my life depends upon self-love and self-respect. It means that I must everlastingly seek to cleanse myself of the hatred and the contempt that surrounds and permeates my identity, as a woman, and as a Black human being, in this particular world of ours (Jordan 2002, pp.269-270).

Black feminist scholarship has utilised and developed discourses on love and caring to shape the critical consciousness that informs the political and social visions of Black liberation struggles against the tyrannies of racism, sexism, classism and homophobia. Black feminist scholars do not claim to have any exclusive or privileged right to love and caring and the grounds of their racial or gender specificity. However, the different ways in which Black

women become both gendered and racialised subjects informs our experiences of love. Subsequently how we practice and ‘act out’ love in the divergent social spaces of our lives whether in our homes, in the work-place, in our relationships, in our local or global community, or in relation to self, our experience of love is tied to the social conditions that surround us. Black feminists such as bell hooks have argued that without love, ‘our efforts to liberate ourselves and our community from oppression and exploitation are doomed’ (hooks 1994, p.243).

Love in the context of Black feminist politics is highly intersectional crossing the borders of ‘romantic’ intimacy concerning the longstanding debate over the ‘crisis’ of Black male/female relationships to transformative socio-political activism with deep and far reaching concerns for psychic renewal in the context of community (Collins 1991, hooks and West 1991, hooks 1994, Nelson 1997, Richardson and Wade 1999, Jordan 2002, Collins 2005, Lorde 2007). hooks sees love as a tool for social transformation suggesting that by adopting a focus on love we can actually see how ‘the denigration of love in Black experience, across classes, has become the breeding ground for nihilism, for despair, for ongoing terroristic violence and predatory opportunism’ (hooks 2001, p.xxiii). In *Salvation: Black People and Love*, hooks observes that Black people were perceived by those who colonised us as lacking in the human capacity to love. Through systems of indentured labour and slavery, acts of racial aggression were justified against enslaved African men and women because we were considered not to be fully human. hooks argues that since the end of slavery such racist stereotypes were challenged by Black artists and intellectuals in the early 1900s who had debated the issue as to whether the dehumanising affects of racism had left Black people incapable of knowing and practicing love. She writes,

Writers like Richard Wright, Zora Neale Hurston, Ann Perry, Lorraine Hansberry, and James Baldwin sustained vibrant debates about the issue of love in fiction and nonfiction. Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* showed that love was not only possible among the poor and oppressed but a necessary and essential life force (hooks 2001, p.xx).

In recognising this life force, an ethic of love and care has been used as an epistemological method to validate the subjective knowledge and experiences of Black women (Collins 1991). For Patricia Hill Collins (1991), an ethic of caring, empathy and emotional expressiveness informs the dimensions of an 'Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology.' An ethic of caring becomes a tool for validating the knowledge claims of African American women. Intellectual activity was traditionally seen as male pursuit, constructed as a scientifically objective and rational exercise for validating knowledge claims. Collins argues against the notion of seeing emotion and intellect as separate and distinct entities by drawing on the Black women's blues tradition as a location where emotional expressiveness goes hand-in-hand with social commentary. In this sense our personal expressions and our ability to bond empathetically, not only produces valuable knowledge and meaning, they also connect our interior life to the outside world.

An ethic of love and care also acknowledges the need and longing for change in those social structures which support systems of race, gender, class, and heterosexist domination (hooks 1994, hooks 2001). As hooks argues,

Without a love ethic shaping the direction of our political vision and our radical aspirations, we are often seduced, in one way or the other, into continued allegiance to

systems of domination – imperialism, sexism, racism, and classism. It has always puzzled me that women and men who spend a lifetime working to resist and oppose one form of domination can be systematically supporting another (hooks 1994, p.243).

In this statement, hooks makes it clear that a love ethic entails that we must all become aware of our own capacity to overlook systems of domination, especially those systems that we believe serve our own self-interest. Thus whilst hooks embraces the decolonising critiques of racism and white supremacy that emerged from Black liberation struggles in the US during the 1950s and 1960s, she is highly critical of patriarchal homophobic rhetoric and attitudes in the Black liberation movement during the sixties that ‘made homophobia a criterion for authentic blackness’ (hooks 2001, p.194). Within Black feminism, an ethic of love involves embracing difference in order to build networks of political solidarity. This means, for example, acknowledging the important contribution that Black gay people have made to the struggle for Black liberation. As hooks writes,

Many prominent Black women thinkers, writers, and activists are gay. Sometimes it is important for the public to know this information so that the negative stereotypes which imply that Black gay people are only concerned with sexuality can be collectively challenged and debunked. Collectively the straight Black world should acknowledge the powerful positive contribution of gay folks to the Black liberation struggle. Such acknowledgement is always an act of resistance; it stands as a challenge to homophobia, to those who think heterosexual Black folks have more rights in “blackness” than anyone else (hooks 2001, p.200).

Although this thesis does not explore loving blackness in relation to gay identities and LGBT politics, it is important to note at this stage, that many important and revolutionary ideas regarding building a politics of solidarity across divergent positionalities have emerged from Black intellectuals, artists and activists who are gay. Audre Lorde (2007) argues that our sexual identities and other differences as Black women must not blind us to the need for bonding in order to defeat racism and sexism. Within Black feminism, some writers are keen to ensure that whilst gay men and women can validate their identities on their own terms beyond heterosexual validations, the overall human bonding between Black women and men, heterosexual and gay, must remain intact in order to bring into reality an environment where no one is excluded or discriminated against (hooks 2001, Lorde 2007). This is why when June Jordan asks, 'Where is the love?', we must consider questions of self love, self-determination, self respect, and self-validation as the basis of a love ethic that does not 'require my suicide to any degree' (Jordan 2002, p.271).

The fragmentation of Black life through different forms of oppression requires a particular form of unity that makes a decisive shift away from seeing Black people as 'some standardly digestible quantity. In order to work together we do not have to become a mix of indistinguishable particles resembling a vat of homogenised chocolate milk' (Lorde 2007, p136). As a love ethic, this particular kind of unity sees the tensions within our differences as opportunities for growth toward a common goal that seeks complex solutions to interlocking forms of oppression (Lorde 2007). How this unity takes shape, how it comes into being, cannot run the risk of privileging the oppression of one group over another. Such a form of unity as an ethic of love makes explicit references to the centrality of our differences seeing them as part of a universal commitment to the survival and wholeness of people in our entirety.

It is at this interface of love as an interior exercise to cultivate self-love which extends itself to wider external social transformations, commitments, values and ethics, that Black feminist discourses on love form an essential element of liberation work. Black feminism, specifically in the African American context, thus argues that Black female experiences of love are important sites for producing and validating knowledge claims (Collins 1991), thus transforming dominant structures of knowledge that construct blackness as a site of lovelessness. Love within Black feminist thought also becomes a weapon against racism and all other systems of domination (hooks 1994), thus creating a social climate of revolutionary democracy where political acts of love cannot exist in the same space as domination. In this sense, love requires that we change the way we think by making a conscious decision to decolonise our thoughts in order to bring into existence new ‘democratic’ ways of being through the ethics of care, justice, unity and difference. With these ethical tools, love in Black feminism seeks to open up the possibility that we can be and live differently as subjects and communities making a conscious choice to affirm who we are without the need to commit to violence and domination against others who are different to ourselves. Furthermore, as Collins has argued, ‘Black Feminism is a process of self-conscious struggle that empowers women and men to actualize a humanist vision of community’ (Collins 1991, p.39). Black women intellectuals see their struggle for human dignity and empowerment as part of a wider humanist vision to eradicate the ideology of domination in favour of reorganising humanity along lines of solidarity.

### **Love as a means for social change**

Alongside Black feminists, a diverse group of thinkers are also considering the possibilities of love as a tool for social transformation that serves to build new egalitarian forms of



community and human relations. Hilary Rose (1994) approaches love to argue for a feminist transformation of the sciences which seeks to go behind love, its 'naturalness' as 'woman's work', 'to reveal the systematic relations of domination and subordination within patriarchy' (Rose 1994, p.30). Rose observes that without close interpersonal relationships of love, human beings, especially young human beings cannot survive. However she argues that the unacknowledged labour of housework, child care and the sexual servicing of men is profoundly naturalised through the notion of love as woman's work. Thus a feminist response to love has been to expose the 'double-sidedness' of women's work as both labour and love. Rose calls for a radical re-visioning of labour as a concept so that emotion is restored within concepts of work and within knowledge. A rationality of responsibility for others, Rose suggests, becomes central to the feminist re-conceptualisation of labour. Furthermore, she argues that feminist critiques of the sciences from Mary Shelley onwards have spoken on the dangers of knowledge without love (Rose 1994).

Continuing with this theme of love as a form of social responsibility to others, Martha Nussbaum (2002) writes about love in relation to the intensification of US patriotic commitments, specifically, in the shadows of the terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Centre on 11 September 2001. Nussbaum argues that patriotism is by and large a morally misguided exercise that should be distrusted. Whilst patriotism can serve a worthy purpose such as 'the goal of national unity in devotion to worthy moral ideals of justice and equality', Nussbaum suggests that these goals would be better served in our contemporary interconnected world by the old ideal of the cosmopolitan 'whose allegiance is to the worldwide community of human beings' (Nussbaum 2002, p.4). Thus to challenge parochial nationalism in politics and education, Nussbaum calls for a 'cosmopolitan education' rooted in Greek Stoicism where as human beings we are defined as citizens of the world rather than

citizens attached to local temporal forms of power and government. Nussbaum believes that through learning about others we learn more about ourselves thus cultivating the values of responsibility, reason, justice and the love of humanity. Furthermore, the cosmopolitan citizen, can also think beyond its responsibilities to the nation in order to construct a global dialogue thus making headway to solving problems that require international cooperation (Nussbaum 2002). In response to Nussbaum's cosmopolitan ideal, the historian Gertrude Himmelfarb argues that Nussbaum is wrong to extol the virtues of cosmopolitanism, dismissing her thesis as both high minded and illusionary. Himmelfarb even doubts whether the values of freedom, justice and the love of humanity even exist outside of the Western governmental, political and 'civilised' hemisphere, stridently declaring that these values belong to the West, and are indeed primarily, if not exclusively Western principles and traditions (Himmelfarb in Nussbaum 2002). Himmelfarb's observation seems strikingly amnesic, if not wilful in its attempt to forget the historical and contemporary ways in which 'Western principles and traditions' have failed to extend the ideals of love, justice, freedom to, for example, enslaved Africans during European systems of trans-Atlantic slavery or to populations violently subjugated under old and new forms of colonialism and occupation. Such ideals are as slippery in the hands of Western (neo) liberal democracies as they are in the hands of any ideological or religious fundamentalist. Les Back elucidates this point, when he writes,

In the 21st century hate speaks the language of divine love and everyday justice – and this is not just confined to the perpetrators of the events of 11 September. The racial nationalists, white fundamentalists and patriotic zealots of today also claim that they

do not hate anyone. They merely profess self-love, the pursuit of ‘justice’, and the desire to preserve and cherish their ‘civilisation’ and history (Back 2001[online]).

Whilst I agree with much of Nussbaum’s argument on the need for discourse and action on a cosmopolitan love of humanity, I am also interested in uprooting the boundaries of dominator thoughts and practices that seek to place limits on love’s expansive reach. This includes discourses that on the surface appear to support the idea of a love for humanity but below this veneer conceal systems of exploitation and injustice. It is within these ‘double-sided’ discourses on love (Rose 1994) where love is both dangerous and risky. Linnel Secombe (2007) pulls together gender theory, philosophy and cultural analysis to deconstruct the paradoxes of the love relation within ‘humanist’ colonial discourses. Secombe engages with love stories in literature, cultural production as well as ancient Greek to contemporary philosophical accounts of love. In her chapter on ‘colonial love’ Secombe uses Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin White Masks* and the Aboriginal Australian Artist, Tracey Moffatt’s short experimental film *Night Cries* to challenge the dangers of love as a humanist project within the context of the colonial civilising mission. Within this colonial relation, ‘love’ can be misconstrued as a benevolent attempt to ‘cultivate the savage’ or to ‘transform the heathen into a human’ (Spivak cited in Secombe 2007, p.88). This ‘gift’ of humanist civilising is conceived as a benevolent gesture by the coloniser towards those they seek to subjugate. However, in reality, this form of ‘love’ is dangerous and coercive. It serves as a mechanism to secure the perpetual subordination of the colonised through the requirement that the colonised return the gift of humanist civilising love through service to the colonial state, religion, society and economy. As Secombe explains:

Confronting the traditional models of gift giving in which gifts circulate in an economy of exchange rather than being free and unreciprocated (Derrida 1993), the colonial gift of benevolent love and of civilising education puts the colonised recipient under an obligation or debt to be repaid through allegiance, gratitude and especially through labour for the coloniser (Secombe 2007, p.89).

Secombe's insightful analysis reveals the dangers of humanist forms of love that perpetuate conditions of subordination under a guise of benevolence and civility. Thus as Secombe suggests, 'love may be more effective than violence in producing docile subjects' (Secombe 2007, p.76).

Clearly, love is a highly contested field. And as such, any discussion on the social function of love carries with it some real dangers, specifically when contested notions of love such as Nussbaum's critique of patriotism and Secombe's assessment of colonial love, can work to sustain existing structures of domination and exploitation. This makes the task of advocating a discourse on loving blackness quite precarious. Precarious in that it can be easily misconstrued as replacing one racialised dominator culture with another. However it is my intention and hope that my deployment of the idea of 'loving blackness' remains integral to the vision of bell hooks in that rather than seeing loving blackness as another system of domination, we should instead see it as a tool that 'transforms our ways of looking and being, and thus creates the conditions necessary for us to move against [all] the forces of domination and death and reclaim Black life' (hooks 1992, p.20).

In this thesis, I am utilising loving blackness to deconstruct discourses on race and racism within the UK. Currently, no substantial work in the field of critical race theory has linked the discourse on loving blackness to anti-racist practices in Britain. This debate is

timely as new forms of racism are emerging such as xeno-racism – ‘a racism that is not just directed at those with darker skins, from the former colonial territories, but at the newer categories of the displaced, the dispossessed and the uprooted’ (Sivanandan 2001, [Online]). Along with xeno-racism, we are witnessing the recent post 9/11 surge in ‘anti- Muslim racism’ and Islamophobia where the lines of ethnicity and faith have become increasingly blurred (Kundnani 2007). Next to these new forms of racism, we are also witnessing the ways in which *racisms* are being ‘pushed further and further out of sight, out of “existence,” unmentionable because the terms by which to recognise and reference them recede, fade from view and memory’ (Goldberg 2009, p.360). In other words whilst the structural effects of racism are materially evident, they are accompanied by increasingly silent and muted discourse on racism, ‘as the terms of articulation, analytical and critical, are dimmed and deleted, distorted and redirected’ leaving us with ‘racisms without racism’ (Goldberg 2007, p.360). This dynamic terrain where racism exists and functions requires new ways of building, thinking and approaching anti-racist politics. In this respect I am utilising loving blackness to argue for a democratic love that affirms difference and complexity whilst suggesting that love necessarily requires a unifying entity in the form of solidarity and compassion amongst allies against racist forms of domination. This form of unity is not a flattening process of homogenisation, but one that takes into account the need for a continuing evolving debate on anti-racism that recognises both the multiplicity of racist power and of racialised subjects. And finally I am also deploying ‘loving blackness’ to reconstruct blackness and love to examine the praxis of love within Black communities. These forms of love are found more obviously in the terrain of popular culture, but also, as suggested above, they are also tied in interesting ways to the transnational space as a location where love as praxis produces complex and contradictory outcomes for Black communities in Britain.

### **Thesis outline**

In order to propose a discourse on loving blackness as a transformational anti-racist practice, I wanted to explore the many divergent ways in which different forms of blackness have been and continue to be denigrated, mainly within the Western social context of Britain. Thus, the structure and organisation of this thesis follows this logic, in that before we can think about repair, we must first understand the damage caused by historical and contemporary processes of racial violence and power. Thus, I have delayed my discussion on loving blackness towards the latter half of this thesis in order to discuss contemporary and historical processes of racism that continue to devastate, denigrate and dehumanise Black life.

In chapter one, I introduce the broad themes of this thesis, ‘blackness’ and ‘love’, to discuss how contemporary and historical forms of racism have denigrated Black life. I have chosen to open this discussion with Frantz Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth* to argue for a renewed politics of decolonisation which reconfigures oppositional politics and anti-racist strategies in ways that reposition the roles of women at the heart of liberation struggles. bell hooks’ (1991) notion of ‘postmodern blackness’ as a site of difference and solidarity is used as an antidote to Fanon’s ‘masculinised’ discourse to argue for renewed political alliances against organised and persistent forms of racialised oppression. I introduce my conversation with a young member of my family to illustrate how racism teaches us to perceive blackness in ways that are pathological and monolithic. Contemporary pathological ideas on race and blackness belong to longer genealogies of racism including religious, pseudo-scientific and Enlightenment arguments regarding the European belief in the ‘inherent’ and ‘natural’ inferiority of Africans. I am suggesting that this historical process of denigration remains a potent force in contemporary discourses on blackness in Britain where blackness is frequently separated from notions of love and instead is too often configured as a site of lovelessness. I

argue that such beliefs exist because dominant cultures are failing to examine racism as a devastating ideological, political and institutional weapon against humanity.

The failure of Western nations, specifically the US and the UK, to sufficiently examine racism and its devastating outcomes has produced a politics of ‘forgetting’ racism. Thus chapter two starts by examining memory, post-racialism and diversity, in light of the 2008 election of Barack Obama and in relation to forgetting the history of violence embedded within imperial power. One important question for this thesis is how we can achieve social transformation through discourses in love to bring into existence more equitable human relations. I have chosen to examine post-racialism and institutionalised forms of diversity ‘talk’ (Ahmed 2007) because both discourses appear to mark a positive social shift towards more equitable human relations through the ideal of meritocracy. However, I will make the claim that both Britain and the United States as modern neoliberal nations continue to negate blackness and the violence of racism through the ideals of ‘post-racialism’ and ‘diversity’ thus allowing racialised denigration to remain intact. Systems of domination can thus be ‘dressed up’ in the grammars of equality and meritocracy thus producing a culture where racism can be wilfully forgotten. I introduce Aime Césaire’s notion of the ‘forgetting machine’ and what Barnor Hesse calls ‘decolonial fantasies’ to support my claim that racial forgetting denies racial violence thus perpetuating the conditions for racism to persist in the context of racialised regimes of brutality within Western democracies.

In chapter three I continue to trace the denigration of blackness and race through recent debates on multiculturalism and its contested, varying, social and political configurations within Britain. In a similar way to post-racialism and diversity, multiculturalism had seemed at one stage to offer an equitable solution for healthier human relations within culturally diverse societies. This chapter shows the ways in which

multiculturalism has been widely condemned as an outright failure and as a source of injury and violence in Britain. In order to be British, migrant groups and outsiders can only belong to the nation if they negate cultural and religious practices or traditions deemed incompatible with the values of the dominant, benevolent and tolerant nation. In this sense, belonging is framed through Sara Ahmed's notion of multicultural love (Ahmed 2004), where the nation becomes the victim of what is often perceived to be an 'innately' violent multiculturalism that is being manufactured by unloving and ungrateful outsiders. However, this chapter also examines multiculturalism as a highly contested space for 'Black British' subjects and our continuing negotiation of blackness and Britishness. I have chosen to frame these debates between two important figures on the Black British scene: A. Sivanandan and Stuart Hall who argue for two very different models of multicultural blackness in Britain that expose the tensions between differing ideas on social unity and diversity. Using the work of Barnor Hesse (2000), I finally, turn to the 1945 Pan-African Congress in Manchester where transnational political agents constructed their own meanings of blackness in the British diaspora through Black political networks such as Pan-Africanism and Black feminism. This thesis argues that the transnational space is an important resource for Black communities in Britain for building and sustaining Black diasporic identities and politics. Thus, I examine the anti-imperialist discourses within the Manchester Pan African Congress of 1945 to demonstrate that the transnational space is not new and had already provided a rich resource for diasporic and transnational notions of blackness in Britain before the emergence of multiculturalism and the 'Black *and* British' (Hall 1992) paradigm.

Another key argument within this thesis is that the transnational space is disrupting the notion of what it has meant to be 'Black British'. As I attempt to show in chapter three, the political idea of 'Black Britain' is historically underpinned by transnational processes such as



migration and pan-Africanism. In chapter four I show how Stuart Hall sought to redefine what it means to be Black *and* British during the 1980s and 1990s emphasising the need to see blackness and Britishness, not as mutually exclusive categories but as a unified position where both identities could exist jointly without contestation (Hall 1992). But has this ‘optimistic moment’ in Hall’s formulation of ‘Black Britain,’ now passed? I will attempt to answer this question in relation to the predicted ‘mixed race’ future of Britain that suggests social attitudes towards ‘race’ are changing and more equitable and humanistic social relations are emerging due to increasing levels of mixed race couplings. I use textual analysis to deconstruct the Channel 4 documentary *The Great British Black Invasion* to demonstrate how ‘positive’ discourses on Britain’s ‘mixed race’ future can conceal hidden residual discourses on ‘diminishing blackness’ whilst paradoxically working to reinforce deeply racist ideas about British ‘racial purity’. I also examine the work of Mark Christian (2000) and Jacqueline Nassy Brown (2005) on the ‘mixed race’ histories of Liverpool to demonstrate that ‘mixed race’ communities are not simply a novel contemporary phenomena, but have deep historical routes within the social fabric of Britain that are often ignored due racist narratives of national racial purity. I draw upon Christian’s and Brown’s writings to also highlight that Black communities in Liverpool have utilised the transnational space as an important Black diasporic cultural resource through dynamic lines of kinship, gender and oppositional Black cultural politics.

In chapter five I continue to examine the shifting parameters of ‘Black Britain’ through the genre of UK Grime music and the continuing importance of the Black diaspora as resource for sustaining transnational identities. By contrast, I also consider recent migration shifts from Africa to the UK and the different ways in which the ‘Black British’ identity is being reframed through recent discourses on immigration, refugees and asylum seekers. These

factors are impacting upon the everyday spheres of Black life in Britain, gradually decoupling older postcolonial notions of 'Black Britain.' But rather than just focusing on the construction and organisation of new 'Black British' identities, I am also questioning the political and ethical value of Black Britishness within a highly contentious national situation where racism and the popular vilification of migrant groups continues to shape the lives of various Black and migrant populations in Britain. It is at this point within the thesis that I begin to ask how divergent Black populations in the UK can begin to rethink a new anti-racist politics of solidarity. I introduce bell hooks' concept of loving blackness to ask whether this idea has any ethical political significance for Black communities in Britain.

In chapter six I analyse bell hooks's concept of loving blackness alongside Cornell West's essay, 'Nihilism in Black America' (West 1992). I suggest that the continuing conditions of racism, political discourses on love are important critical interventions in the reclamation and recovery of Black life. I contextualise West's nihilistic thesis in the context of Hurricane Katrina and the 'loveless' federal government response to this epic tragedy. Love as a form of social justice is also considered in the context of the 'psychic despair' left behind by the violent assassinations of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King. Love as justice is also examined within the possibilities and limitations of self-help strategies adopted by Black people to defeat the ravages of racism. I argue that whilst I see loving blackness as a necessary anti-racist strategy, the theoretical orientations of hooks's (1992) and West's (1992) debates emerge from the specificity of race and responses to racism within the African American experience. As such, I mobilise the discourse of loving blackness to place it within a transnational framework of migration and Caribbean families in Britain and the diaspora.

In chapter seven I will cover new ground in the area of transnational and diasporic musical forms through a gendered analysis of lovers' rock music. Lovers' rock is one example

of how loving blackness has been manifested as a form of praxis amongst Caribbean communities in Britain. 'Lovers' rock' is a largely overlooked genre of 'Black British' reggae music that emerged in London during the 1970s through Caribbean nightclubs and 'pirate radio' stations. The genre was an integral part of the reggae music scene of that period. However lovers rock became gendered as genre that appealed particularly to the romantic aspirations of Black teenaged girls growing up in 'Thatcher's Britain'. Within the political context of the dancehall scene, both lovers rock and roots reggae are seen as binary opposites of each other - lovers being 'soft' feminised reggae concerned with romantic love, and roots as masculinised 'serious' reggae concerned with Black oppositional politics. Using Black feminist theories on love and the erotic, this chapter challenges the gendering of lovers' rock by suggesting that the genre was part of a much broader and complex political expression of love and rebellion amongst Caribbean communities in Britain. Indeed, whilst the gendering process is highly problematic, the chapter also argues that Caribbean communities had also used the erotic and political intersection of both genres to reconfigure racist and sexist representations of their identities. As such Caribbean males and females had created their own ethic of 'loving blackness' as a way of restoring and validating their experiences within Britain's often hostile urban centres.

In the conclusion I summarise the key arguments I have made throughout this thesis and suggest further avenues of research. I argue that my configuration of the transnational space has primarily been based on the triangulation of the English speaking Caribbean diaspora with a specific engagement with the US. I suggest that future research in this field needs to disrupt this transatlantic trajectory to consider the transnational configuration of 'Black Europe' in light of growing racialised forms of discontent across different nation states within the European Union.

## Chapter One

### RACISM AND THE DENIGRATION OF BLACKNESS

*'Today, I believe in the possibility of love that is why I endeavour to trace its imperfections'* Frantz Fanon

#### **Introduction**

In an impassioned plea for renewal, Frantz Fanon (1963) in the conclusion to *The Wretched of the Earth* calls for humanity, specifically those of us in the 'Third World,' to turn over a new leaf, to work through new concepts, to set afoot a new man. The creation of a new man is a necessary intervention, a new trajectory in the formulation of the whole man, something Fanon believes Europe has failed to do in the shadow of imperialist and colonial projects:

The West saw itself as a spiritual adventure. It is in the name of the spirit, in the name of the spirit of Europe, that Europe has made her encroachments, that she has justified her crimes and legitimized the slavery in which she holds the four-fifths of humanity (Fanon 1963, p.313).

In order to avoid the pitfalls of imitating 'a succession of negations of man, and an avalanche of murders,' (Fanon 1963, p.312) which have become impregnated in European colonialism and slavery, Fanon writes,

The human condition, plans for mankind and collaboration between men in those tasks which increase the sum total of humanity are new problems, which demand true

inventions. Let us decide not to imitate Europe; let us combine our muscles and our brains in a new direction. Let us try to create the whole man, whom Europe has been incapable of bringing to triumphant birth (Fanon 1963, pp.312-313)

Fanon's plea is both illuminating and problematic. It is illuminating because Fanon's ultimate concern is with the possibility of (re-)creation, the possibility that we collectively participate in and take full and active accountability for reinventing and reclaiming our humanity from the debris of psychic colonial trauma in the spirit of affirming life and not generating destruction and murder. Fanon calls upon the subjugated to take up an active, penetrative gaze that looks within and beyond the trauma of colonisation to take on the serious and ethical task of psychological decolonisation, to create afresh a renewed humanity of the oppressed.

Fanon's call is conceptually challenging, requiring new cognitive skills and insights as well as one of praxis demanding practical physical action and work founded upon the embodiment of revolutionary thought and practice.

However, Fanon's plea is also problematic. The masculine bias evoked within Fanon's discourse is ultimately concerned with the 'phobic' (loving) bonds of solidarity formed between men as equals in a form of 'brotherly love' (Fromm 1995, pp.37-38). Such male exclusivity precludes the presence of women in general, and in particular, the presence of the Black female body that thinks (hooks 1996, p.81). Fanon's male centred thinking suggests the process of decolonisation pivots exclusively around the bonds of brotherhood formed between Black men as the primary protagonists for anti-colonial revolutionary struggle. There are no allusions to or suggestions as to the role of de-colonised Black women who yearn for a new social condition to end systematic forms of oppression as much as for political solidarity with

Black men. Thus our function as Black women in this revolution is eclipsed, silenced by the exclusive focus upon the healing work of brothers.

Fanon's vision of resistance is centred on masculine ascendancy, which equates intellectual praxis with the work of resisting colonised men. Through this particular gaze the muscles and brains of the colonised male form the necessary armour in the conquering of Europe, as a feminised colonial power. In this vision the power of man exists purely in the coalescing of mind and muscle in a unified effort to renew humanity. Feminised power remains either unacknowledged through omission or metaphorically acknowledged as a violent, dominant imperialist threat. For on the one hand, the intellect, emotion and power of colonised women are excluded and marginalised by our absence. Whilst on the other, Europe becomes the sole representation of the feminine and symbolises an ethical void, a metaphor of devouring bankrupt womanhood. Fanon's masculinised discourse inadvertently lifts the veil that covers a complex discursive tension between race, gender and the cultural politics of decolonisation which this thesis will explore.

This chapter discusses the key themes at the heart of this thesis, namely 'blackness' and 'love', within the context of historical and contemporary configurations of racism. It will consider the ways in which blackness has been denigrated historically through discourses that defined Black people as being less than human. This chapter will show how such historical accounts of blackness are tied to contemporary notions of Black pathology. It will consider the possibilities of loving blackness in a white supremacist context and suggest why this can be both challenging and necessary. Blackness is discussed in relation to pseudo-scientific racism as the ideological underpinning of contemporary racisms. I will also examine older myths as to the origins of blackness as a form of 'lost whiteness' in sixteenth century England and then move on to discuss plantocracy racism as the brutal justification for transatlantic

slavery. Finally this chapter will scrutinize pathological racisms and ‘lovelessness’ pertaining to blackness within contemporary British culture. The consequences of lovelessness generated by structural forms of racism in Britain spawn further consequences for Black and Brown populations and the ways in which these communities engage with the transnational space. It is this immediate engagement with the transnational space that I will be exploring during the overall development of this thesis.

### **Loving dialogue and the affirmation of Black humanity**

Fanon’s discourses on decolonisation and liberation are central concerns to this thesis. So too are the underlying tensions that exist amongst ‘the wretched’ along the lines of ‘blackness’ and ‘love’ as Black men and women straddle ‘the conjuncture of race and gender’ (Young 1996, p.88). Thus the aim of this study is to engage with decolonising tools of resistance in the battle against psychological colonialism for the purpose of exploring ways of sustaining positions of solidarity across and through blackness as a contested location. bell hooks (1995) defines the term ‘decolonisation’ as a process of unlearning white supremacy by divesting of white privilege, if we are white, or vestiges of internalized racism, if we are Black, in order to transform our minds and our habits of being (hooks 1995, p.264).

By critiquing patriarchy in Frantz Fanon’s work, it is my intention to engage in conscious reflexive dialogue that affirms at once the humanity of both Black men and women. From this position I can occupy a shared egalitarian space of solidarity and difference that allows for critical dissent without intending to harm or wound the ‘other.’ I can sustain my own agency by entering into a dialogue about strategies for decolonisation in ways that validate as opposed to cause harm to the humanity of my own subjectivity as well as the subjectivity of other Black men and women. I have arrived at such a ‘dialogic’ position

through the writings of bell hooks, whose insightful critical voice will echo throughout my work. As hooks suggests, it is 'wrong-minded' to assume that solidarity cannot co-exist with dissent (hooks 1996, p. 78). As a panellist at a conference held at the ICA during the mid 1990's, where women thinkers and scholars debated sexism and the legacy of Fanon, hooks urged female participants to claim their own agency in their relationship with Fanon, avoiding the binary presumption that if a patriarchal standpoint exists, then that leaves women with very little room or no way to 'enter the text.' hooks explains that she 'enters the text' by her own capacity to utilise Fanon's discourse about colonialism (hooks 1996, p.104). By 'journeying through the body of the father to connect with the mind' (hooks 1996, p.80) hooks envisions the possibility 'of a world where women and men in general, and Black women and men in particular, would dialogue together,' a world she feels Fanon has failed to imagine (hooks 1996, p.85). For hooks 'dialogue makes love possible.' She continues;

I want to think critically about intellectual partnership, about the ways Black women and men resist by creating a world where we can talk with one another, where we can work together (hooks 1996, p.80).

It is my intention to 'enter' into this decolonising 'dialogue' from the metropolitan centres of the United Kingdom, where blackness is constructed through the dynamics of gender and through the complex formation of African and Caribbean globalised transnational networks.



### **The politics of love and blackness**

The purpose of this study on 'loving blackness' is to stand in solidarity with Fanon's themes of turning over a new leaf, to work through new concepts, to set afoot a new human condition, by seeking to unpick the implicit residual dynamics subsumed under Fanon's illuminating yet problematic discourse. The silent residual dynamics include love which is at once tangible and elusive to the human condition. Love's 'spaciousness' (Ackerman 1995, p. xviii) lends itself to multiple and often contradictory meanings. Thus it is necessary for me to state specifically from the outset that I am concerned with love as political *praxis*. Ana Maria Araújo Freire (McLaren 2000, p.xiv) wife of the late Paulo Freire, provides us with an insightful working definition of love as political praxis which underpins my discourse on love throughout this thesis. Speaking of love she writes,

A feeling that, when deep and true in human beings, is not wasted on itself but opens possibilities for those who live it radically, both for reflections in the political and epistemological field and everyday, ethical and generous praxes (McLaren 2000, p.xiv)

Freire allows us to see the limitations of narcissistic forms of love offering us an alternative view of love that looks beyond the interests of the self to one that extends itself to the realm of political thinking and the ethics of everyday human interaction. Alongside love as political praxis, I am also concerned with the 'spaciousness,' complexity and multiplicity of blackness and Black subjectivities as contested locations for decolonised identities. In this respect bell hooks's concept of 'postmodern blackness' becomes a useful starting point (hooks 1991, pp.23-31). In her essay, 'Postmodern Blackness,' hooks critiques the failings of postmodernist

discourses dominated by the voices of white male intellectuals and academics who fail to include 'other' postmodern voices. hooks highlights the hypocrisy of postmodern discourses predominated by white male elites that call our attention to 'difference' and 'otherness' even as these groups exclude and ignore the voices of Black critics, particularly Black women. However, hooks also constructs an argument in defence of postmodernism in the specific sense that it permits a critique of essentialist notions of blackness that are narrow and constricting. Non-essentialist notions allow us to affirm 'different' multiple Black identities and varied Black experience (hooks 1991, p.28). She argues that a critique of essentialist thinking,

challenges colonial imperialist paradigms of Black identity which represent blackness one-dimensionally in ways that reinforce and sustain white supremacy. This discourse created the idea of the 'primitive' and promoted the notion of an 'authentic' experience, seeing as 'natural' those expressions of Black life which conformed to a pre-existing pattern or stereotype. Abandoning essentialist notions would be a serious challenge to racism ... This critique should not be made synonymous with a dismissal of the struggle of oppressed and exploited peoples to make ourselves subjects. Nor should it deny that in certain circumstances this experience affords us a privileged critical location from which to speak ... There is a radical difference between a repudiation of the idea that there is a Black 'essence' and recognition of the way Black identity has been specifically constituted in the experience of exile and struggle (hooks 1991, pp.28-29).

For the purposes of this study, hooks's definition of 'postmodern blackness' provides a helpful framework for understanding blackness as a complex space that contests the limits of narrow configurations of blackness that can dangerously reinforce racist essentialisms. However 'postmodern blackness' also affirms blackness as a location of shared collective history and struggle, particularly as it is this global history of Black struggle and resistance that is shaped by systematic forms of racism, imperialism and colonialism. Postmodern blackness sustains old and constructs new alliances against organised and persistent forms of racialised oppression. Indeed, hooks's discourses on decolonisation and liberation are central concerns to this thesis.

### **Is loving blackness possible in a white supremacist context?**

This research seeks to take a critical excursion through loving blackness, by asking the question, is it possible to love blackness in a white supremacist culture? There are many reasons why I ask this question. However a recent conversation had made it more pertinent as it revealed the pervasive nature of 'common-sense' racist logic that exists around blackness and identity as we grow to understand who we are in relation to the rest of the world. Not too long ago, a conversation I had with my seven year old cousin clearly illustrated to me that white supremacist thinking is not only deeply entrenched in British culture but also that it becomes deeply engrained in our thinking from an early age. On a recent visit to my home my cousin, who is used to having things given to him on demand, asked me for some biscuits, to which I replied that we had none. He then asked me for some sweets which we didn't have either. Frustrated, he asked with feisty annoyance, 'Well what are you going to eat then?' I replied 'Nothing.' He said, 'What nothing! You mean you gonna' starve yourself like those people in Africa.' I asked him how he knew people in Africa did not have any food. He

confidently asserted, 'I saw it on the TV and my teacher told me that there is no food in Africa and that children in Africa are starving. I'm lucky because I don't have to starve. See ya.'

This brief and swift exchange illustrated that often from an early age young intelligent Black children in the Black diaspora are taught in subtle and not so subtle ways to adopt a view of African humanity as a condition of lack, suffering, and deprivation. On another level, my cousin was able to understand that as a Black boy born and brought up in the UK his experience of blackness in a Western environment is in many ways different to how blackness might be lived and experienced by an African child on the continent. Through our conversation my cousin demonstrated that blackness is not simply understood at the surface level of skin colour or phenotype, it can also be differentiated by class, access to foods and resources, material lack or privilege as well as by geographical location.

Indeed, our conversation caused me to think about the way we come to *know* these images of 'hungry Africans' and the different meanings they reproduce. One obvious example of how we know these images is through print and television emergency relief campaigns run by international non-governmental organisations (INGO's). Charities such as Oxfam are keen to emphasise in their marketing publicity that the role they play in 'empowering' communities in Africa to be 'self reliant' is to assist communities to find local solutions to local problems (Oxfam 2008). However the notions of 'empowerment' and 'self reliance' remain ambivalent. By suggesting communities are empowered and self reliant Oxfam might be avoiding the dangers of racialised stereotypes that suggest African people are burdened by an inability to govern themselves. At the same time, however, Oxfam utilises a discourse of dependency that makes it clear to potential donors and supporters that the 'empowerment' and 'self-sufficiency' of communities is still dependant on Oxfam, its partners and our donations, thus

compromising initial claims of 'local community' agency. African agency is compromised even further when 'discourses of compassion' between NGO charities and their supporters reinforce the agency of the 'Western subject' (Ahmed 2004, p.22) to act to save and rescue African people, thus subordinating the agency of the people who feel the pain of poverty the most. This becomes even more evident when charities such as UNICEF, Oxfam or Save the Children draw upon the cult of 'celebrity' to promote high profile media campaigns for emergency relief or to highlight long term programmes. As the charities, the celebrities and their marketers compete to establish 'brand personality,' in a competitive corporate market place the issue of acquiring the market share of potential donors can take precedent over the very lives they are supposedly helping. As one marketer puts it,

If Denise Van Outen says 'I'm involved in this charity,' then people want to be involved in it, too, want to be part of that club, to echo that kind of lifestyle. So charity is then not about rattling tins and grubbiness and shots of famine and stuff like that, which people will turn the page on. Readers will keep the page open if it's Denise Van Outen wearing a tight T-shirt saying Oxfam on it. As tragic as this might seem, even charities have to be pragmatic to do their job (Smith 2002 [Online]).

However pragmatic in a world of competing markets, it is indeed tragic. It is tragic because it underscores the agency of the Western subject, which itself though not quite always white, relies heavily on the economic structures of white privilege and the performative display of 'kindness.' Here the newly styled fantasy of 'the white man's burden,' is fashioned through Western benevolence, the 'goodness' of charity and the social 'conscience' of philanthropy (Smith 2002). The white man's burden whose mission it once was to 'civilize the savages,'

can now call on the supposedly titillating talent of Denise Van Outen's tightly fitted T-shirt to tempt the 'civilised' into giving money to 'charitable causes' that may, we hope, help to solve the problem of famine in Africa.

The privileged discourse on 'giving' that takes place between Western charities, celebrities and the giving public is more likely to eclipse those Africans that the charity believes Van Outen can assist. It would be an oversimplification to say all charity is bad. Of course, this is not the case. However, at the same time discourses on 'giving' and 'charity' often allow us to stop thinking about contemporary socio-economic relations that are unequal and the historical violence of colonialism and imperialism that have enabled poverty and famine to exist in Africa in the first place. And according to our marketeer the discourse is not always about famine in Africa either. As he reminds us the discourse is as likely to be concerned with Western celebrity and how Western life style choices and aspirations impact upon our decision making. Such aspirations are often predicated on the acquisition and consumption of global brands such as Prada and Gucci, companies whose public image can appear to have a social conscience whilst simultaneously hiding a multitude of sins, such as poor working conditions for their labour force and exploitative pay (McDougall 2006). Very rarely on our TV screens do we gain an insightful understanding of local African responses to poverty and hunger within specific regions without such narratives being tied to the intervention of Western 'assistance,' whether through aid or philanthropy. Take for example Gucci's 'most extensive philanthropic programme' in support of the charity Unicef with the help of Hollywood actress Jennifer Connely,

We are committed to supporting important humanitarian efforts through Unicef.

Connelly has spent considerable time in Mozambique and has personal ties to the well-being of the children from this and other regions (McDougall 2006).

It is Gucci's humanitarian commitments and their defence of Jennifer's *personal* integrity that is meant to lure us into 'feeling good' about securing the 'well being' of the children of Mozambique as customers purchase products from their special charity Christmas collection (McDougall 2006). If Jennifer has the time to be empathetic, then so should we. Thus we are encouraged to privilege our own empathetic feelings that we share with Jennifer over the well-being of Mozambican children. Here the human suffering of African and other darker skinned and impoverished peoples becomes the backdrop for the excessive tastes of the super rich, the unscrupulous motives of global brands and the narcissism of celebrity. The echoing language of urgency - *disaster, emergency, crisis* - often accompanies painful images of Black and brown children, men and women who are suffering the most injury from famine and hunger at that time. In this case the 'humanness' of African suffering becomes 'humanised' and worthy of attention because the Western subject feels moved enough to empathise and intervene.

It would be unfair and unrealistic to expect my seven year old cousin to understand the complex dimensions that make poverty and hunger a persistent and devastating problem in specific regions of Africa and indeed in other parts of our impoverished world. Understanding these issues remains a challenge to most concerned adults. However the logic of 'common-sense' racism exists when the complexity of African humanity is removed from the specificity of its socio-economic and historical context, within which the legacies of colonialism, imperialism, neo-colonialism and globalisation have continued to ravage and under-develop

Africa through different yet consistent modes of exploitation (Rodney 1981). Through the logic of 'common-sense' white privilege, where charitable agency is framed through the actions and emotions of the Western subject, Africa and its diverse populations become de-contextualised from the structural dimensions of exploitation. As a consequence, African peoples are often depicted in pathological terms that suggest we are rooted in a perpetual state of Western dependency. Exposure to such narrow pathological representations of Africa often through Western media platforms, is damaging to *all* African peoples in the continent and in the diaspora because at once such constructions deny our humanity, our agency, our human rights and our heterogeneity. Such perceptions undermine the work that African people themselves are doing to tackle the structural forces of oppression that shape and define our daily lives.

In my conversation with my cousin I had failed to utilise the opportunity to fully redress the dehumanising information he had been given by the media and his teacher. When Black people internalise dehumanising racist stereotypes of each other we contribute to a form of psychological colonialism. If we fail to challenge and interrogate the often racist origins of African and Black stereotypes, then the task of decolonising our thinking and of loving blackness becomes difficult. In particular loving blackness becomes difficult when we live in a white hegemonic Western context such as Europe and North America where blackness is more often viewed through the racially hierarchical lens of white supremacy and white privilege. As white privilege is constantly promoted in our everyday environment, particularly through visual media on TV, online and through advertising, it is no wonder that Black peoples often view the world through a lens coloured by the logic of white supremacy. Les Henry argues,



Many non-whites seldom consider whiteness as an ideal that influences their thoughts and feelings about self, because it's so taken for granted nature renders it the norm and that makes it dangerous to all of us. That is why whiteness as an anti Afrikan presence in the Black imagination needs to be considered in any discussion of the power of white privilege (Henry 2006a).

When we engage with the task of scrutinising the presence of white privilege in the 'Black imagination' as well as the taken for granted normative power of whiteness in our daily lives, then it becomes possible to engage with loving blackness in a white supremacist context.

When Africans and Europeans (and any 'other' group for that matter) can begin the process of removing from their thinking racialised binaries and hierarchies that suggest blackness and indeed Africaness are perpetually inferior to whiteness and 'westernness', then we can begin to reconfigure the politics of our human relations by engaging with a radical erasure of racism both externally and internally. Furthermore, loving blackness is thus not only possible, it is necessary for a radical decolonised understanding of blackness as a shared location differentiated by distinct and uneven global circumstances within Africa and throughout the Black diaspora.

### **Blackness as a discursive location**

This thesis recognises that both love and blackness are conflicting, contentious spaces. The research aims to explore the discursive relationship between blackness and love to see how each are problematic to each other. Discussing discursive relationships within Black cultures, sociologist and cultural critic Paul Gilroy (1993a) has argued that the existence of multiplicity in Black life has created new *intra-racial* differences, producing political tensions and

divisions based on class, ideology, money, language, locality, sexuality, gender and generation (Gilroy 1993a, p.2). Thus Gilroy argues that, although assumptions of racial purity, cultural sameness and the appeal of 'phenotypical symmetry' are highly prized attributes of Black social life, they are fantasy and over simplistic in the formation of dissident Black cultures (Gilroy 1993a, p.1). For Gilroy, racial authenticity is elusive to those that seek it, even though it remains highly desirable. He argues that sexuality and gender become the privileged modes to express this desired but elusive racial authenticity. In the formation of Black authenticity, specifically Black male identities, the interlocking modes of race and gender have often combined to form a 'toughened mode of masculinity' (Gilroy cites 'Slackness' reggae, misogynistic forms of hip hop and Africentricism as the main culprits for this 'authentic' male centred form of blackness). Gilroy argues that often Black masculinity is formulated as a blend of Spartan authoritarianism and the cunning traits of a Black hustler. Of this toughened mode of Black masculinity he writes, its

central characteristic is that it has been stripped of all tenderness, for expressions of tenderness are now dismissed as signs of weakness, just as ruthlessness and violence are exalted over love (Gilroy 1993a, p8).

Thus for Gilroy what he terms as 'racial absolutism' (fixing and essentialising blackness) is problematic and so too is the tendency of Black identities to be masculinised through violence and ruthlessness. Gilroy's argument is indeed compelling. I agree with Gilroy that blackness as differentiated along the lines of class, ideology, money, language, locality, sexuality, gender and generation is neither a secondary or trivial matter (Gilroy 1993a, p.2). I also agree that Black masculinity as the modality for which blackness and race is lived and symbolized

as 'authentic' can, and does, obscure the complexity of Black experience to the detriment of Black men and women (Gilroy 1993a, p.7). However, I disagree with the way in which Gilroy configures a desire for a sense of collective politics based on a shared sense of blackness as something that has been fatally undermined (Gilroy 1993a, p.2). His arguments seem to suggest that once differences are delineated and fissures in blackness are exposed, then the possibility of finding a language for collective and 'connected' Black politics becomes invariant and dangerously tied to fascistic notions of 'racial purity' and 'cultural sameness.' Fraught by 'political divisions' and 'tensions,' the differences and multiplicity within blackness appear irreconcilable in Gilroy's analysis of Black vernacular culture. Difference is thus collapsed into antagonistic and amplified divisions. These divisions seem too deeply engrained to be reconciled by a democratic commitment to dialogue or debate which have according to Gilroy, been replaced instead by a political mood of communal therapy (Gilroy 1993a, p.3). It is not my intention to 'cover-up,' undermine or pretend that divisions along the fissures Gilroy has outlined do not exist. However I would like to suggest that by framing aspirations for a shared sense of global Black politics as 'fantasy' and 'simplistic', Gilroy in the end contributes to the loss of dialogue he so rightly defends. The desire for a collective sense of politics remains a powerful discourse in the Black world because racialised oppression remains a significant contributing factor to Black life in a multitude of ways. The parameters and borders of a connected and collective subaltern politics will always be contentious and passionately fought over precisely because racialised forms of justice remain as highly prized attributes in Black life as opposed to the simple politics of racial or 'phenotypical symmetry' that Gilroy suggests. By contributing to a form of dialogic paralysis Gilroy fails to create an open alternative space where complex, contentious and contradictory political positionalities can engage in building and sustaining old and new dialogic networks.

Rather than suggesting that the valorisation of racial phenotype is firmly rooted in 'simplistic' forms of Black politics, the following discussion will show that the valorisation of phenotype is deeply rooted in racist discourses that abounded during the European 'Age of Enlightenment'. During this period, European pseudo-scientific racism was mapped onto the African persona where degrees of lighter and darker phenotypes became the marker of ones hierarchical position in the pecking order of humanity. Therefore, in order for us to understand the originary moments of modern day racism we need to go back to the past to understand earlier ideas and configurations of 'blackness', 'whiteness', 'race' and 'races'. It is here that the discursive politics of phenotype have found their most enduring value and power.

#### **'Race,' racism and pseudo science**

Negro, *Homo pelli nigra*, a name given to a variety of the human species, who are entirely Black, and are found in the torrid zone, especially in that part of Africa which lies within the tropics. In the complexion of Negroes we meet with various shades; but they likewise differ far from other men in all the features of their face. Round cheeks, high cheek-bones, a forehead somewhat elevated, a short, broad, flat nose, thick lips, small ears, ugliness, and irregularity of shape, characterize their external appearance. The Negro women have loins greatly depressed, and very large buttocks, which give the back the shape of a saddle. Vices the most notorious seem to be the portion of this unhappy race: idleness, treachery, revenge, cruelty, impudence, are said to have extinguished the principles of natural law, and to have silenced the reproofs of

conscience. They are strangers to every sentiment of compassion, and are an awful example of the corruption of man when left to himself (cited in Eze 1997, pp.93-94).

This extract, taken from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1798), is an example of how the perceived 'essence' of 'blackness,' when understood as a phenotypical signifier to ones 'racial' origin became 'naturalised' as a source of corrupted racial difference and human inferiority in eighteenth century Western philosophical thought. As the critic Adam Lively has noted in relation to the 'invention' of race by eighteenth century naturalists, 'when it came to race, the new language of science and rationalism coexisted with ancient prejudices and folkloric fantasy' (Lively 1999, p.14). Scientific racism during the 'Age of Enlightenment' had made the fallacious claim that the 'white race' was naturally superior to all other 'races'. For example, the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, an influential figure during the 'Age of Enlightenment' wrote,

In the hot countries the human being matures in all aspects earlier, but does not, however, reach the perfection of those in the temperate zones. Humanity is at its greatest perfection in the races of the whites. The yellow Indians do have a meagre talent. The Negroes are far below them and at the lowest point are a part of the American peoples (Eze 1997, p.63).

This thesis recognises that the formation of 'race' as a concept is based on false pseudo-scientific and racist doctrines advanced by eighteenth century Western European thinkers and their studies in phrenology, archaeology, physiology and natural sciences (Eze 1997). Within these disciplines French, British and German thinkers sought to categorise human beings into

superior and inferior races based on speculative ideas such as the influence of climate on human physical traits and the measurement of moral virtue predicated on the superiority and civility of the 'white race' (Eze 1997). Emanuel Eze (1997) suggests that some of the major thinkers of the European Enlightenment were instrumental 'in codifying and institutionalizing both the scientific and popular European perceptions of race' (Eze 1997, p.5). Eze argues that figures such as Hume, Kant and Hegel had written numerous articles on race. These writings played a strong and significant role in articulating not only Europe's sense of cultural superiority but also its sense of racial superiority (Eze 1997). According to Eze, in their writings, 'reason' and 'civilisation' became synonymous with 'white' people and northern Europe, whilst unreason and savagery were 'naturally' located among the non-whites, the 'black,' the 'red,' and the 'yellow,' outside Europe (Eze 1997). Their writings contributed to the ideological, socio-economic, political, scientific, emotional, historical and genealogical root of modern day racism (West 1982).

The ideology of superior and inferior 'races' was well accepted within scientific thought well into the twentieth century (Fryer 1984, p.169). After the end of World War II and following a UNESCO declaration on 'the race problem,' the concept of biologically distinct human 'races,' where human populations could be categorised into different species (polygenism), became morally implausible in scientific terms and was discredited as a 'social myth' (UNESCO 1950). After World War II, the moral legitimacy of scientific racism could no longer be justified following the role eugenics had played in the racial policy of Nazi Germany. Noting the function of racism in the Jewish Holocaust in Nazi Germany, the UNESCO report, *The Race Question* (1950), named racism as a 'social evil' that far from being biologically knowable, had existed like war in 'the minds of men' and needed to be combated (UNESCO 1950).

This study recognises that although the concept of ‘race(s)’ is a socially constructed myth based on implausible pseudo-scientific meanderings and superstition, its offspring, the ideology of *racism* is a very real and tangible phenomenon affecting the life chances of millions of non-white people globally. Pseudo-scientific racism, its direct coupling with Western imperialism and capitalism were used to justify the brutalisation and enslavement of African people and the subjugation of ‘non-white’ populations globally (Fryer 1984). In the popular and intellectual imagination of white supremacy not only was blackness as a ‘racial’ category the epitome of barbarity and lovelessness, it became antithetical to Western epistemological definitions of humanity.

### **Whiteness lost - the ‘origins’ of blackness in sixteenth century England**

Eighteenth century pseudo-scientific racism attempted to fix racialised notions of blackness in a deviant binary relationship to whiteness. Literally and metaphorically, blackness and non-whiteness became associated with notions of ‘evilness’ and inferiority, whilst whiteness with ‘goodness’ and superiority. However, according to the late historian Peter Fryer (1984) in the English language the words ‘Black’ and ‘white’ were heavily charged with meaning long before the English encountered African people. Blackness in England traditionally stood for death, mourning, baseness, evil, sin and danger. It was the colour of bad magic, melancholy, and the depths of hell. English people spoke of black arts, blackmail and the black Death. The devil himself was Black, so were sorrow, poison, mourning and forsaken love (Fryer 1984, p.135). Jennifer Brody (1998) suggests a more complex relationship existed between blackness and whiteness in the etymological root of the word ‘Black.’ Citing the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., Brody highlights that in Old English, ‘Black’ was also confused

with ‘... *blác* shining, white ...’. The two words were only distinguishable by the context in which they were used, and sometimes not even by that (Brody 1998, p.11).

By highlighting the confused etymology of the word ‘Black’ Brody points out that the construction of pure whiteness and pure blackness in Victorian culture was based on words that were etymologically impure and hybrid. Furthermore, Brody intends to demonstrate that meaning is never stable but is ‘through repeated reference constructed and reconstructed’ (Brody 1998, p.11). Elsewhere, other originary myths and theories of blackness have suggested that whiteness was some originary truth whilst blackness signified ‘some later horror, a kind of accident or aberration’ (Little 1993, p.308). Arthur Little (1993) discusses Shakespeare’s play *Othello* in relation to the circulation of popular myths that abounded in England during the sixteenth and seventeenth century concerning the origins of blackness. These myths and theories had suggested that the origin of blackness was indeed rooted in a loss of whiteness. Little argues that between the late sixteenth century and the middle of the seventeenth century English audiences both inside and outside of *Othello* brought with them a set of historical ‘pretexts’ full of these originary myths. Some myths linked blackness to Africa’s proximity to the sun. One popular pretext was the myth of *Phaeton*. Little cites Ben Johnson’s *Masque of Blackness* (1605) where Johnson draws on the Greek myth of Phaeton. Riding his chariot (the sun), Phaeton loses control burning the Earth. Flames were said to hurtle around the world scorching the Ethiopians. The Ethiopians, who were once as fair as others, were now Black with Black despair roaming the world looking for their missing beauty, their lost identity (Little 1993, p.307). Cursing the sun that scorched them, the Ethiopians set out to find a land where they could lose their blackness. They arrive in England, where,



Their beauties shall be scorch'd no more:

This sun is temperate, and refines

All things on which his radiance shines

Adam Lively (1999) suggests that for Johnson, blackness was a mask, a superficial deformity that hid an inner purity, a hidden whiteness (Lively 1999, p26). Christian theology also provided originary explanations of blackness. Little notes that 'The curse of Ham' for example, was used in sixteenth century 'scientific' literature as evidence that blackness was a curse and punishment from God because of an abhorrent unexplained sexual act committed by Ham against Noah.<sup>1</sup> Ham was said to have 'saw his fathers nakedness' whilst Noah lay in a drunken stupor inside his tent. The descendents of Ham, the Canaanites, who were believed to have had Black African ancestry, would be eternally punished for Ham's ambiguous sexual violation of his father. As punishment from God, the 'blackness' of the Canaanites would remain as 'a spectacle of disobedience to all the world' (Little 1993, pp.307-308). In this biblical narrative, utilised as scientific 'evidence' in the writings of George Best (1578), we see an early example of blackness being synonymous with some form of 'deviant' and horrific sexual behaviour. As Randall C Bailey rightly claims the 'curse of Ham' was used to sanction U.S. enslavement of African people and was a cornerstone of South African apartheid (Bailey 1995, p.138). Little further suggests that these narratives not only assume that 'whiteness' functions as an originary truth (that is eventually lost) they also assume that the 'essence' of blackness can be found and thus provide some 'proof' to the literal and metaphorical savage and libidinous nature of the Black persona (Little 1993, p.308).

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<sup>1</sup> Although in George Best's account the sexual crime was committed against 'Noah's wife', since the sixteenth century, more recent interpretations suggest that this act of sexual violation had taken place not between Noah's wife and Ham, but between Ham and Noah himself. As the theologian Randall C. Bailey (1995) notes, much ambiguity and discussion exists in theological interpretations of the sexual transgression for which Ham is punished by God.

Peter Fryer argues that English people during the sixteenth century were poorly informed about Africa and the people who lived there (Fryer 1984, p.6). He suggests that as more and more Englishmen travelled to the 'dark continent' a heady cocktail of 'sober facts' and 'accepted myths' began to appear in English travel accounts of Africa. In the socially and economically underdeveloped climate of England during the sixteenth century, tales of 'Ethiopian Blackamoors' were at once titillating, entertaining and threatening. Fryer argues that England was relatively ethnically homogeneous between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, geographically isolated, technologically backward, and socially conservative, with knowledge and political power concentrated and controlled in the hands of the elite (Fryer 1984, p.133). The onset of British dominance in the Slave trade had not taken hold at this time. Travel writers, predominantly white Englishmen, travelled to Africa and on returning to England, would publish their findings in travel books. The books revealed the travellers to be surprised by the living standards of Africans in places such as Benin, where the ruling elite were fluent in European languages such as Portuguese (Fryer 1984, p.6). However impressed they were by the standard of living and development of African civilisations, the writers were unable to resist their temptation for the fantastic in their implausible accounts of 'exotic' Africans.

Subjected to the Englishman's gaze, African peoples possessed a peculiar foreignness and were viewed as abnormal and irregular, defying the physical composition of the human form. Various mythologies were created about the 'nature' and 'essence' of Africans that became inseparable from pre-existing notions of blackness. Africans were depicted as defying the limits of age and generation, size and human formation (Fryer 1984). In one example cited by Fryer, the King of Ethiopia was said to live to the age of 562. Ethiopians had no noses, 'others no upper lip or tongues, others again no mouth; others had no heads but eyes and

mouths in their breasts' (Fryer 1984). Fantasies often reveal more about the subject doing the fantasising than the object of the fantasy itself. Thus it is at this point during the sixteenth century that we also witness the seeds of English anxiety concerning sex and Africans, where the boundaries of blackness and sexuality become the site for 'monstrous' and 'dangerous' transgressions. By fixing their gaze upon African men and women, the English male travel writers were thus confronted with their own titillation and proceeded to reduce human warmth and sexual intimacy between African males and females to unnatural animalistic and beastlike impulses. One writer noted,

after a meal of fish washed up on the shore and baked by the sun... like animals ...  
[they would] fall upon their women, just as they come to hand, without any choice;  
utterly free from care because they are always sure of plenty food (Fryer 1984, p.7).

As Peter Fryer argues,

Such fantasies tended to cement in the minds of English people the notion that Africans were inherently carefree, lazy and lustful. By the middle of the sixteenth century this notion was taken for granted, just as some English people took it for granted that every male African had an enormous penis ... (Fryer 1984, p.7).

In these early depictions of sexually charged racial fantasies in the white imagination, blackness was devoid of emotional fabric, absent of human warmth and intellect and reducible to the Black body's genitalia and physical appearance. It would be reasonable to argue here that the Black body was also devoid of love and instead becomes a site of

pornographic objectification. Notions of corrupted blackness, inscribed onto the Black body, had not only come to signify a deviant, abnormal and alien human identity, it came to represent a 'lost' white essence. It came to signify a lost or indeed an unsubstantiated humanity.

To summarise, in sixteenth century England the African persona in the popular imagination of English people became the embodiment of literal and metaphorical ideas about blackness. Pre-existing ideas about blackness were mapped onto African bodies and used to categorise Africans as being less than human. As such Africans became dehumanised in the European imagination. For these Europeans, African worth could only be redeemed through commerce and the global system of chattel slavery.

### **Plantocracy racism and slavery**

Blackness had taken on a much more acute racial distinction when the European trade in Africans demanded an inexhaustible supply of free African labour. As Caribbean scholars such as Eric Williams have shown, slavery in the West Indies started as an economic venture rather than a racial one (Williams, 1994). However, racist ideologies were used to justify the enslavement of African people in the 'New World' (Fryer 1988, p.63). Racism became an institutionalised cornerstone of British economic expansion, justifying British rule over Africans first under slavery and later under colonialism (Fryer 1988, p.67). According to Stuart Hall (1997) the stereotyping of racial difference during slavery was represented around the themes of the 'innate laziness' of blacks, born and fit for servitude, and the 'innate primitivism' of Black people, simple and lacking of culture and genetically incapable of civilisation. Edward Long, the son of a Jamaican planter and a key exponent of plantocracy racism (Fryer, 1988), wrote the infamous *History of Jamaica* in 1774. His racist attack on

Black people linked pseudo scientific assertions about Africans to an economic defence of chattel slavery (Fryer 1984, p.159). As Fryer states, ‘his racist diatribe fits into, and serves the purpose of, the overall economic argument’,

That the trade in slaves and in goods produced by slaves was immensely profitable, not only in the West Indies, but to Britain itself and that it greatly enriched Englishmen in all walks of life; that West Indian slavery was, on the whole, a mild and benevolent institution and that slaves were better off than the lowest classes in Britain; that negro slavery was inevitable and necessary in certain regions of the world; that the slave trade benefited and helped to civilise Africa; that virtually all the slaves were originally convicted criminals; that in every mental and moral way negroes were absolutely inferior to white men, and that the most constructive thing which could happen to them was to be compelled to work productively (Fryer 1984, p.160).

Long’s racist rant makes two things clear: that firstly plantation slavery had garnered massive economic rewards for Britain and the West Indian planters. And secondly, that the tentacles of racism had now moved beyond pseudo-scientific nonsense and nasty epistemological ignorance, so that racism as a folklore of Western civilisation became an essential institutional component in the political, economic and industrial growth of British global capital and a justification for white colonial rule (Fryer 1988, p.61).

The plantation as a hive of European economic growth and exploitation, as a site of systematic racialised violence and oppression, was also a site of sabotage, resistance and revolt. Africans struggled for their freedom and independence both during and after the end of slavery. Armed slave revolts were common place throughout the Caribbean, the most famous

and successful being the Haitian Revolution of 1804 where ‘the Africans in Haiti shook the foundations of slavery and capitalism in the Caribbean, North America and Europe’ (Campbell 1985, p.27). The island of Jamaica was significant not only because it was the most prosperous of the British colonies but also because it was the area with the most slave revolts in the New World (Campbell 1985, p.26). Other more surreptitious means were used to disrupt the system of slavery such as poisoning, economic sabotage, withdrawal of labour, arson, assault and murder (Dadzie 1990). Despite the systematic violence and ideological fabrications transmitted against African humanity under the guise of ‘civilisation’ and ‘science’, enslaved Africans were not passive materials nor moulded by the wills of their masters. Stella Dadzie’s gendered analysis of African female resistance in Jamaica during slavery found widespread malingering, strikes and physical assaults by women that suggest that far from accepting and collaborating with the system, a significant number of female slaves were willing to risk all in defence of their right to self-determination (Dadzie 1990, p.24).

### **Early Black presence in England**

Peter Fryer suggests that amongst the Black population settled in London during the eighteenth century there is evidence of cohesion, solidarity and mutual help. In England Black people were often fragmented and isolated, atomised in separate households (Fryer 1984, pp. 67-70). Nevertheless, Fryer argues Black self-awareness took literary shape in autobiography, political protest and other published writings. Black communities had developed a lively social life and had found ways to express their political aspirations (Fryer 1984, p.67).

However, the Black presence in London during the eighteenth century was met with hostility by the ruling elite, who were both suspicious and resentful towards Africans presumed to

have eloped or to be living undercover having escaped the clutches of servitude by their owners (Fryer 1984, p.70). For some, including Sir John Fielding, the possibility of escaped servants being ‘intoxicated with liberty’ came too close to witnessing the dangerous seeds of a full scale rebellion bloom into ‘the blackest conspiracies against their Governors and Masters’ (Fielding [1768] in Fryer 1984, p.71). Here, the fear of Black volatility and revenge lies at the heart of white supremacist anxieties about freedom in the hands of ‘blacks.’ Blackness was not only a physical injury to mankind, it was innately wild and untamed and thus prone to ‘evil.’ Could ‘blacks’ be trusted with freedom? For Fielding and his class, it certainly could not. Freedom in the hands of African people could only signify danger and vengeance.

Blackness has been discussed in the historical context of pseudo scientific racism and sixteenth century ideas regarding the origins of blackness itself. Transatlantic slavery had institutionalised racism within the economic order of Europe with devastating consequences for African peoples. Born out of historically deep-seated racial inequalities and systematic racial violence, both notions of ‘race’ and racism have proven to be salient and persistent modals in which contemporary life is configured and reconfigured. I will now discuss contemporary configurations of blackness and the ways in which racism contributes to notions of ‘lovelessness’ as it pertains to Black life in the Western context.

### **Pathological configurations of Blackness in the Western environment**

For blackness, again as an expanding metaphor, embodies the nihilistic values that ... propounds in opposition to the positive values of Western bourgeois Graeco-Christian society, values such as work, family, country, love, respect for life and property, the high values of art and culture (Oxenhandler 1975, p.418).

This citation demarcates the Eurocentric social parameters in which love is imagined to find its most positive expression in Western modernity; work, family, country, property, art and culture. In the context of Western modernity, love resides within an elite cultural domain of white Eurocentric privilege. Indeed, in *The Encyclopaedia of Cultural Anthropology* (1996) the study of romantic love is said to be nonexistent because of the widespread belief that romantic love was unique to Euro-American culture. The entry cites Lawrence Stone who insists that if romantic love ever existed outside Europe, it only arose among the elite in non-Western states who had time to cultivate an aesthetic appreciation for subjective experiences. The entry further suggests that underlying these Eurocentric views is the assumption that modernisation and the rise of the individual are directly linked to the appearance of romantic notions of love. As a consequence, the article concludes that very little work has been done to alter the prevalent opinion that romantic love is a European contribution to world culture (*The Encyclopaedia of Cultural Anthropology*, pp.718-719). Here, romantic love is linked to material wealth and to the cultural and leisurely pursuits of an affluent and elite social class. Romantic love between the elite and affluent is assumed not only to cultivate subjectivity but also contributes to the cultural superiority of European civilisations. In the United States, Entman and Rojecki's (2000) important study on media and race in America, analysed prime-time television adverts to probe racial distinctions between blackness and whiteness. Their study found images of white couples and children were represented more frequently than Black couples and children (thirty four white couples were shown compared to two images of Black couples; fifty five white children were featured compared with four Black children). Furthermore, 'according to the world of TV advertising, whites are the ones who occupy the realm of ideal humanity, of human warmth and connection' symbolised occasionally by their love for their pets and by the amount of times white couples are seen touching each other.



None of the Black couples were shown touching white people or each other, conveying a subliminal message that Black skin is taboo (Entman and Rojecki 2000). The implications of Entman and Rojecki's research marks the way 'racisms police the boundaries' of racial difference (Goldberg 2009). It reveals how the codification of racial difference produces narratives of civility, value and power, and more importantly about who belongs within these boundaries and who is excluded from them.

Representations of blackness in the media have often been pathologised in terms that are disassociated and antithetical to 'positive values' such as human warmth and 'love'. In this sense rather than contributing to the cultural reproduction of love in Western society, blackness is perceived as damaging and harmful to Western values and is thus precluded from 'protection, privilege, property, or profit', unless it is enlisted to work and labour for them. Genocidal narratives that do injury to Black people that assault our bodies, minds and humanity, seek to justify Black oppression and racialised forms of annihilation. Take for example the right-wing American Republican radio host William Bennett who in September 2005 made press headlines when he stated that, 'if you want to reduce crime, you could abort every Black baby in this country, and your crime rate would go down' (*Guardian* 2005). In this logic of 'rationalised' racial hatred, being Black means you become a legitimate target for genocide. Criminality becomes genetically imbedded into Black people who thus have a 'natural' tendency to do violence. Unable to give love to the nation and having minimal social value, the logic goes that Black people are prime targets to be exterminated. African Americans become the epitome of lovelessness within American society because they are readily expendable. Love's absence is marked by blackness, a 'condition' that is unworthy of receiving love and supposedly incapable of reproducing love within a white supremacist nationalist context. Thus blackness must be violently expunged from the nation at its earliest

embryonic stage, in order to save the sanctity and liberty of good Americans and ‘their’ (white) country. Blackness as a signifier of lovelessness becomes an unspoken assumption, a taken-for-granted sub-conscious text within the dominant culture that relies upon the brutalisation of blackness to maintain the status quo. As Goldberg (2009) writes,

Bennett’s ‘observation’ trades on a cache of widespread if no longer explicitly expressed presumptions: that the crime rate in the US is overwhelmingly fuelled by Black criminality, that such criminality is more or less natural and so inescapable condition of especially the Black poor, but also that it is not unacceptable to issue eugenicist judgements about the implications of hypothetical genocide in the case of African Americans in ways it would mostly not be for any other group today (Muslims included) (Goldberg 2009, p.79).

### **Internalised narratives of racism**

Within the UK, blackness has also had its fair share of representational deprecation. Amongst Black Caribbean communities it is not uncommon to hear the view that Black people have psychologically internalised racism and have produced attitudes that are both self-negating and self-hating (Gabriel 2006). Often the evidence of this internalisation seems on the surface to be compelling, especially if we consider how Black communities are represented through the mainstream British press and media. Constant representations of behaviour deemed as intrinsic cultural patterns in Black life - lone parenting, teenage single-mothers, absent male fathers, ‘worklessness’, infidelity and womanising, poor academic attainment, intellectual inferiority, gun crime and gun culture, sexually transmitted diseases – paint a bleak picture.

The social ambience created from these representations suggests Black people in the Western environment are morally, psychically and emotionally broken.

In the autumn of 2006 the BBC screened a television drama entitled *Shoot the Messenger* (originally titled *F\*ck Black People*), a drama that was meant to be a 'brave' insight into what it was like being Black in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain. Written by Sharon Foster and directed by Ngozi Onwurah, the drama seemed all too happy to perpetuate the notion that being Black in Britain in the 21<sup>st</sup> century meant being in a chronic condition of Black self-hate. Considering the lack of television dramas on British television screens that present a complex and humane insight into Black life, *Messenger* seemed to capture and capitalise on the popular denigration of blackness in contemporary Britain. Indeed, the screenplay was a crash course in Black pathological stereotypes. The main character, Joe, a Black teacher working in an inner-city school wants to save the Black pupils in his school from a life of gangs, crime and underachievement. Having lost his job and affected by mental illness, Joe turns against the Black community and blames Black people for his downfall. He states, 'When I think about it, everything bad that has ever happened to me has involved a Black person.' For all its lustre in terms of high television production values, the content of *Messenger* failed to move beyond the lazy one-dimensional stereotypes that plague representations of Black people in the mainstream British media.

According to Ligali MediaWatch, *Messenger* targets and hits almost every stereotype that exists of the African community, including, but not limited to: 'Black people go on about slavery,' 'Black people should forget about African identity,' 'Black people cause their own mental health problems,' 'Black people are violent and lazy,' 'Black women are desperate and predatory,' 'Black men are no good' (Ligali MediaWatch 2006). In an interview, the writer, Sharon Foster said she wanted to be 'loving' toward the Black community and had written the

screenplay as an act of love to counter the ‘blame, blame, blame culture which is killing our community.’ She went on to say, ‘This film is intended to be a healing experience. To look at what we do, to acknowledge it and move on. I do believe we have a difficulty with taking responsibility’ (Foster circa 2006). If only Foster had heeded her own advice by taking responsibility for ‘healing’ the stereotypical representations of blackness found in her screenplay that bludgeon back audiences and others with monolithic depictions of Black people. Foster lost the opportunity to write about the serious issues that are affecting Black communities in a complex way that went beyond the binary of ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ images and stereotypes. This thesis supports Black people taking responsibility for each other, for looking at better ways in which we can *be* with each other, for ending attitudes that negate blackness. Such a position places the concept of agency at the heart of the struggle to move away from notions of helplessness and powerlessness. However, this thesis understands that Black peoples’ efforts to care for the wellbeing of themselves and others does not take place in a vacuum outside of the injuriousness of contemporary and historical racism, outside of what bell hooks terms ‘white supremacist capitalist patriarchy.’ Such a context would indeed praise *Messenger* for being ‘brave’, for being ‘a landmark piece for a generation of Black Britons’ (BBC Online 2006) precisely because it allows the status quo to stay intact, precisely because it allows racism to remain unchallenged. However, *Messenger*, far from being a ‘brave’ attempt at confronting Black people with ‘our difficulty with taking responsibility,’ is an example of how as Black people we can engage with the process of pathologising each other.

Yet we also know racially pathologised notions of blackness do not provide a full and complex picture of Black humanity. We know that to define a segment of humanity in such narrow terms contributes to the process of dehumanisation. From the outset this research

seeks to centre the humanity within blackness as opposed to essentialising blackness within humanity. It seeks to understand that those of us who live and are seen through the lens of blackness as a limitation are able to find ways to love beyond the perceived limits, myths and narratives mapped onto our existence. We also know that notions of love have been used as a tool in various localities whether in the family, the home, the church, the dancehall, in grassroots activism and in our artistic, literary, visual and spoken cultures, to resist oppression and to maintain and validate our human spirit. Resistance steeped in notions of loving praxis have proven to be life-affirming. However these manifestations of love have often been met with counter-resistance by the dominant culture. I am arguing that the dominant culture of white supremacy in the UK and its globalised manifestations, alongside other systems of social domination including sex and class, militate against love in Black life. As bell hooks argues, 'Historically, all unions between Black women and men were forged within a culture of white supremacy where in all bonding which did not serve the interest of white people was deemed suspect and threatening' (hooks 2001, p.155). She further writes,

Importantly, remembering that white supremacist thinking is always challenged by loving unions between Black males and females sheds light on why there have been so many obstacles placed in the path of such union (hooks 2001, p.156).

Internalised racism has produced attitudes that are believed to be self negating producing nihilistic cultures that increasingly pervade Black communities (West 1992, pp.37-47).

Racism has made repeated attempts to dehumanise blackness and has undermined the concept of love as it relates to Black populations globally. Narratives of racial expulsion and 'evaporation' are not uncommon within the context of blackness and its presence in Western

civilisation (Goldberg 2009). However Black communities in Britain have sought to affirm blackness both within and beyond its racially hostile borders. Hence this thesis is arguing that, for Black diasporic communities in Britain, the transnational space has become a critical site for the construction and reconstruction of Black subjectivity and cross border communities.

I am arguing that the once optimistic possibility of a cohesive 'Black British' identity that sought to safeguard a secure postcolonial sense of national belonging has now fragmented. It has been broken by the continuing disavowal of Britain's racialised and transnationalised populations, by national and global anxieties over the meaning of Britishness as well as by 'the changing economies of British racism' (Hesse 2000, p.22). The transnational space offers Black communities complex opportunities to reconstruct the vestiges of belonging from both contemporary and historical diasporic lineages, in the face of resurgent movements towards fascism both in the UK and across Europe (Marble and Agard-Jones 2009; Hine et. al. 2009). In this respect, bell hook's theory of 'loving blackness' becomes the critical lens by which this thesis engages with the politics of antiracism. I am extending hooks's thesis on loving blackness by situating it outside of the local context of domestic racism within the US, in order to re-contextualise it within transnational notions of blackness and globalised perspectives on race and racism.

### **Blackness falling out of love with Britishness**

In the contemporary UK context, popular concepts of blackness in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are constructed as being synonymous with the 'ghetto' an imagined enclave outside of an equally imagined normative British experience. Fraught with the threat of implosion in the face of the gun, blackness in Britain is presumed to possess distinctive self-destructive violent cultures that belong to being Black. In the final weeks of his premiership, Tony Blair blamed the

causes of knife and gun murders in London not on poverty or social deprivation but on a distinctive Black culture (Webbe 2007). He said,

When are we going to start saying this is a problem amongst a section of the Black community and not, for reasons of political correctness, pretend that this is nothing to do with it? ... We need to stop thinking of this as a society that has gone wrong - it has not - but of specific groups that for specific reasons have gone outside of the proper lines of respect and good conduct towards others and need by specific measures to be brought back into the fold (Webbe 2007)

Here, nihilistic tendencies are depicted as essences in Black culture, essences that are both racially and culturally located. Blackness is constructed in the popular imagination as self-defeating and self-eroding. The social integration of Black and brown communities into mainstream British society is touted in reactionary outbursts as *the* cure-all to protect the integrity of Britain and 'British values'. Take for example Trevor Philips who suggested that Britain was 'sleep walking into segregation,' or indeed, the Conservative party leader David Cameron who stated that, 'we need to reassert faith in our shared British values which help guarantee stability, tolerance and civility' (cited in Kundnani 2007, p.125). However, the cure-all of integration is proving to be highly problematic. This is because Black and brown communities discover a double standard taking place where 'they are routinely expected to demonstrate national allegiances while living with unreliable citizenship rights and recognition, and [are] subject to the ever present risks of institutional racism' (Hesse in Hine et. al 2009, p.292). Hence, Black and brown communities are sensitive to the inherent hypocrisy within the integration debate where non-white groups are encouraged to do and to

be seen to be doing the work of integration in order to suit the needs of the dominant culture. Guardian columnist Gary Younge (2005) has highlighted what he sees as the 'fetishising' of integration particularly in the aftermath of the July 7<sup>th</sup> bombings in London:

The cause of integration has become so fetishised since the July bombings that it has been elevated to the level of an intrinsic moral value - not a means to an end but an end in itself (Younge 2005).

Ironically, it has also been suggested that Black groups are still more likely to view integration more positively than white groups in the UK (Younge 2005). For example, reports have shown that the group that has the hardest time integrating are white people. A poll for the Commission for Racial Equality showed that 94% of white people polled compared with 47% of ethnic minorities say that most if not all of their friends are white. A Mori poll for *Prospect* magazine in 2004 showed that 41% of whites, compared with 26% of ethnic minorities, want the races to live separately (Younge 2005). If this report is to be believed, then the nature of integration in the UK context reveals that a significant proportion of the white population in the UK do not want to integrate. Thus the push for integration can be read as a mask for assimilation. Assimilation implies there is something inherently wrong with Black and Brown people and the cultures that shape their blackness and brownness that needs to be managed or erased. Such logic fails to question the values of the dominant society itself. It fails to take seriously the currency, durability, efficiency and efficacy of racism despite promoting, bureaucratising and legalising the notion that social equality can be attained in such discriminatory circumstances.



There is a presumption that the dominant system has nothing to gain from challenging and changing their attitudes and beliefs about race, particularly within our supposedly new neoliberal post racial climate. However this thesis refutes such thinking on the basis that,

The future of democracy itself depends on the outcomes of racial politics and policies as they develop in various national societies and in the world at large. This means that the future of democracy also depends on the *concept* of race, that is, the meaning that is attached to it (Winant 2009, p.41).

Thus, we all have a vested interest in ending systematic forms of racial discrimination.

Racism remains one of the most damaging ideological, political and institutionalised weapons against humanity, and will continue to remain so if left unchecked.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed how contemporary and historical forms of racism have denigrated Black life. It has shown how contemporary racist pathology belongs to a longer genealogy of racism including religious, pseudo-scientific and Enlightenment arguments regarding the European belief in the ‘inherent’ and ‘natural’ inferiority of Africans. I have argued that this historical process of denigration can be found in contemporary discourses on blackness in Britain where blackness is often separated from notions of love and configured as a site of lovelessness within popular commentary and public discourse. Such beliefs continue to exist because dominant Western cultures are failing to sufficiently address racism as a devastating ideological, political and institutional weapon against humanity. The following chapter addresses the ways in which racism is overlooked in dominant Western cultures and can be

buried and forgotten in popular discourses such as ‘post-racialism’ and ‘diversity’. Such a politics of forgetting allows racism the power to continue to structure the basis of our human relations.

## Chapter 2

### **A LOVE THAT BINDS THE NATION:**

### **Race, memory and the politics of forgetting**

#### **Introduction**

How do memory and amnesia work to stick the neoliberal nation-state together at times when the nation feels anxious about its postcolonial legacies and the repercussions of an ‘unsettled multiculturalism?’ (Hesse 2000). This chapter critiques the neoliberal nation state and the debris of racism as a largely unattended legacy of former imperial enterprises, histories and memories. I will make the claim that both Britain and the United States as modern neoliberal nations continue to negate blackness and the violence of racism through processes of selective historical and cultural amnesia. The ideological vehicles that help to process these forms of negation can be found within the popular social discourses of ‘post-racialism’ and ‘diversity.’ The post-racial frenzy that accompanied the election of Barrack Hussein Obama in 2008 seemed to offer an exemplary incarnation of the neoliberal state’s overzealous desire simply to forget about racism. In that moment we saw an unnerving wilfulness to evaporate, bury and ‘mis-remember’ race and racism even as their conditions remained alive and kicking (Goldberg 2009).

In this chapter I will discuss Obama’s America in the context of its ‘post-racial’ forgetting. I will expand this discussion to reveal how constructions of whiteness and diversity discourses can conceal racisms within Western neoliberal states. Finally, I will discuss Aime Cesaire’s notion of the ‘forgetting machine’ and what Barnor Hesse’s calls

‘decolonial fantasies’ within the context of racialised regimes of brutality within Western democracies.

For Aime Césaire, the ‘forgetting machine’ conceals the barbarity of European colonialism and imperial histories. This concealment allows us to forget that ‘Western values’ such as freedom, justice and equality are historically founded upon practices of racialised forms of barbarism, domination and exclusion. Indeed, such values and their reconfiguration within Western democratic structures emerge from the systematic dispossession and denial of such freedoms to those erased from the ideological image of the nation.

For Hesse, ‘de/colonial fantasises’ deny contemporary ‘racial’ (in)justice by simply forgetting that racialised barbarity was an intrinsic instrument to Britain’s colonial and imperial dominance. By ‘forgetting’ and ‘fantasying,’ the modern neo-liberal nation state can frequently imagine and believe itself to be benevolent and open-minded towards ‘racialised others’ through the qualities of, love, tolerance and hospitality (Ahmed 2004). This is nowhere more evident in recent debates on multiculturalism, where its perceived failure is seen as a cause of ‘injury’ to the cohesion of the nation, specifically here in Britain (Ahmed 2004).

My analysis of the need for a politically conscious form of love assumes that the power and impact of racism and white supremacy continue to victimise, harm and destroy the life chances of people of African descent globally alongside many more of the world’s darker skinned peoples and populations. As Horace Campbell (2006) points out, ‘If anything, in the era of globalization the exploitation of the masses of the people has intensified. This exploitation is being carried out under the neo-liberal ideas of liberalization that redistributes wealth from the exploited to the powerful’ (Campbell 2006, p.39). Due to racism’s far reaching and devastating global impact, contemporary activists in the field of Pan-Africanism

and the global reparation movement continue to stress the need for a globalised and collective response to racism. For example, in 2007, I conducted an interview with leading pan-Africanist and reparations activist campaigner Esther Stanford to discuss the issue of tackling racism within a transnational context. She stated,

The reality is if we look globally at the population of peoples of African descent, there is genocide happening. We are dying at an undeniable rate. I'm not just talking about HIV AIDs; I'm talking about the civil conflict and wars that are fuelled by Western powers. I'm talking about the negative impact of climate change. So we do not have the luxury [of being partisan]. We have to see ourselves as one. First, of all that's a mental construct. We have to eradicate some of these artificial, although significant, borders and boundaries that have come to define and shape our experience (Stanford 2007 personal interview).

Stanford's approach to destabilising some of the 'significant' borders and boundaries that have come to define blackness is pertinent because the power of racism as a phenomenon works to discriminate against people as one monolithic racialised group. I am not suggesting that all people of African descent experience racism in the same way. Quite clearly, we should always remember how racism intersects and works with other factors such as space, location, gender, class, sexuality, poverty, economics, age, employment, trafficking and migration, religious intolerance, conflict, the environment, and our human rights. These boundaries are indeed significant because they necessarily force us to think beyond narrow and monolithic definitions of blackness and one-dimensional approaches to racism. However, across our varying localities racism must be seen as an interconnected, continuous, and institutionalised

global phenomenon that makes all of our localities relational and dialogic. Within his book, David Theo Goldberg argues that the exclusionary, humiliating and violent expressions of race have been historically produced, contemporarily articulated, and yet are so often in denial (Goldberg 2009, p.vi). He further claims that the transformational grammars of race and racisms as a neoliberal political economy have assumed a firm grip on different societies across varying regions (Goldberg 2009, p.vi). Cornell West reminds us that African people are part of a rich culture and community that have struggled against racialised oppression in light of the fact that ‘all people with Black skin and African phenotype are subject to potential white supremacist abuse’ (West 2001, p.39). However, race in the dominant popular imagination is assumed to be an ‘antique notion’ (Goldberg 2009, p.329). Instead, in the political economy of neoliberalism we see an ‘increasing stress on individualised merit and ability in the name of racelessness’ (Goldberg 2009, p.331). This logic of the raceless, ‘post-racial’ meritocracy became the definitive narrative in the election of Barack Obama in 2008. At this seminal moment in American history, the nation began to dream, again. The nation could now forget about race. Racism was finally over, evidenced by the individual charisma, skill, intelligence, wit and ambition of its newly elected Black leader.

### **Navigating race and blackness in Obama’s ‘post-racial America’**

bell hooks argues that ‘blackness’ as a racialised sign primarily evokes hatred and fear in the public imagination of all groups who have learnt to share racist assumptions about blackness in an environment that values whiteness and white supremacy. hooks argues that,

In a white supremacist context ‘loving blackness’ is rarely a political stance that is reflected in everyday life. When present it is deemed suspect, dangerous and threatening (hooks 1992, p.10).

The threat, suspicion and danger of blackness has remained a consistent narrative in Barack Obama’s sojourn to the White House. With this in mind, how then has Obama managed to become the first African American President in a country historically divided along the lines of race?

Conventional wisdom had told us that Obama’s election victory was a clear sign that America had entered into a post-racial meritocracy. In this new social order, if you worked hard, played fair and could demonstrate your unwavering commitment and belief in ‘the greatness and goodness’ of America, as an ideal and as a nation, anyone from any social group could make it to the highest seat in the land. Obama seemed to transform this myth into reality. With magician-like conjuring, Obama’s victory supposedly had achieved something none of us had done before. He had eradicated racism, just like that. The bar had thus been raised for all African Americans to move beyond the racial grievances of the past. No more excuses for academic under achievement, no more talk of being a victim of the criminal justice system. No more blaming systematised forms of social degradation, deprivation, economic exclusion or any form of systematic oppression deeply rooted in racist, class, or sexist injustices. No more excuses. We have a Black President now, so please, no more excuses.

Others felt they no longer needed to confront the issue of white guilt over racism. According to the Black conservative commentator Larry Elder (2008), the civil rights war is over, the good guys have won and white racism is no longer a major problem in America.

Elder argues that the fear of being perceived as a racist was now an even bigger problem than racism itself (Elder 2008). Indeed, how could racism be real when Black brown and white folk voted for President Barack Obama in significant numbers and believed in his fundamental message of change and social transformation? How can race and racism have any historical context or social relevance to our post-racial contemporary narrative where a Black man is now the Commander in Chief?

And yet, as always, racism proved itself to be downright stubborn, pernicious, indignant and characteristically ignorant. In the face of this extraordinary parable of post-racial conquest, racism has given the Obama Presidency the finger. It has accused Obama himself of being a racist, of 'having a deep seated hatred of white people' (Beck 2009). Even Rupert Murdoch, owner of the global media conglomerate, News International, seemed to agree (Murdoch 2009). Racism said Obama could never be a true patriot. He was not even born in America, he wasn't a true bona fide American citizen - he was born somewhere between Mombasa and Hawaii (CNN 2009). In the summer of 2009 at 'tea party' rallies across the country Obama was depicted on placards and posters as the natural air to Hitler and Mussolini. In the face of rightwing opposition to healthcare reform, government bailouts of big business and the possibility of future tax increases, shouts of 'U. S. A.', 'Glenn Beck for President', 'freedom' and 'we want our country back' could be heard by protestors lamenting the demise of 'their' country and the untold damage that had been done by Obama and his 'army of socialist Czars' since January 20<sup>th</sup> 2009. Clearly, racism was not and is not going down without a fight.

During the 2008 presidential race, in the bitterly fought campaign to become the Democratic Party nominee, Obama's blackness became the source of much race-bating and sensational media scrutiny. For some, to know the content of his 'character' and his ability to



govern America was to look no further than his blackness. His twenty-year membership of the African-centred Trinity United Church in Chicago; his relationship with the church's former charismatic leader Rev Jeremiah Wright; alongside comments made by Michelle Obama (2008b) about feeling proud to be an American for the first time in her life time, informed a wider discourse of 'racial-reasoning' used by right-wing media pundits to stoke up the fears of undecided white American voters about this suspicious and untrustworthy Black candidate.

Sarah Palin, infamously accused Obama of 'palling around with terrorists who would target their own country' referring, of course, to his association with William Ayers, a co-founder of the 1960s-era Weather Underground, an organization the FBI labelled as a domestic terrorist group (Orr 2008). Obama's fist-thumb gesture with Michelle Obama was dubbed a 'terrorist fist jab' by Fox News anchor woman Ed Hill (Sweeny 2008) whilst on the same network she was described in derogative terms as 'Obama's baby mama' (*The Huffington Post* 2008). Blackness, domestic terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism (his middle name is Hussein) and stereotypes of Black dysfunctional families, were all collapsed into one singular metaphor that spelt 'danger, enemy within.' Racism said this man and his ilk are fundamentally un-American, unpatriotic and unfit to govern our nation.

And still during this racially charged pre-election climate, the notion of a 'post-racial society' had garnered increasing momentum - perhaps for some good reason on behalf of the American electorate. Obama's victory over his rival Hilary Clinton in the Iowa caucuses and soon after in the South Carolina primary seemed to signal, as one commentator put it, the moment that 'Americans began to make race free judgements on who should lead them' (Daniel Schorr 2008[online]).

Within the media however the post-racial obsession seemed to represent an opportunity to silence any complex and meaningful discussion on the continuing problem of

racism in America. As the journalist John Stossel wrote, ‘It's time to stop complaining about past discrimination and to treat people as individuals, not as members of a certain race. I assumed that the success of Barack Obama, as well as thousands of other Black Americans and dark-skinned immigrants — demonstrates that America today is largely a colorblind meritocracy’ (Stossel 2008). A colour-blind meritocracy imagines that social arrangements in the US have transformed to such an extent that ‘race’ and ‘racism’ have become unimportant in America’s new post-racial narrative.

The post racial ideal is not a new idea. Writing in 2004, Debra Dickerson suggested African Americans needed to ‘surrender’ themselves to America as a nation and give up on the idea of racial justice (Dickerson in Davis 2004). Dickerson’s views support the notion that we now live in a meritocratic ‘post-racial’ world with an even playing field where all Americans can compete on equal terms. The academic Grant Farred (2006) argues that the notion of post-racialism in African American and Black diasporic cultures has a long history that can be traced through the works of Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* through to Paul Gilroy’s thesis *Against Race*. For Farred however, post-racialism remains potentially destructive to ‘historical subalterns’ precisely because subjugated people are racialised into being through race and racism. In other words, in order to transcend race or racism we have to acknowledge their existence in order to oppose them.

In this short lived moment of post-racial celebration, where exactly had racism gone? As *Guardian* journalist, Gary Younge, noted, ‘We have racism but no racists. A system of discrimination - albeit much altered from 40 years ago - remains, yet no one will take responsibility for it. There are views that pervade, but apparently no one who actually holds them’ (Younge 2008). A post-racial meritocracy assumes the historical legacies of Black oppositional politics have little or no significance to contemporary struggles for freedom,

equality and justice. Indeed, a post-racial meritocracy assumes that racial injustice belongs to the past and can thus be locked away and forgotten. Furthermore, it dangerously assumes modern racism 'has been truncated as an ongoing social problem for persons of color generally' (Wise 2009, p.18). As Tim Wise argues, if the idea and perception of meritocracy is reinforced, it can make it easier,

to rationalise racial domination and inequity, to rationalise white advantage and privilege, and to accept blatant injustices on a mass scale, since they can be written off to aggregate gaps in effort, ambition or work ethic between whites on the one hand and blacks and Latinos on the other (Wise 2009, p.107).

Clearly, President Obama himself had done very little to challenge the fallacy of being labelled the post-racial candidate. As Younge argues, race played an ambiguous role in his election campaign, in which it was both central to Obama's meaning, but absent from his message (Younge 2008). He states,

This is less a criticism than a description. Obama is navigating uncharted and decidedly choppy waters. It is difficult to see how else he could play it. And yet it is not without its problems. At any moment, while passing for the presidency, he can be outed by anything from a preacher to a fist bump or a magazine cover. Such is the lot of the incognegro. For what people really mean when they refer to his candidacy being post-racial is that it is 'not too obviously Black'. The trouble is that is as racial a category as any other, albeit a negative one (Younge 2008).

Obama has not transcended his racial inscription or blackness. He occupies an even more precarious and volatile position than that. Obama has to navigate his presidency through a

minefield of racial time bombs that are easily escalated and combustible and threaten to derail him at any given moment. And yet he cannot continue to obviate the question of racism in America by treading hesitantly with caution or with silence. He cannot continue to instruct poor Black people (specifically Black men) in America to take personal responsibility for their situation (MSNBC 2008) without asking those who are privileged and white to take personal responsibility for structural or everyday acts of racism that sustain white privilege and deepen systems of inequality.

With declining poll numbers (after his first year in Office) and a tendency to fear alienating or worrying the middle class white electorate, it's worth asking ourselves what kinds of turmoil and havoc would erupt if Obama decided to take the lead in an open and honest discussion on racism not just in America, but on its deep and devastating effects worldwide. A Beer Summit would not suffice.<sup>1</sup>

As Naomi Klein argues, 'no matter how race-neutral Obama tries to be, his actions will be viewed by a large part of the country through the lens of its racial obsessions. So, since even his most modest, Band-Aid measures are going to be greeted as if he is waging a full-on race war, Obama has little to lose by using this brief political window to actually heal a few of the country's racial wounds' (Klein 2009). But Klein also suggests Obama has turned his back on Black America. I doubt this is the case or that it is indeed that simple. Obama is caught in a racist trap, partly by his own reluctance to confront the issue of racism head on, and also by the possibility that a white racist backlash against his presidency could go beyond

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<sup>1</sup> 'The Beer Summit' is a colloquial term used to describe the talks held at the White House between the Harvard Professor Henry Louis Gates, Cambridge Police Sergeant James Crowley, President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden, after the arrest of Gates by Crowley at his home in Boston in July 2009. The arrest sparked a 'race row' in the US media over the issue of 'racial profiling' in light of the fact that Gates, an African American, was believed to be breaking and entering into a property, which turned out to be his home. After charges of 'disorderly conduct' were dropped against Gates, President Obama had commented on the arrest saying Cambridge Police had 'acted stupidly'. Following President Obama's comments, the 'race row' escalated and the President apologised for exacerbating the situation. President Obama invited Gates, and Crowley to the White House to discuss the issue over beers in the hope to defuse the ensuing debate on race in America.

simply damaging his Presidency. Such a backlash could have more dangerous implications for the safety and security of Black and other non-white populations on a whole.

In her article, 'Obama's Big Silence', Klein (2009) cites the late Latino activist Juan Santos who during the election campaign wrote an essay on how Obama's unwillingness to talk about race was a triumph not of post-racialism but of racism. Santos argued that,

Obama's silence was the same silence every person of colour in America lives with, understanding that they can be accepted in white society only if they agree not to be angry about racism; 'We stay silent, as a rule, on the job. We stay silent, as a rule, in the white world. Barack Obama is the living symbol of our silence. He is our silence writ large. He is our Silence running for president ... with respect to Black interests; Obama would be a silenced Black ruler: A muzzled Black emperor (Klein 2009).

We are now living in an era where racism has a number of different guises. One such guise as Santos shows us is silence. Racism thrives off silence. By not speaking its name racism continues to outsmart the best of us. We need to unmask it and reveal it for what it is – a barbaric, disgusting and brutal hangover from Western imperialism, slavery and colonialism.

Obama's success is a hugely powerful and a momentous symbolic step in the historical struggle for racial equality. And indeed his 'A More Perfect Union' speech on the subject of race quite clearly acknowledged the complexity of race in American society, something he states America has failed to work through. In it he remarks that we,

Need to remind ourselves that so many of the disparities that exist in the African-American community today can be directly traced to inequalities passed on from an

earlier generation that suffered under the brutal legacy of slavery and Jim Crow (Obama 2008a).

However, to believe that Obama's victory marks the end of decade's structural racism and centuries of Black oppression is delusional. And yet this delusion seems appealing to those of us invested in the notion of a post-racial meritocratic democracy. Without the continuing reminders that racism is deeply rooted within and remains a function of Western liberal democratic cultures (an inheritance that will not simply be eradicated because of the election of a Black US President) post-racialism allows us to imagine a clean and clinical historical break from systems of racial violence and oppression. For some of us being silent about racism through a colour-blind post-racial lens, allows us to be comforted by the belief that racism is passé and is a convenient excuse for victimhood (Vennochi 2008).

### **Forgetting racial horrors and imperial terror**

Indeed, what happens to Western liberal democracies when the hegemony of white supremacy seeks to perform a *break* with the past and *conceal* those features from history that reveal the violence and trauma of present day racisms? Furthermore, what happens when the continuing inflicted terror and trauma of racism become difficult if not impossible to name in an imagined 'post imperial,' 'post-racial' climate that claims to at once stand for fairness and equal opportunity whilst seeking to recall and celebrate the legacies of imperialism and empire? Indeed, the United States is not the only place that imagines race and racism can simply be obviated through silence.

In the UK for example, the former Chancellor and then Prime Minister Gordon Brown on a visit to Tanzania in 2005, a former British colony, boldly declared with much hubris that, 'I've talked to many people on my visit to Africa and the days of Britain having to apologise for its colonial history are over. We should move forward ... we should celebrate much of our past rather than apologise for it.' Furthermore he states, 'Our strong traditions of fair play, of openness, of internationalism, these are great British values' (Brogan 2005). Whilst the British government have not as of yet officially apologised for colonialism or slavery, Brown is able to imagine a clinical historical break from the barbarity of Britain's colonial past. Such a break removes and erases the legacy of barbarity from having a lasting or meaningful imprint on the contemporary 'values' and promises of Britain's neoliberal democracy. Brown would like us to 'move forward', conveniently forgetting the bequest of violence and barbarity that are intimately imbedded in the legacy of colonialism. But the horrors and violence of racism remain an untreated hangover from European colonial and imperial histories. Such histories that are at once glorified as triumphant also attempt to conceal the horrors of victory to shore up Western claims of superior moral values and civilisations over 'other' inferior, 'darker' peoples. Racism is always relevant and ever present in contemporary life supported by older historical structures of racialised oppression. Whilst belying attempts to conceal it, racism still continues by 'splitting the world in the course of domination' (Kovel 1988). Joel Kovel provides a useful framework for understanding the nature of racism itself:

A society's racism is not comprised by its degree of racial segregation, or how racially prejudiced the population may be. These are manifestations of racism. But the racism itself is the tendency of a society to degrade and do violence to people on the basis of race, and by whatever mediations may exist for this purpose (Kovel 1988, p.1xiii).

As Kovel suggests, racism is dynamic and has many manifestations from personal prejudice to structural and institutionalised violence. We all can be clear about the particularity of the British National Party's and the Klu Klux Klan's flag-waving form of white supremacy. However, more subtle forms of racism not only make it easier for society to question the nature and the existence of racism itself, they also allow racialised oppression to be 'forgotten like a bad dream' (Hesse 2002, pp.143–173). Racism forms the corpus of what Barnor Hesse usefully refers to as 'blind memory' in Western liberal democracies where obstacles of perception interrupt the ways in which Western democracies remember and yet forget their imperialist and colonial past and mask their present day racisms through acts of wilful forgetting. An ideology of 'post-racialism' is one such obstacle of perception which works toward making racism increasingly soundless and imperceptible despite racism's concrete structuring of our modern-day situation.

### **'The white, white, West' – white hegemony and social amnesia**

Within the political and economic paradigm of Western cultures, white Western cultural hegemony can conceal different forms and manifestations of racism and their historical routes. This concealment establishes the ambiguous terrain of race and racism in contemporary Western cultures. For Black and Brown subjects in contemporary Western societies, it is possible to paradoxically 'feel' and experience the physical violence of racism consciously knowing its presence in our everyday social interactions. And yet at the same time racism can be elusive, not easy to locate or to pinpoint in concrete ways through, for example, the mainstream articulation and bureaucratic inscription of diversity discourses (Ahmed 2007). Subsequently, racism's modern character is both concrete and elusive. In terms of empirical evidence, institutional forms of racism can be found in English schools



where Black Caribbean and mixed white-and-Black Caribbean children are excluded from school at rates three times greater than that for white children (Curtis 2008). Indeed a report published by Warwick University in 2008 concluded that Black Caribbean pupils are being subjected to institutional forms of racism which dramatically undermined their chances of academic success. Indeed, the academic abilities of African Caribbean pupils by teachers in English schools were routinely under-estimated, and assumptions about behavioural problems were overshadowing their academic talents (Curtis 2008). In terms of child poverty, 50% of Black children compared to 27% of white children are living in poverty in the UK according to the TUC (TUC 2008). In Lucinda Platt's (2009) study on ethnicity and child poverty, the report highlights that whilst the UK has set out its ambitions to end child poverty, the poverty of ethnic minority children has not been strongly emphasised within the child poverty agenda. The report highlights that children from ethnic minority groups are overrepresented among poor children. Furthermore:

As these children become adults they will carry with them the consequences of childhood poverty and, to the extent that poverty is intergenerational, minorities may make up an increasing share of those in poverty in the UK. The greater risks of poverty faced by children from minority groups demand attention (Platt 2009, p.1).

In 2003 there were *twice* as many Black men in prison in the UK than in British universities (Cracknell and Bessaoud 2003). According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, while some ethnic groups have improved their labour market position relative to white people [between 1991 and 2001], substantial disadvantage remains both in access to jobs and in earnings once

in employment. Individuals from all ethnic minorities earned less on average than white people and substantial disadvantage remains (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2007).

However, these concrete examples of racism and racial discrimination can also be concealed by more subtle forms of racist and racialised acts. For instance, racism can become elusive or hidden by the guise of diversity discourses that proclaim to value difference as an economic or moral value whilst concealing and failing to address the continuation of systematic inequalities within public and private institutions and organizations (Ahmed 2007, p.604). As Sara Ahmed notes, diversity documents have been mainstreamed in British society as measures of institutional performance that express a commitment to promoting race equality (Ahmed 2007). Ahmed's research interrogates the politics of diversity documents in 10 universities in the UK. She argues that institutional preferences for the term 'diversity' can indicate a lack of commitment to change, and might even allow universities to conceal the operation of systematic inequalities. Thus she suggests that 'the politics of diversity has become what we could call "image management": diversity work is about generating the 'right image', and correcting the wrong one' (Ahmed 2007, p.605). In other words, 'diversity work becomes about *changing perceptions of whiteness rather than changing the whiteness of organizations* ... If we consider the politics of documenting diversity, we can see that documents create fantasy images of the organizations they apparently describe' (Ahmed 2007, pp.605-607, original italics).

Diversity talk and diversity documentation may make it difficult to locate racism in our imagined post-racial times. Michael Eric Dyson argues that in the 1960s and before, acts of hatred had symbolic clarity because blacks and whites shared an ecology of race, albeit from opposing perspectives (Dyson 1997, p.215). Dyson refers to the ideal of post-racial colour-blindness as 'racially murky' where 'the ecology of race is much more complex and

choked with half-discarded symbols and muddied signs' (Dyson 1997, p.215). The 'murky' simulation and performance of cultural diversity through 'image management' as well as the 'fantasy' of a post-racial society have become substitutes for scrutinising and dismantling structural and institutionalised forms of racism and white hegemony.

In the United States, Hazel Carby (1992) observes that universities can often point to an integrated curriculum which includes the writings of Black women but conversely, they cannot point to an integrated body of Black students. In the university setting, the commodification of Black women's literature has produced an essential Black female subject for its own consumption. Carby argues that within the university faculty there exists a failure to acknowledge the contradiction of having an integrated body of work by Black women writers as cultural icons and the failing of faculty to integrate the Black female subject into the classroom:

Instead of recognising these contradictions the Black female subject is frequently the means by which many middle-class White students and faculty cleanse their souls and rid themselves of the guilt of living in a society that is still rigidly segregated (Carby 1992, p.192).

A 'multicultural' curriculum thus works as an illusionary visual ideal of diversity (Carby 1992). It has been noted elsewhere that postmodern cultural diversity, with its articulation of multiculturalism, tolerance, equal opportunity and affirmative action, can indeed obscure the reiteration of old hierarchical forms of discrimination (Lewis 2002, p.346). Jeff Lewis (2002) notes Stuart Hall's observation that Western popular consumption of 'international cuisine' may be substituting real *difference* with commodified and palatable difference. Lewis goes on

to say that: 'it is perhaps for this reason that the ideologies of racism and imperialism are able to survive even in the midst of significant articulations of tolerance, equal opportunity and affirmative action' (Lewis 2002, p.346). The commodification of multiculturalism has created a situation where as long as diversity can be performed as an ideal the consequences of racialised exclusion and structural racism can be left largely unattended. Thus the invocation of diversity and multiculturalism can dangerously serve the interests and tastes of white privilege.

Whiteness is represented as an *un-ethnicised* human norm in our day to day lives in Western cultures. Its privilege is organised and sustained around an uneven and unequal exchange of symbols, currencies, violence, ideologies, resources, narratives and images that flow through an overlapping network of geopolitical alliances, global multinational institutions, interlocking global economies, globalised media, and the movement of human beings. These exchanges and networks help shape and structure the ever-prevailing presence of racisms in late modern cultures. Recently, this has been most evident in the discourses on 'the war on terror.' Here, notions of humanity and democratic 'progress' are held firmly in Western hands and are known through Western ownership of particular values such as freedom, women's rights, life, free speech and education (Bhattacharyya 2008). These values are the signposts of civilisation that guide and protect us from the 'barbarism' of the Islamic world. We know our enemy because these are the values they 'seek to destroy' (Bhattacharyya 2008). Others are welcome to participate in our values, but they can do so only on the terms outlined by us. Here, the perceived values of Western civilisation are exclusively associated with those who seek to defend the hegemony of Western supremacy whether they are phenotypically 'white' or not. We know whiteness by 'culture' and 'values' not by race or biology. Thus whiteness stands un-raced and unmarked as the principle

expression of what it means to be just human (Dyer 1997). It is assumed to be the normative state of existence (Carby 1992). The social construction of whiteness remains largely defined outside of *racialised* discourses on terror and much more through the lens of cultural normativity, civility and equitable diversity. Whiteness has thus retained much of its normative power to bestow social and political privilege upon groups identified as white despite the proliferation of statements on diversity and post-racialism that encourages us to believe that white racial privilege and non-white racial disadvantage are no longer an issue.

However, it is also important to note that whiteness in the Black imagination can also be a representation of terror (hooks 1992). hooks argues that one fantasy of whiteness is that the threatening other is always a terrorist. Such assumptions 'enable many white people to imagine there is no representation of whiteness as terror, as terrorizing' (hooks 1992, p.174). She goes on to say that an inability to conceive whiteness as terror is an indication of how cultures of white supremacy fail to understand the profound and psychological impact of white racist domination (hooks 1992, p.177). I retain the use of the term *whiteness* because I seek to elucidate its power to remain largely invisible, mostly to itself (McIntosh 2004). As suggested by theorists in the field of white studies, whiteness has the dubious and contradictory capability of being everywhere yet remaining racially unseen or unnamed (Dyer 1997). This is despite the dynamic political, intellectual and economic shifts occurring within our racialised landscape that disrupt and encroach upon the continuing existence of white racialised Western hegemony and dominance. These shifts include the emergence itself of critical white studies as a field of academic enquiry that as helped to make whiteness more 'visible' [hooks 1992; Dyer 1997; Ware and Back 2002; McIntosh 2004; Jenson 2004]. They are also registered by the global emergence of economic powers such as Brazil, China, and India that are changing the balance of power in the global economy (Zakaria 2009). Even

Obama's presidential victory, that at present represents a shift, symbolically at least, in the 'racial' administration of America for the first time, is the cause of widespread political volatility and white supremacist insecurity (Younge 2009). In spite of these disruptions, whiteness continues to have an enduring if not tenuous grip on our global political cultures. Goldberg suggests that neoliberalism itself can be read as a response to the concern about the impending impotence of whiteness:

In short, from the 1970's on, the state increasingly came to be conceived as a set of institutions supporting the undeserving (recall the identification of Bill Clinton as 'the first Black President,' first by Toni Morrison but taken up quickly by neoconservatives out to do him in). Fear of a Black state is linked to worries about a Black planet, of alien invasion and *alienation*, of a loss of the sort of local and global control and privilege long associated with whiteness (Goldberg 2009, p.337).

Goldberg is highlighting that white cultural hegemony is not a completed project. However it still remains as a powerful political ideal and social function of neoliberalism. The cultural hegemony of whiteness as an ideal particularly in the west becomes increasingly concealed by signs and discourses that promote the ideal of diversity and plural societies. Concurrently, an un-raced ideal of white cultural and political hegemony conceals and consigns the injustices of white supremacy to the past away from the racism of the present and from the liberal promises of our promised diverse post-racial futures. As hooks writes,

In contemporary society, white and Black people alike believe that racism no longer exists. This erasure, however mythic, diffuses the representation of whiteness as terror

in the Black imagination. It allows for assimilation and forgetfulness. The eagerness with which contemporary society does away with racism, replacing this recognition with evocations of pluralism and diversity that further mask reality, is a response to the terror. It has also become a way to perpetuate the terror by providing a cover, a hiding place (hooks 1992, p.176).

White supremacy as a ‘naturalised’ and ‘universalised’ political norm mutes the social memory of the Black ‘other’ and our impact upon the formation of Western societies both as participants and transgressors of the social order. Whiteness has long stood as the normative dominant lens for Western and global historical memory to be mediated and understood.

White hegemonic cultural memory is selective about the retelling of history in such a way that history becomes, ‘an ideological tool to support the existing distribution of power’ (Jenson 2005, p.28). Robert Jenson (2005) highlights a series of responses amongst some white Americans when the celebratory stories of US history are contested by the uncomfortable truth of racism. Responses include statements such as ‘why do you insist on dwelling in the past’ or why are you ‘trying to humble our proud nation’ (Jenson 2005, pp.27-28). In his reply Jenson states,

I want to undermine the intellectually lazy and morally bankrupt practice of rewriting history to exclude or downplay inconvenient facts so that in the present we can pretend that the United States is the ultimate fulfilment of history, the paragon of virtue, the repository of justice (Jenson 2005, p.28).

Indeed, Russell Jacoby writes,

Exactly because the past is forgotten, it rules unchallenged. To be transcended it must first be remembered. Social amnesia is society's repression of remembrance (Jacoby cited in Wilson 1993, p.34)

Jenson further argues that white supremacist thinking has always been at the core of the American project: 'The country's formation, economic expansion, and imperial endeavours are inextricably intertwined with racism' (Jenson 2005, p.30). White hegemony through the neoliberal nations' rhetoric of freedom, justice and equality, encourages socio-historical amnesia, serving to obscure our deeper understanding of the intimate and interconnected links between equality/racism, freedom/violence, democracy/enslavement, liberty/terror and the ways in which blackness/whiteness have themselves been constructed along these paradoxical borders. It thus remains a necessary imperative to interrogate any assumption that the values of freedom, democracy and liberty are intrinsic to the west (as imagined in Brown's early invocation of 'great British values' or Bush's rhetoric on 'the war on terror') and that the best purest expressions of such values can be located within white Western liberal democratic cultures. What is clear is this; whilst we see a deepening silence instead of any meaningful public debate about race, racism continues to grow, globally, and violent hate crimes continue to rise.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See the international human rights monitoring group, *Human Rights First* who note that in the United Kingdom racist incidents reported to the police in 2006/2007 had increased by 3.7 percent over the previous year. 'Among these, there were 42,551 racially or religiously aggravated offences, representing a 2.6 percent increase in the number of offenses over the previous year. Just over half of all police forces recorded an increase in the number of offences motivated by a religious or racial bias' <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/discrimination/reports.aspx?s=racism-and-xenophobia&p=racvio>. Accessed on 23 November 2008.



The hegemonic processes of white supremacy promote the idea that Western violence on Black bodies as a direct outgrowth of racism is a necessary and unspoken function in the advancement of Western civilisation. Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib and other clandestine detention facilities are seen as ugly ‘exceptional’ necessities where the torture and imprisonment of ‘enemy combatants’ can be justified on the grounds that these bad brown/Black men seek to destroy us (Bhattacharyya 2008). The over represented and disproportionately populated bodies of Black/brown men and women are deemed punishable by death and incarceration in the name of ‘crime control’ within the global prison industrial complex (Brewer and Heitzeg 2008). These citadels of punishment, torture and retribution exist because they are dependent upon oppressive systems of racism, poverty, sexism and homophobia (Davis 2001; Bhattacharyya 2008). Our ability to forget their presence further permits their existence. As Angela Davis reminds us, ‘One of the reasons the prison industrial complex has expanded as it has is because we have learnt how to forget about prisons’ (Davis [Date unknown] 2007). By proclaiming meritocracy and deriding racism, attention to racialised violence and oppression become delegitimized within the neo-liberal state.

We can continue to ignore racialised violence so long as our freedoms can be preserved. But we must not name racism and its history within the neo-liberal order. Only a savage would do that. Such thinking and action encourages us to forget racialised trauma by denying racism a language that transcends the muted and ‘murky’ tones of meritocratic, post-racial, colour blind, diversity speak, leaving racism vulnerable to social amnesia. This culture of forgetting is dehumanising, wilful and headstrong and continues to belittle, undermine and perpetuate continuing racist violations against Black bodies.

**‘The forgetting machine’**

Aimé Césaire, the Martinique poet, activist and politician, argued that European civilisations and democracies are indivisibly stained by the violent debauchery of colonialism and slavery and thus ‘the forgetting machine’, which works to conceal the underbelly of barbarism within the establishment of Western civilisations, seeks to sanitise and hide the stains of violent enslavement and subjugation which dirty the symbolic values entwined with Europe’s civilised development and progress (Césaire [1955] 1997). The ethos of the civilising endeavour of Western slavery and colonialism, like components of globalisation, are inseparable from the terror of racial violence and oppression. Césaire critiques the pseudo humanism of the West where the rights of man are conceived in narrow, fragmentary and incomplete terms which are sordidly racist (Césaire 1997, p.77). Césaire argues that Europe is a decadent and dying civilisation because it has failed to solve the problem it created: ‘the problem of the proletariat and the colonial problem’ (Césaire 1997, p.74). Césaire critiques the fractured racist logic within Western European thought, where the crime of genocide under colonialism as part of a wider *civilising* mission was seen as a necessary instrument for the enlightenment of the heathen pagans of Africa, Asia and the Americas. In Césaire’s view the crime of genocide under Nazism against the Jewish population in Germany was viewed precisely as an abhorrent *crime* not only because Jewish people were human beings like all other victims of genocide, but because Jewish people could also be considered as being akin to ‘white’ Europeans. The Jewish Holocaust for Césaire was evidence of the extremities of European barbarity, a blind alley of racism imploding in on its self. He writes,

Whether one likes it or not, at the end of the blind alley that is Europe, I mean the Europe of Adenauer, Schuman, Bidault, and a few others, there is Hitler. At the end of formal humanism and philosophic renunciation, there is Hitler (Cesairé 1997, p.77).

Racism emerges as unresolved problem, a blind spot in Western European hegemony that fuels ‘the forgetting machine’ which conceals acts of European barbarity and their inseparable relation to Western democracy and capitalism. Western socio-historical amnesia towards racism exposes the contradictory nature of so-called ‘Western values’ such as freedom, equality and justice. It is an amnesia that leaves Black and non-white people, communities and societies broken fragmented and wounded as racism continues to be a powerful determinant factor affecting our life chances, our access to citizenship in Western democratic states and our fundamental human rights (Goldberg 2009). It produces a form of moral paralysis where white supremacist thinking can create an attitude of racialised indifference to the suffering of ‘the other’ (Geertsema 2004).<sup>3</sup> Racism remains the focal hindrance of the Western inability to truly view the highly coveted values of freedom, liberty and democracy beyond the boundaries of Western liberal democracy. Racism acts as a potent reminder of the contradictory duality of these freedoms within Western societies as racism in its very nature necessitates the deployment of violence and subjugation. In this respect blackness in the Western liberal democratic framework has been constructed against the constancy of white violence and amnesia. It is an amnesia that nestles within the supposedly liberal and democratic notion of Western civilisation that enables the violence and trauma inflicted upon Black bodies to be concealed as a direct result of racism.

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<sup>3</sup> Geertsema (2004) discusses the immorality of White Afrikaners and their indifference to the suffering of Black South Africans as representing a reactionary clinging on to the status quo which involved massive and obvious injustice. It also signifies the difficulty of moving beyond ‘race debates’ in south Africa that are in danger of resuscitating a familiar psychology of White superiority and Black inferiority.

### **De-colonial fantasies within liberal democracies**

In an essay entitled 'Forgotten like a Bad Dream,' Barnor Hesse (2002) re-inscribes the themes of amnesia and the incomplete and unresolved legacies of slavery and colonialism as discussed by Cesairé in *Discourse on Colonialism*. Whereas Cesairé arrives at the conclusion that Western European decadence will face a slow gradual death if it fails to solve the problem of the inherent barbarity locked into the inheritance of Western civilisation, Hesse speaks into the contemporary realities of Western Euro/American neo-liberal democracies and their failure to engage with the memory of slavery and the contemporary barbarity of racism. In a penetrating analysis of Western capitalism's framing of modernity which Hesse argues is conceived within the polarity and interdependency of Christianity and slavery, liberalism and imperialism, democracy and racism, he puts forward the view that the West has profound difficulty in comprehending and consolidating its memory of slavery. Hesse argues that modern day liberal democracies engage with a 'de/colonial fantasy.' For Hesse, postcolonialism is a critical counterpoint of incomplete forms of decolonisation. Indeed the memory of slavery and its forgetting are carefully phrased within a 'liberal-democratic disavowal.' Hesse proposes for de/colonisation to be rethought and re-fought to 'work through and against the West's liberal-democratic culture of de/colonial fantasy.' According to Hesse,

When Western history seems so unrelated to its shadowy imperial constitution – readily comprehensible only as a successful psychic investment in a European, American, democratic enterprise – we are experiencing an episode of *de/colonial fantasy*' (Hesse 2002, pp.158-159 [authors italics]).

De/colonial fantasies are,

Western attitudes, practices, and discourses that imagine against the evidence, against counter-interrogation, the comprehensive undertaking and successful completion of de/colonisation both within the metropolis and the former colonies or sites of racial segregation (Hesse 2002, pp.158-159).

It is an attempt to conceal the bitterly fought and grudgingly conceded battles for de/colonisation which within the Western tradition threatens to highlight the discrepancy between the liberal democratic ideal and an unsettled postcoloniality (Hesse 2002, p.159).

For Hesse, Western liberal democracies often imagine a complete rupture, completeness and closure from the consequences of trans-Atlantic slavery. Indeed, trans-Atlantic slavery is remembered and forgotten in European and American histories in ‘a peculiar pathos of distance’ in which ‘the generational, emotional, social, and political relations of the people who were enslaved are simply forgotten’ (Hesse 2002, p.155). Hesse uses Stephen Spielberg’s *Amistad* as an example of the whitewashing of history that inscribes a master/abolitionist memory of slavery. Thus Hesse argues that in *Amistad*, ‘the legacy of slavery becomes the historical record of abolitionism, not the contemporary agenda of racism’ or, might I add, the business of enslavement (Hesse 2002, p.150). The employment of a representational strategy that reinforces the concept of whites as the makers of history and Black people as a-historical, is a configuration of ‘white amnesia’ that ‘can only be achieved with reference to a politically muted if not absent Black presence’ (Hesse 2002, p.150).

Indeed the erasure of the Black presence from Western historical narratives is also acutely illustrated in the film *Amazing Grace* (2006) which sought to canonise William

Wilberforce as the mythical ‘great emancipator’ of enslaved Africans. The presence of Africans as agents of and agitators for their own freedom is overlooked within the film, such as significantly in the Haitian revolution 1791-1804. With the exception of Olaudah Equiano there are no speaking roles for African characters within *Amazing Grace*, whilst Wilberforce, the great crusader for the British abolition of slavery, takes centre stage, symbolising the ‘great’ democratic values of freedom, a freedom that is imagined to travel cleanly through the colonial and imperial epochs of British History unscathed by the trauma and violence of capitalism and racism. Indeed, the dream of freedom becomes monopolised as an intrinsically British value that is given away to enslaved Africans by ‘decent’ and ‘principled’ abolitionists.

*Amazing Grace* was released to coincide with Britain’s official year long commemoration of the bi-centenary anniversary of the Abolition of The Slave Trade Act of 1807 during 2007. The anniversary was dubbed the ‘Wilberfest,’ by observers critical of the hypocritical self-congratulatory tone and spectacle of the nation’s official commemorations that sought to canonise white men as the deliverers of freedom whilst eradicating any mention of resistance, rebellion and revolution instigated by millions of African people (Agbetu 2007).

Abolitionist memory outlined by Hesse and enacted during the 2007 commemorations creates a ‘hegemonic disavowal’ of the perverse, systematic and traumatic violence perpetrated on Black bodies for the advancement of capitalism. Abolitionist memory encourages us to forget that the enslaved African body was commodified and quantified as a piece of property for the purpose of industrial development and capitalist expansion. The kind of abolitionist memory seen in the example of *Amistad* and *Amazing Grace*, erases the racialised historical formation of slavery as a degrading social process and replaces it with a

‘hypervisable’ heroic white centred abolitionism which ‘works to undermine the possibility of actually seeing Black specificity’ (Hesse 2002, p.151).

Citing the work of Marcus Wood, Hesse argues a Western obsession exists for representing the memory of slavery through *abolitionist memory* as exemplified in *Amistad*, as well as in the realm of ‘*curatorial memory*.’ Whereas abolitionist memory focuses on ‘the consecration of white liberators,’ curatorial memory proceeds to represent slave torture through the rearrangement and recollection of objects, tools, weapons, exhibits and images displayed in galleries, museums or on our film screens ‘experientially’ or ‘aesthetically’ (Hesse 2002, p.155). Hesse argues that the focus on the aesthetic arrangements of objects can allow the emotional, social and political legacy of slavery to be forgotten. He cites Woods’ analysis of ‘curatorial memory’ to illustrate his point. Here Woods suggests that curatorial memory directs our attention to ‘the easy option of an unthinking moral outrage’ (Hesse 2002). Such representations of African enslavement eclipse the contextual, social and emotional violations of the day to day experience of slavery. Hesse suggests curatorial memory’s dramatization of slave objects reduces the memory of slavery to the banalities of its routine violence. It caricatures the slave/master relationship in the process whilst eclipsing the emotional and contextual violations definitive of enslavement. For Hesse, the dramaturgical obsession through the curatorial memory of slavery ‘offers a peculiar pathos of distance that replicates yet another way in which the generational, emotional, social, and political relations of the people who were enslaved are simply forgotten’ (Hesse 2002, p.155). Even where more ‘liberal’ approaches to critiquing the west’s problematic relationship with the memory of slavery are discussed, the privileging of white emotional guilt in the remembrance of slavery over the history of Black suffering, repeats old patterns of prioritising white agency over the trauma and violence inflicted on the bodies and psyches of enslaved Africans. Hesse critiques

Wood for repeating such an error, so displaying a '*family resemblance*' to the master/abolitionist configuration in Woods' own work (a model in which Woods seeks to distance himself from) by his privileging of white historical guilt over 'contemporary feelings of disenfranchisement' (Hesse 2002, p.157).

The politics of disavowal as a blueprint for un-remembering the uncomfortable legacies of racialised barbarism found in Britain's colonial and imperial histories marks the borders of historical amnesia, where British social memory can reconfigure barbarism into benevolence. The politics of disavowal further reflect the reluctance of Western liberal democracies to interrogate and seek ways to dismantle the living legacies of racism within white dominant cultures.

In the context of hegemonic distance and disavowal blackness becomes the body politic where racism and de/colonial fantasies can be acted out and performed. Blackness becomes a space where the memory of slavery and colonialism becomes socially visible within Western 'post-imperial' societies, despite efforts to disavow the emotional, physical and social violations of these histories. As a site of forced and chosen dislocation and dispersal, the Black body stands as a continuing reminder to neo-liberal democracies that racism in its various mutations continues to open up the routes of racialised barbarism between and across disparate temporal eras. The brutalisation of the Black body can be expelled from the memory of liberal democracies in order for such democracies to imagine themselves as untainted by histories of racial violence and unaffected by their modern day consequences. However it is this fantasy of closure, this imagined fracture from past brutalities, where the memory of racial violence as a constituting factor of neo-liberal democracies becomes vulnerable to the politics of forgetting. In historical hegemonic memories of Western liberal democracies, blackness and racialised violence can also become



obstacles to the clean and unsullied enunciation and social recollection of freedom and justice; values that are believed to secure the cohesion, legitimacy and progress of the Western nation-state.

Popular British hegemonic discourses on race continue to play dangerously with amnesic disavowal of racism, displaying a reluctance to probe and question the durability of racism as a prevailing hangover of imperialism and colonialism. Racism shapes knowledge and ways of being in Western cultures (Goldberg 2009). Although racism remains a virulent, tenacious and indispensable epistemology that structures thought and determines material stratification in global cultures, it also plays a paradoxical function of being a shameful social taboo that resides in a culture of denial and amnesia. Racism in today's neoliberal democracies functions as an unspoken discourse below the transparent surface of neo-liberal hegemonic respectability. Racism has become increasingly difficult to label and locate. Western policies and discourses on race employ non-racial language to achieve racial ends. Even the most virulent racist plays the role of a ventriloquist by making vile audible racist sounds whilst also being disingenuous by refusing to own up to and take ownership for peddling in racism. However the nostalgic yearning for the monolithic nation is symptomatic of a wider more entrenched problem that has challenged Britain for all of the twentieth century and continues to become more intensified at the start of this new millennia; that of the continuing denial of Britain to seriously confront the living legacy of its racist past. Clearly racism remains a profoundly unresolved phenomenon.

## **Conclusion**

The chapter has shown the ways in which the politics of ‘forgetting’ racism has produced an insufficient examination of the state and complexity of racism and its devastating outcomes within Western neo-liberal democracies such as UK and the US. By examining memory, post-racialism and diversity, this chapter has sought to uncover how these discourses can appear to mark a positive social shift towards more equitable human relations through the ideal of meritocracy. However, conversely, these discourses continue to negate blackness and the violence of racism thus allowing racial denigration to remain intact. Systems of domination can thus be ‘dressed up’ in the grammars of equality and meritocracy thus producing a culture where racism can be wilfully forgotten. One important question for this thesis is to consider how we can achieve social transformation through discourses on love to bring into existence more equitable human relations. In the next chapter, I will examine multiculturalism which had once seemed to embody the notion that diverse cultures and people could build more equitable societies. However, the multicultural ideal is now in disrepute, cast as the ‘breeding ground’ for violence against the neo-liberal state itself.

### Chapter 3

## **'WE DON'T WANT THE HATE MONGERS'**

### **Multicultural love and anti-colonial politics in the making of Black Britain**

#### **Introduction**

During the 1960s the former Labour Home Secretary, Roy Jenkins, is believed to have laid the foundations for a multicultural British society with his definition of social integration:

Integration is not a flattening process of assimilation but equal opportunity accompanied by cultural diversity in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance (Sivanandan 2006 [online]).

However, Jenkins's vision of tolerant multiculturalism has now been replaced with widely felt perception that multiculturalism has failed. Distinctive cultural identities and ethno-cultural claims are now presumed to be in conflict with the neo-liberal nation-state. Groups marked as different by ethnicity or religious faiths are now accused of retreating behind their ethnic walls, refusing to assimilate to a 'British way of life' (Johnston 2008). The multicultural state, that at one time invited cultural differences without the fear that the nation's cohesion would fragment and disintegrate at the seams, is now in retreat. The very idea of the multicultural society within neoliberal democracies is under attack. According to one newspaper report, the 'dogma of multiculturalism' has failed Britain:

Multiculturalism has failed because people refuse to move out of the 'comfort zone' of their own community, academics have warned. The study said the Left-wing doctrine had ignored the dangers of religious fundamentalism and should be scrapped.

Communities should instead be actively encouraged to mix. The report, written by a team from University of Leicester, said this should be backed by a new concept of Britishness. It would be based upon respect for the monarchy, loyalty to the elected Government, and respect and adherence to the law (Slack 2006 [Online]).

Within this discourse, migrant communities of non-white and particularly Muslim groups are failing to 'mix' into the mainstream fabric of British society because multiculturalism has encouraged them to hold onto distinctive cultural/religious practices and particular identity claims, or so the narrative goes (Slack 2006). Tony Blair gave his support to this doctrine in a rather dictatorial fashion, when he informed 'immigrants' that they had a 'duty to integrate': 'Conform to it; or don't come here. We don't want the hate-mongers, whatever their race, religion or creed' he said (Johnston 2008). Where multiculturalism was once believed to be a progressive democratic ideal in Britain, it is now perceived as a threat to the idea of democracy itself, as a breeding ground for intolerance and 'lethal moral madness' (Phillips 2005).

In this chapter I will examine how Black people in Britain have negotiated their relationship to the multicultural nation through transnational models of blackness. The chapter is split into two sections. In the first section I will discuss the concept of multiculturalism as discussed above in relation to Sara Ahmed's notion of 'multicultural love', where the British nation is imagined as being open, loving and hospital to 'others' – migrants, asylum seekers, Muslims - at the risk of injury and damage by the foreigner/outsider (Ahmed 2004). As the newspaper report cited above suggests, multiculturalism should be scrapped and replaced by

‘a new concept of Britishness.’ Thus Ahmed argues that social cohesion discourses put forward the view that ‘immigrants’ ‘must learn to be British ... by taking ‘the nation’ as their object of love’ (Ahmed 2004, p.134). I will then discuss multiculturalism as a particular offspring of western colonial histories, arguing that its social invocation can also trigger monocultural responses of racial sameness as a valued possession in the construction of Britishness. Within Black communities in Britain, multiculturalism has also produced both distinct and conflicting modes of blackness. Two distinct positions have emerged in this context, through what I have termed as the *post-colonial paradigm* of blackness in Britain and the *dialogic paradigm* of blackness in Britain. The former is discussed in the context of A. Sivanandan’s political notion of ‘unity in diversity’ whilst the latter dialogic ‘paradigm’ is discussed in the context of Stuart Hall’s theories on plural ‘hybrid’ identity formations.

In the second section I argue that Pan Africanism was an exemplary precursor to the postcolonial and dialogic paradigms that I identify. The historical underpinning for transnational blackness in Britain, beyond the dialogic and postcolonial paradigms, emerges from the history of Pan-Africanism as a way to transcend and respond to racism, imperialism and colonialism in global and local contexts. Pan-Africanism as a transnational movement in the twentieth century promoted the affirmation of blackness as a restorative and transformative political location. I will discuss how Pan-Africanists as transnational political agents in the twentieth century constructed their own meanings of blackness in the British diaspora through Black political networks such as Pan-Africanism and Black feminism. These globalised political discourses created a transnational Black political culture that was distinctive to Britain. British soil was utilised for the mobilisation of Black transnational subjects and for the creation of transnational and transcultural dialogic networks that were strategically significant to the constitution of Black liberation and anti-colonial global

movements for freedom and justice. Early Pan-African movements and Black feminists played an important role in establishing political justice and human dignity for Black diasporic subjects. I will argue that they constituted a political modal for loving blackness. However, the significance of these transnational political formations in the Black British diaspora are often obscured by the evocation of more popular 'Black British' memories that recall and commemorate the docking of the *Empire Windrush* at Tilbury Docks in 1948, a now iconic symbol of mid twentieth century Caribbean migration to Britain. I am suggesting that those *pre-Windrush* globalised forms of loving blackness such as Pan-Africanism provided an historical framework for seeing blackness in Britain, beyond its hybrid coupling and coalescence with the nation, in other words beyond Stuart Hall's framework of 'Black and British' (which I will discuss in more detail in chapter four). As such, agents within the Pan African movement had established not only a multifarious and complex political network but an effective dialogic response to racism and colonial oppression centred on the welfare and wellbeing of oppressed colonial subjects. I will argue that the Pan-African congress of 1945 in particular had connected locally specific responses to racism with broader global opposition to colonial domination, racial discrimination and imperial subjugation (Fryer 1984). Finally, to borrow Hall's terms, I will suggest that for the Black diaspora in Britain the 'potentialities' and 'possibilities' of blackness have sought fulfilment and enunciation beyond its 'contestation' with Britain and through the cultural and political currencies of Black dialogic and transnational formations.

### **Are we all British now? Love and the multicultural nation**

I have already suggested in the previous chapter that 'forgetting' racism creates the historical amnesic conditions for barbarism to be erased from the socio-historical memory of western

neo-liberal democracies. However forgetting racism also allows other political 'ideals' to take its place, ideals such as hospitality and tolerance. In her book, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed argues that within the UK,

The nation is imagined as an ideal through the discourse of multiculturalism, which we can describe as a form of conditional love, as well hospitality. The nation becomes an ideal through being posited as 'being' plural, open and diverse; as being loving and welcoming to others (Ahmed 2004, p. 133).

However, Ahmed also marks a shift in the multicultural discourse, specifically since September 11, where multiculturalism has been viewed as a security threat. Under these new conditions, 'migrants must learn to be British'; that is, migrants must identify themselves as British, by taking 'the nation' as their object of love' (Ahmed, p.134). Migrants are expected to subsume their distinct cultural heritage under a general notion of Britishness by declaring allegiance to common British values (Kundnani 2007). Here, a form of assimilation is 'reimagined as the conditions for love' (Ahmed 2004, p.143). Discussing the Home Office report *Community Cohesion* Ahmed suggests that the document makes the notion of integration a national 'ideal' (Ahmed 2004, p.138, emphasis added). Here, she argues, difference becomes an ideal represented as a form of 'likeness' for the nation; it becomes a new consensus that binds us together (Ahmed 2004, p138). 'In other words, difference becomes an elevated or sublimated form of likeness: you must like us – and be like us – by valuing or even loving differences' (Ahmed 2004, p.138).

Ahmed examines how love becomes a way of bonding with others in relation to an ideal, in this case multicultural Britain, and how individuals become aligned with collectives

through their identification with an ideal. Ahmed cites Renata Salecl who suggests that the pleasure of identifying with the multicultural nation is that one gets to see oneself as a good and benevolent subject (Ahmed 2004, p.133). Such alignments rely on the existence of others who have failed that ideal, namely ethnic minority communities, who have fallen short of integrating into the national ideal. Thus 'the nation can also be taken away by migrants and asylum seekers who don't accept the conditions of one's love' (Ahmed 2004, p.134). Ahmed is not concerned with love as an overt or crude discourse on fraternity and patriotism. Rather her concern is with love as an act of benevolence from the nation towards the inclusion of 'others,' a love which she locates within national discourses on multiculturalism. Thus Ahmed asks us to consider whether multicultural love works to expand love to include others or does this expansion require that other 'others' fail the ideal? Within the UK, multiculturalism has been diagnosed as a catastrophic failure since the London terrorist attacks on July 7<sup>th</sup> 2005. Even before this attack took place, multiculturalism was seen as causing harm by fragmenting the cultural fabric of Britain (Hesse 2000). According to Ahmed, 'a crucial risk posed by migrant cultures is defined as their failure to become British, narrated as their failure to love the culture of the host nation' (Ahmed 2004, p.137). Ahmed suggests that in Britain the failure of multicultural love is framed as being the fault of the inability of 'immigrants' to return the love given to them by the benevolent nation. In this sense 'immigrants' are failing to demonstrate a sense of gratitude towards the tolerant nation. This failure to return the love of the host community can be evidenced by the disturbances caused by 'immigrant' communities. She writes, 'One tabloid headline after the burning down of a detention centre for asylum seekers reads: This is how they thank us' (Ahmed 2004, p.137).



Such disturbances are read as the signs of failure - that the conditions of national love are not being reciprocated. Ahmed notes that the 'race riots' in Northern England in 2001 were another telling example of the failure of multicultural love. The failure of immigrants to 'mix' and integrate into the nation and thus 'segregate' and 'stick' together prevents them from loving differences outside of themselves. This is seen as a disturbance to the national ideal of multiculturalism (Ahmed 2004).

Thus, disturbance in the form of riot (and more recently in the form of terrorist attacks), is read as a failure that belongs exclusively to the immigrant and not to the nation. 'Love for the nation is hence bound up with how bodies inhabit the nation in relation to an ideal' (Ahmed 2004, p.133). The immigrants inability to love, to integrate and come closer to the national ideal is further evidence of the failure of multicultural love to deliver harmony between others (Ahmed 2004). The narrative would read something like this: our nation has been benevolent and loving towards you but you have failed to deliver and return this love back to us by rioting in our cities, committing acts of terror on our streets and by burning down our detention centres in which we give you hospitality. As Ahmed suggests, rather than seeing segregation as being an effect of racism, it now becomes the *origin* of racism and violence (Ahmed 2004, p.138 original emphasis). Immigrants' must learn to value difference, not of each other, as this would be narcissistic, but difference that suggests you must like us and be like us, a difference that will not breach the ideal image of the benevolent nation (Ahmed 2004). The national ideal on the other hand poses as hybrid, plural and mobile (Ahmed 2004, p.136). Ahmed uses the term 'hybrid whiteness' to illustrate how the nation can envisage itself as being able to incorporate the bodies of 'coloured' or 'bronzed' others. Here she proposes that the nation constructs itself as an 'ideal' in its capacity to assimilate the other (Ahmed 2004, p.137).

**'Tea drinking, hokey cokey' and other projections of monocultural Britain**

No jungle bunnies, coons or Kitekat eaters are present to sully the glorious unanimity of tea drinking and hokey cokey dancing that takes place safely down in the underground while the bonding adversity of the blitz bursts overhead (Gilroy 2008[Online]).

Whilst multiculturalism is perceived as exposing the nation to injury, it can also trigger a retreat back to discourses that make racial sameness a national virtue. Within Britain multiculturalism is a peculiar offspring of European colonial and imperial histories. Large scale migration of African, Caribbean and Asian populations from former British colonies after the Second World War began to alter the ethnic complexion of Britain's major urban centres.

Although colonial migrants were not new to British shores, the country's subsequent and emerging multiracial situation created ideological and discursive trajectories that suggested this development was new and would threaten the racial shape of Britain forever (BBC 2007). The notion that Britain was being 'swamped' by 'immigrants' created fearful meanings and imaginings that put forward the view that Britain as monoculture nation was now under threat. As postcolonial migrants arrived in Britain, increasing racial tensions became a characteristic feature of the 'inner-city,' a space where Black and Asian migrants lived restlessly alongside the white poor working class in urban slums (Gilroy 2006). Soon after, phrases such as 'inner city' and 'immigrants' became synonymous with blackness, rioting and criminality. Black people, particularly African Caribbean groups, became

criminalised as a monolithic scourge on the cohesiveness and solidity of the British nation (Gilroy 2006).

Enoch Powell's venomous '*Rivers of Blood*' speech epitomised the perceived injury and damage that immigration was allegedly inflicting upon Britain. In Powell's speech the vexed nation exists in a state of collective insanity verging on the brink of decomposition;

Those whom the gods wish to destroy, they first make mad. We must be mad, literally mad, as a nation to be permitting the annual inflow of some 50,000 dependants, who are for the most part the material of the future growth of the immigrant-descended population. It is like watching a nation busily engaged in heaping up its own funeral pyre (*Telegraph* 2007 [Online]).

In a scathing article in *The Guardian* newspaper, Paul Gilroy asked the pertinent question as to why the vexed memory of Powell cannot be left alone (Gilroy 2008). This is in light of the fact that in March 2008, the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Powell's infamous speech was the cause for a nationwide commemoration across the British media. These commemorations were most notable by the BBC's *White Season*, a series of programmes that supposedly gave a voice to white working class people in Britain, but instead characterised this social group as monolithically racist and socially inept. Within one flagship programme in the series, a documentary entitled *White Rivers of Blood* (2008) Powell was championed as the marginalised hero of the white working class, the valiant torchbearer of truth against the unlistening British liberal elite. Gilroy describes this recent canonisation of Powell as a reflection of a 'narrowing political culture' in England in which Englishness can be imagined as 'an oversimplified sense of identity as fundamental sameness' (Gilroy 2008 [Online]).

The revival of Powell's narrative works in a similar way to Ahmed's construction of the national ideal. Except that, where the national ideal could once imagine itself as being loving and hospitable to multiculturalism, now the true and binding love of 'the nation' requires the return of 'fundamental sameness' for both 'natives' and 'interlopers.' To be part of this sameness, ethnic minorities have to effectively subsume their cultural heritage in order to claim Britishness (Sivanandan 2006). The British nation in its longing for meaningful cohesion, calls upon the memory of those that profess to care and love the nation, hence the drum-call and bayonets for Powell's canonisation. Through Powell, 'the nation' wants to rekindle an old smouldering flame; a flame that is exclusively monocultural, white and Anglophone, to guide it through these dark and testing times. In this context, it is not the nation that should be decomposing on the funeral pyre but multiculturalism. Whilst multiculturalism continues to burn in the political imagination of the nation, the sticky issue of racism goes unmentioned. Deriding multiculturalism allows the nation to become the central victim in the multicultural narrative where its imagined 'tolerance' and indeed 'benevolence' to strangers and outsiders becomes the source of irreparable injury.

### **Multicultural blackness in Britain**

Whilst multiculturalism has been a narrative concerned with how the nation constructs its self image, it has also created distinct and often conflicting modes of Black community formation in Britain. The relationship between Blackness and the British nation has remained persistently unresolved despite attempts at binding them together to establish grounds for reconciliation alongside new 'potentialities and possibilities' (Hall 1992). These efforts to bind blackness and Britishness have taken two distinct routes between what I call the 'post colonial paradigm' and the 'dialogic paradigm' of blackness in the British context.

***Post-colonial paradigm of blackness in Britain***

The Sri Lankan activist and anti-racist campaigner Ambalavaner Sivanandan explains that the Black Power movement in the US had spread to Black communities both in Britain and worldwide during the 1960s and 70s. Sivanandan wrote about his own personal politicisation through his encounter with Black revolutionary thinking during his time as a librarian at the Institute of Race Relations of which he is now chair:

As librarian, I was able to introduce Black radical literature - Eric Williams, C.L.R. James, the Black Panther Party newspaper from the States, the works of Frantz Fanon, writings and speeches from Nkrumah and Amilcar Cabral, the life stories of Sojourner Truth and Robeson, the poems of Langston Hughes. Because this body of Black thinking could be found only in the IRR's library, we began to attract a whole lot of Black activists and thinkers – from, say, members of the Black Unity and Freedom Party and Grassroots to Third World Liberation groups. And they in turn radicalized my own thinking (Sivanandan 2000, p.418).

Blackness became a political space and source for collective community politics, self-empowerment and self-determination for African, African Caribbean and Asian 'New Commonwealth immigrants' (Kundnani 2007). We can call this formation of blackness the 'postcolonial paradigm.' Here, 'Black' as a political category was constructed around the colonial histories of African, Caribbean and Asian communities and their shared experience of racism in Britain during the 1960s and 70s. I would like to suggest for the purpose of this study that within the postcolonial paradigm the notion of loving blackness can be conceived

as providing a place of solidarity for diverse and marginalised post-colonial migrant groups victimised by racism in Britain. Thus the idea of loving blackness in this paradigm had a glutinous quality that stretched across diverse ethnicities to find common ground to critique Britain's internal colonial formation rooted in former historical colonial practices. During the 1960s the political activist Claudia Jones suggested Black self-organization was the alternative to state integration (Owusu 2000, p.420). The emergence of Black self-help groups, community organizations and structures established to mobilise Black self-empowerment echoed the earlier works of Pan-Africanists in Britain, as they responded to the social welfare needs of the Black community. Racial discrimination in education, housing, employment, the media and the printed press gave rise to a proliferation of Black bookshops such as 'Grassroots, Sabarr and Headstart, newspapers and magazines such as the *Black Liberator*, *Flame*, *Black Voice*, projects like Harambee and Ujima, Black information centres, the Keskidee theatre, the Black University and supplementary schools up and down the country' (Owusu 2000, p.420).

Blackness became the platform for multicultural anti-racist praxis. It was a multicultural model of political love based on anti-racism and anti-imperialist practice that enabled Black and Asian communities to mobilise against their collective sense of oppression as postcolonial citizens in Britain. Sivanandan locates Black multicultural politics within grassroots activism. He suggests that political activism within the Black community as an inclusive practice saw British Asian communities unified in struggle with the African Caribbean community to obtain employment, housing and social services. Blackness was thus constructed as a political model that could withstand the complexities of cultural diversity or the varying expressions of disaffection arising from each community. It enabled a joint fight on the factory floor and in the wider community against racial discrimination (Sivanandan

2006 [Online]). Strategic and political, blackness became the adhesive that enabled a 'unified struggle across communities, ethnic groups, faiths and locales' thereby creating unity in diversity (Sivanandan 2006 [Online]). In the postcolonial paradigm blackness emerged through the collective struggle for equality, 'that also led to the bringing in of the government's anti-discrimination legislation in the Race Relations Acts of '65, '68 and '76. And it was that understanding of multiculturalism that, in the early 1970s, encouraged schools to teach children to respect each other's cultures and religions and celebrate each other's festivals' (Sivanandan 2006 [Online]).

However blackness within the postcolonial paradigm as a diverse and unifying political identity became increasingly undermined by the same multi-ethnic distinctions that had held it together. As Heidi Safia Mirza (1997) has highlighted, blackness as a political articulation appeared strategic, however in terms of community and personal identity 'Black' remained a contested space. Furthermore, 'who could or should be named as 'Black' (i.e. Asians, Chinese, 'mixed race') characterised the political terrain for multicultural Britain for over a decade' (Mirza 1997, p.4). Such a reductionist notion of blackness, Mirza argues, had erased religious and ethnic difference (Mirza 1997, p.4).

Sivanandan contends that both the emergence of 'cultural politics' and the demise of an 'anti-racist political culture' saw the emergence of a more fragmented Black political culture in Britain (Sivanandan 2006). According to Sivanandan, African Caribbean, African and Asian cultural identity politics thus replaced Black political activism on the ground; 'When anti-racism was taken out of the equation, as it was by the beginning of the 1980s, all that was left was culturalism, ethnicism and its outcrop: cultural and ethnic enclaves with their own cultural and ethnic politics' (Sivanandan 2006). With the demise of the 'postcolonial

paradigm' the terrain of Black cultural politics had shifted from anti-racism to a new location concerned with discourses on identity and difference.

***The dialogic paradigm of Blackness in Britain***

In the UK anti-essentialist positions have argued against the concept of 'racial unity' seeing the concept of unity as a 'homogenising' force. Hybridity, difference and pluralist notions of Black identities became the new ground upon which the formation of complex Black subjectivities were being reframed and rethought (Hall 2000). We can call this second model of blackness the 'dialogic paradigm.' Here, the loving element within blackness presupposes that we rethink older models of Black resistance to oppression in ways that are inclusive of all our identities and subjectivities. The 'dialogic paradigm' avoids the assumption that liberation in one subjective area such as race, gender, sexuality or class will automatically lead to liberation in other areas. In the 'dialogic paradigm' blackness is imagined as a discursive space as opposed to a space that is one dimensional and politically monolithic. Stuart Hall in the 1970s and early 1980s focused on race in terms of the politics of *identity*, steering the debate on race away from the 'race problem' as the source of ills in British society towards more complex understandings of identity, race, racism and *Britishness* (Owusu 2000). The work initiated by Hall at The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham during the 1960s and 1970s, opened up new dialogues on Black cultural identity that challenged the notion that British culture was essentially white. Hall's writings and their influence in shaping the discipline and direction of Cultural Studies in British universities and beyond should not be underestimated (Owusu 2000). His theories on identity and Britishness made a direct impact upon a group of young and mainly London based artists and critics who came to be a part of what was is now called



the Black British Cultural Renaissance of the 1980s, notably filmmakers such as Isaac Julien, John Akomfrah, Pratibha Parmar, Martina Atille and cultural critics such as Paul Gilroy and Kobena Mercer (Owusu 2000). Hall's central theme was the 'non-essentialist Black subject' which opposed the notion that a person is born with a fixed identity or that Black people have an underlying Black identity which is the same and unchanging. Hall suggests that identities are floating and are not fixed and universally true at all time for all people (Hall and Bailey 2000). Hall's revision of 'race' discourses had two specific targets:

1. The racist new Right represented by conservative figures such as Enoch Powell and Margaret Thatcher, who excluded Black people from the notion of Britishness and,
2. A Black political orthodoxy that represented the Black experience as a singular and unifying framework (Owusu 2000).

What remains key to our understanding of what Hall means when he talks of the 'non-essentialist Black subject' is the concept of difference; sexual difference, racial difference, class difference, cultural difference, ethnic difference (Hall 1992). In the 'dialogic paradigm' blackness could no longer be imagined as a singular unifying framework. Our liberation politics could no longer be structured along the lines of racial justice alone. For blackness to be 'loving' it needed to be a fluid category able to incorporate all our differences so that all of our subjectivities could be validated. At the heart of this debate was the tension between essentialism and anti-essentialism and the politics of difference and sameness. It was a tension between models of Black love that were seen as marginalising 'other' Black subjectivities.

According to Hall (1997) the stereotyping of racial difference during slavery was represented around themes such as the 'innate laziness' of Black people; that Black people

were only fit for servitude; and that the 'innate primitivism' of Black people meant we were simple and lacking of culture as well as genetically incapable of civilisation. Black people were thus essentialised and consequently 'known' and identified as Black by these fixed 'innate' differences in contrast to whites. The differences that marked Black people as being different to white people – white people being hard workers, fit to be masters, highly cultured and civilised – were based on the practice of reductionism (Hall 1997). Black people were reduced to 'nature.' By naturalising their perceived essential 'true' characteristics, they were beyond change. Their nature became fixed and permanent, forever. 'Primitivism' (culture) and 'blackness' (nature) became interchangeable. Not only were Black people represented in terms of their assumed essential characteristics in nineteenth century racist discourse, they were reduced to a perceived set of essences; as a 'lazy,' 'mindless,' 'childish,' 'simple' species (Hall 1997, p.245).

However it has been argued that the 'fixed' logic of essentialism works in another way that does harm to the 'dialogic paradigm'. Afrocentric discourses have been accused of appropriating the fixed racialised logic behind essentialist thinking that are contrary to anti-essentialist claims (Gilroy 1993). The discourse is accused of appealing to fixed notions of racial purity (Gilroy 1993). To challenge Eurocentric accounts of history and to counteract entrenched racist ideas that Black people are uncivilised, primitive and ahistorical, African centred discourses claim that Black people came from highly civilised cultures in Africa before the advent of slavery and colonialism (Asante 1990). However, the 'dialogic paradigm' points to a number of conceptual problems inherent in the politics of anti-essentialism, in that in trying to construct multifarious constructions of blackness it is dependant upon fixing, replicating and generating other generalised notions of blackness, specifically 'Afrocentric' discourses (Gilroy 1993). As the prefix of 'anti' in anti-essentialism

reveals, in the field of Black cultural politics anti-essentialism works as a binary counterpoint towards 'locating' fixed notions of blackness in order to validate the assumed specificity and fluidity of its plural politics. Fluidity is staged as positive 'loving' value, a space for complex validation and recognition, which indeed it is. However, in its logic, anti-essentialism works on the presumption that it can successfully locate monolithic discourses which 'un-lovingly' preclude fluidity in favour of 'sameness.' Much of the severest criticism levelled at Afrocentricity is questionable, not because the discourse is beyond critique, but because Afrocentric thinking has been repeatedly used as a 'whipping boy' for all that is 'wrong' in Black identity formations within Black political cultures (Dent 1992, Gilroy 1993, Algernon 2006). There are problematical elements within all Black identity formations, including those which celebrate sameness as well as multiplicity, hybridity and fluidity. There are no safe spaces in constructing subjective or collective forms of blackness. Collective and subjective political formations are messy and difficult, and perhaps they ought to be. This is not to underestimate a critique of the notion of monolithic 'racial unity.' But as Audre Lorde reminds us 'unity does not mean unanimity.' Rather, 'unity implies the coming together of elements which are, to begin with, varied and diverse in their particular natures' (Lorde 2007, p.136).

However, as the dialogic paradigm shows there is an implicit assumption that suggests blackness in and of itself is a limited category. For Issac Julien it was not a question of blackness but of cultural politics: 'blackness as a sign is never enough. What does that Black subject do, how does it act, how does it think politically ... being Black isn't really good enough; I want to know what your cultural politics are' (quoted in Hall 1992, p.33). Whilst we must continually recognise that the cultural politics of blackness is and has always been intrinsically contested, multifarious, complex and diverse we must not miss the point that it is

not blackness that is limiting but racism. Discourses that re-inscribe the notion of blackness as culturally and politically deficient continue to perpetuate the binary notion that, in naming blackness as limited and limiting, whiteness and white privilege continue to be nameless normative values that support racialised hierarchies. We can and must validate our difference but this validation is useless if it is unable to change the prevailing social order of racism and white supremacy. It would be erroneous to underestimate the ways in which racism is still predicated upon de-racialised forms of whiteness where white cultural and political hegemony still determine structural relations of power. Film and television theorist Richard Dyer makes a valid point with regards to whiteness, difference and power which is worth quoting at length:

We are often told that we are living now in a world of multiple identities, of hybridity, of decentredness and fragmentation. The old illusory unified identities of class, gender, race, sexuality are breaking up; someone maybe Black *and* gay *and* middle class *and* – female; we may be bi-, poly-, or non-sexual, of mixed race, indeterminate gender and heaven knows what class. Yet we have not yet reached a situation in which White people and White cultural agendas are no longer in the ascendant. The media, politics, education are still in the hands of White people, still speak for Whites while claiming – and sometime sincerely aiming – to speak for humanity. Against the flowering myriad of postmodern voices, we must also see the countervailing tendency towards homogenisation of world culture, in the continual dominance of US news dissemination, popular TV programmes and Hollywood movies. Postmodern multiculturalism may have genuinely offered a space for the voice of the other, challenging the authority of the White West (cf. Owens 1983), but it may also

simultaneously function as a side show for White people who look on with delight at all the differences that surround them. We may be on our way to genuine hybridity, multiplicity, without (White) hegemony, and it may be where we want to get to – but we aren't there yet, and we won't get there until we see Whiteness, see its power, its particularity and limitedness, put it in its place and end its rule (Dyer 1997, pp.3-4).

As Dyer suggests, as human beings in our postmodern world, our subjectivities are complex. However, who we are is constituted and constructed within a racialised regime where whiteness and white privilege are at the helm of western cultural hegemony. In this sense, whilst the dialogic paradigm has been critical for recognising complexity within Black subjectivities and for de-essentialising blackness (Julien 1992), (and this has been a valuable and important strategic move), the post-colonial paradigm reminded us that racism can not be obviated by what Dyer has termed as postmodern multiculturalism.

In the next section, I will attempt to show how Black diasporic subjects have negotiated their relationship with Britain at an earlier stage in the nation's configuration as an incomparable global colonial empire. Whereas multiculturalism had emerged from the post-colonial formulation of Britain as nation, the pre-second world war formulation of Britain translated 'race' into empire (Hesse 2000). As Hesse observes, 'The racialised reconstruction of Britain as an imagined community in the initial post-war period (1945-62) is partly characterised by developments in public culture which attempt to turn the common sense of Britain away from an imperial cosmopolitanism towards a nationalist parochialism (Hesse 2000, p.5). I will now revisit the early history of the Black presence in 'imperial cosmopolitan' Britain to illustrate the point that blackness within a transnational context has historically been a complex and multifarious location for Black post/colonised citizens.

Britain itself had become a space to mobilise anti-colonial movements, specifically Pan Africanism, for the political autonomy and well being of subjugated colonial populations. Indeed, Pan Africanism permitted blackness to occupy a complexity of political positions and voices within collective struggles against racialised oppression through transnational models of blackness as a way of transcending and responding to racism. In this sense Pan-Africanism accommodated difference whilst occupying a position of unity and solidarity. In this sense, it was an exemplary precursor which avoided the binary trap of diversity vs. solidarity which I have highlighted above through the dialogic and post-colonial paradigms respectively. For contemporary Black citizens in Britain today, these early transnational genealogies provide a significant historical map for conceptualising blackness in Britain beyond the simple coalescence of 'Black Britain' or 'Black British.'

### **Symbols and memory in the making of 'Black Britain'**

This thesis argues that Black people have found resourceful ways to assert our being and humanity through loving blackness. Indeed, loving blackness entails an ethical, political and emotional consciousness within everyday life, organised resistance and theoretical responses to racialised forms of discrimination and oppression that restore dignity and human worth to Black life. bell hooks, the architect of loving blackness as a political resistance argues that oppositional Black cultures have provided spaces for the kind of decolonisation that makes loving blackness possible within a white supremacist context (hooks 1992 p.10). hooks was making specific reference to oppositional movements under systems of apartheid in South Africa and racial segregation in the US. In sharing hook's argument I would like to suggest that loving blackness, although not articulated in these terms, was found in Black anti-colonial transnational movements, namely pan-Africanism in the UK before the onset of the

'Windrush' era of Caribbean settlement to Britain. By focusing on the 1945 Pan African congress held in Manchester, a precursor to the Windrush event, I am suggesting that the complex 'potentialities' and 'possibilities' of blackness were historically articulated through the political energy that infused transnational political movements against racism, imperial and colonial oppression. In the first half of the twentieth century culminating with the 1945 Pan African congress, a globalised notion of blackness became a site of radical global transformation for colonised human relations. Here, unity in diversity allowed delegates to see their different struggles to reclaim the dignity of African life, of Africa human worth and value as a shared common cause with colonised populations globally.

### ***Windrush***

In the 'Black British' context, the former trooper ship *Empire Windrush* which brought predominantly Jamaican migrants to Britain in 1948, continues to stand as a symbolic emblematic indicator to the 'originary' moment of the Black presence on British shores (Hesse 2000). Indeed Windrush immediately signifies narratives of colonial Caribbean arrival and settlement to Britain. It also signifies the cartographies of African Caribbean diasporas as populations characterised as transnational, as being formulated by migration and movement. However the *Empire Windrush* has what has been called a 'double edged sensibility' (Hesse 2000). It not only opens routes to remembering Black British histories and may even symbolise the consolidation of Black Britain (Hesse 2000, p.98), it also can act as perceptual obstacle to the broader histories of Black people in Britain. *Windrush* as a symbol that marks the arrival of 'Black Britain' also eclipses other avenues of memory.

The Windrush symbol and narrative is important to Britain's postcolonial history as in some ways it marks the visible onset of Britain as a multicultural nation (Phillips and Phillips

1999). In 1998 its significance was marked in 'official' discourses by a series of programmes on the BBC to celebrate fifty years of Caribbean settlement in England. The book *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain* by brothers Trevor and Mike Phillips was considered a landmark publication on the Black experience in Britain (Phillips and Phillips 1999). The Windrush discourse signalled the onset of new configurations of racialised politics in Britain. After World War II, post-war migration from the Caribbean and Black settlement in Britain's metropolitan centres became a contentious national issue as race was publically staged as an inherent problematic issue (Gilroy 2006; Fryer 1984). The 'Windrush symbol' changed the history and public face of modern Britain forever. However, it has also become an impediment to our understanding of earlier configuration of 'Black Britishness' (Hesse 2000). Barnor Hesse argues that the 'idea of its suddenness or its newness is a deeply misleading invocation because there is a significant residual meaning of Black Britain left unaccounted for' (Hesse 2000, p.99). As Hesse highlights, the discursive logic behind Windrush enacts its own form of 'blind memory' by symbolising a hegemonic concept of Black British identity that removes a number of important and often overlooked factors. These include the African and the West African presence in Britain long before the Windrush era; existing Black and mixed race populations in Britain in cities such as Liverpool; and 'the role of the politics of Pan-Africanism in the formation of Black British identities' (Hesse 2000, p.99). All of these narratives have played their role in the formation of 'Black Britain' but often remain obscured by the very public remembrance of the *Windrush* event (Hesse 2000, p.99). Hesse also argues that the largely overlooked legacy of the Pan African Conference held in Manchester in 1945 needs to be 'revisited.' In recalling this event, Hesse would like to avoid setting-up the memory of Windrush in opposition to the remembrance of the Pan-African Congress 1945. Rather, Hesse's intention is to 'reactivate this residual



discourse of diasporic representation so that it too may be embraced, commemorated and rearticulated in defining the political meaning of Black Britain' (Hesse 2000, p.105).

### ***Why Manchester 1945?***

For the purpose of this thesis, I would like to revisit the Manchester Congress of 1945 to demonstrate the historical underpinning to my theoretical argument concerning the validation of Black life through transnational back diasporic networks that transcended and responded to racism. Whereas the agency of Windrush settlers was centred on access to citizenship and belonging to both empire and nation (ultimately for the ends of the nation itself), pan-Africanists were not necessarily preoccupied with becoming part of a national narrative of becoming British. *Pre-Windrush* Pan-African Black settlers and travellers to Britain were continuously at the forefront of antiracist struggles both at the domestic and international level (Ramdin 1987; Fryer 1984; Hesse 2000). Central to this thesis is the idea that localised struggles against racialised injustice need to be understood within the context of larger globalised injustices in order to understand racism as a consistent if uneven global process of power and domination. The 1945 Pan-African Congress in Manchester, UK was possibly the most notable example of this approach to connecting domestic and international forms of racism and systemic forms of subjugation. Again, this is an important point for this thesis, as I am attempting to argue that racialised oppression is a globalised practice and that dialogic, transnational, global and diasporic responses to racism continue to be necessary. As such, the particularities of local manifestations of racism form part of an interrelated and intersecting global culture of racism. Whilst we should not lose sight of the specific and the local we also need to be aware of how racism is connected globally in complex ways and equally engage with complex and connected ways of defeating it.

The Pan-African movement acts as a historical precursor that created a transnational context for connecting struggles against racism and imperialism. Before the Manchester Pan-African Congress of 1945, four previous meetings had already been convened in 1919, 1921, 1923 and 1927. The four previous meetings were structured around the struggle against imperialistic as well as political, economic and territorial domination (Taylor 2002, p.165). The first 'Pan-African meeting' was organised in England in 1900 by the Trinidadian lawyer Henry Sylvester Williams. Its impetus was to challenge the barbarity of racialised colonial violence, specifically as it related to the violent pacification and partitioning of Africa where European colonisers committed genocide in Africa with impunity in the name of civilisation (Campbell 2006). Delegates denounced the mistreatment of African people in South Africa as well as their subjugation under colonial regimes everywhere. They further looked forward to co-operation among African peoples on a world scale for the mutual advancement of African people. As Horace Campbell has noted, 'the definition of Pan-Africanism at that moment assumed that the content and meaning of political independence would advance the dignity of the African' (Campbell 2006 p.28). In Britain, earlier forerunners of Pan-Africanism during the nineteenth and early twentieth century responded to the alienation and degradation of Black people in Britain who had suffered racial-discrimination as no other group had done before them. They responded directly to the pseudo-scientific arguments which constructed Black humanity as sub human (Ramdin 1987). Amongst the Black intelligentsia and Black men (sic) of achievement, it was vital that a sense of dignity and pride in 'race' should be organised and emphasised in the face of racialised degradation. They felt a sense of pride was lacking in being Black in Britain. In response the Pan-Africanist Duse Mohammed Ali established one of the earliest examples of a Black British press through publications such as the *African Times and Orient Review* and the *African and Orient Review* published between

1912 and 1920. These publications sought to raise Black consciousness with consistent attacks against colonialism, imperialism and racism (Ramdin 1987, p.139). Thus a social class of Black intelligentsia amongst whom were doctors, barristers, restaurant and club owners, had worked on behalf of Black workers in Britain and in the colonies providing essential social welfare and professional services for the Black as well as white working class (Ramdin 1987, p.144).

At the fifth congress a clear shift had taken place because of the representation of the working class amongst the delegates in attendance. Here for the first time the welfare and rights of workers set the agenda for a diasporic Pan-African future. As the historian Tony Martin observes, many of the delegates were representatives of organisations of workers, in contrast to earlier meetings organised by Williams and W. E. B. Du Bois which were dominated by the intellectual classes (Martin 2008, p.197). The Congress under the banner of political unity registered the complex social and political voices within the movement, linking the particularities of their struggles on British soil. The outward looking 'diasporic compass' of the congress was deeply symptomatic of a burgeoning, transnational Black political culture in Britain (Hesse 2000, p.105). The Congress not only debated global international issues such as 'Imperialism in North and West Africa,' 'Oppression in South Africa,' 'The East African Picture,' 'Ethiopian and the Black Republics' and 'The Problem in the Caribbean;' they also protested against increasing racialised discrimination in Britain (Fryer 1984, p.349). The Negro Welfare Centre, for example, raised the issue of Black seamen living below subsistence level in Liverpool (Fryer 1984, p.350). In Cardiff, it was strongly suggested by white locals that Black youths should be 'gotten rid of' because intermarriage between blacks and whites had created a large community of Black youth who, though born in Britain with white mothers and grandparents, found it difficult to gain employment (Fryer 1984). In the

East End of London, it was reported that Black people suffered injustices at the hands of the police. And the late Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) represented by Alma La Badie raised the problem of unwanted babies fathered by Black American troops stationed in Britain and abandoned by their mothers (Fryer 1984). Issues such as the 'colour bar,' 'a conventionalised series of racist practices and decision making which regulated and barred the participation and mobility of colonial subjects within the jurisdiction of British (imperial and national) civilian and military institutions,' pointed to the *interior* colonial formation of British society where racism had become both entrenched and detached from the exterior imperial project (Hesse 2000, p.106). A Congress resolution and session entitled 'The Colour Bar in Great Britain' demanded an end to discrimination on account of race, creed or colour and that such discrimination be made a criminal offence by law. It also declared that all employment discrimination which barred applicants on the grounds of race, creed or colour should be made an offence by law. Furthermore, the resolution declared that African organizations doing legitimate welfare work among Black children, seamen, students and others shall be given encouragement and assistance by the responsible authorities to continue the vital social work in which they were engaged (Adi and Sherwood 1995). In twenty-first century Britain postcolonial Black and Brown communities continue to face similar problems of exclusion, discrimination and marginalisation. As Hesse highlights, there was something momentous about the Manchester Congress and specifically the resolution itself, in that they bear a resemblance to the political formation of the idea of Black Britain itself on the grounds that the social concerns that defined Black people in Britain *before* Windrush continue to define and resonate with our own urgent contemporary social concerns (Hesse 2000, p.106). Even more remarkable is that the conference represents Pan-Africanism in its multiplicity and diversity whilst at once working towards a collective

politics of unity and solidarity, formations which are now largely seen as passé, romantic and unworkable (Kundnani 2007). The political focus of the 1945 congress in Manchester had *pre-1945* origins, a fact which importantly testifies to the accumulation of social critiques generated by Black political cultures during the first half of the twentieth century (Hesse 2000, p.106).

I would like to pay more specific attention to one of those critiques, namely a *Black diasporic feminist* perspective that emerged at the Congress, which has largely gone unrecognised in Hesse's analysis. Amy Jacques Garvey, Amy Ashwood Garvey and other female delegates, played a pivotal role in placing gender within the transnational circulation of Black intellectual thought at the Manchester Congress. Amy Ashwood Garvey and Amy Jacques Garvey<sup>1</sup> were both formidable Pan-Africanists and feminists. Individually, they had developed a Pan-African Black diasporic feminist consciousness concerning the welfare of Africans, and African women in particular, within the transnational context of the 1945 Congress (Taylor 2002; Martin 2008). This is important for this study as it unveils the contribution of Black women to the circulation of anti-colonial political ideas from a gendered perspective in the first half of the twentieth century. It further indicates the overshadowing of Black female political actors and contributors to anti-colonial struggles by contemporary cultural theorists and cultural historians of 'Black Britain' (Gilroy, Hesse 2000). Despite consistently being marginalised by their peers as well as by subsequent academic accounts of the formation of 'Black Britain,' Ashwood and Jacques have consistently been at the heart Pan African anti-imperialist struggles for freedom and justice. Both women were committed political activists in their own right and although individually they had remained close to the

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<sup>1</sup> As their surnames suggest, Ashwood and Jacques were married to the formidable Pan-Africanist Marcus Mosiah Garvey. By coincidence they shared the same forename of 'Amy'. Ashwood's and Jacques' personal contributions to Pan-Africanism however remain relatively 'veiled' and obscured by Marcus Garvey's status as one of the most influential Black political leaders of the twentieth century.

political ideals of Marcus Garvey, they also developed and pursued their own intellectual ideas and political endeavours (Taylor 2002; Martin 2008). Moreover, Ashwood and Jacques were acutely aware of the male chauvinistic political arena which they operated within. Thus, they were willing and astute enough to craft political positions that both mobilised solidarity between male comrades and challenged prevailing notions about the role and contribution of women to Pan-African politics. As Taylor (2002) notes, Jacques struggled to have her intellectual ideas taken seriously by some of her male peers including W. E. B. Du Bois who had invited Jacques to serve as the only female co-convenor of the congress. In a letter to Du Bois concerning the intellectual direction of the congress Jacques felt it necessary to explain to Du Bois that she was accustomed to talking with Marcus Garvey and to taking part in conferences with men 'man to man' to the point that 'I don't think or act, as if I were just a woman.' (Jacques cited by Taylor 2002, p.169). What this example shows is that the intellectual space for Black women to engage politically with Black men was highly gendered in favour of male to male dialogue, so much so that Jacques felt it necessary to qualify to Du Bois her intellectual credentials by appropriating a masculinised identity (Taylor 2002). Hazel Carby (1998) explains that within struggles for liberation and democratic egalitarianism, gendered structures of thought and feeling have permeated our lives and our intellectual work. Such ideologies of gender have undermined our egalitarian visions of the past and the future (Carby 1998, p.12).

However, despite the male bias of the meeting and Pan-African leadership in general, the intellectual contributions of Ashwood and Garvey to the 1945 Congress is indisputable. Although Jacques was unable to go to Manchester due to childcare commitments and a lack of funds, she had played an instrumental role as co-convenor of the meeting alongside fellow convenors, Dr Harold Moody, Paul Robeson and Max Yergan (Taylor 2002, p.166). As co-

convenor, Jacques had written long and detailed letters to Du Bois in which she outlined her transnational Pan-African vision suggesting the Congress organise a permanent body called the 'Pan African Union' 'to watch over the interest of our people the world over' (Taylor 2002, p.67). Her vision also extended to the need for African peoples to self define their reality and identity. Thus she proposed that at the Congress delegates should abstain from using the terms 'Negro' and 'Native' because they were offensive to Africans. She further proposed that delegates replace the term 'West Indian' with 'Caribbean' as the former perpetuated the geographical error of Christopher Columbus who mistakenly believed he was in India when he stumbled upon the Caribbean territories (Taylor 2002; Martin 2007). As the only female convenor, Jacques tackled the issue of female participation at the conference. She requested of her friend and comrade George Padmore that he invite female delegates Una Marson, who could represent the interest of women in the Caribbean, and Tracy Timothy, a voice for Black females in Britain. Timothy, born of an English mother and Caribbean father had, in Jacques words, 'suffered from the inequalities meted out to English-born colored people' (Taylor 2002, p170). Jacques had crafted a gendered paradigm of transnational Black female actors that connected struggles against racialised oppression whilst articulating that Black women too were equal concerned and committed to the struggle for freedom and justice. At the conference in Manchester, Amy Ashwood Garvey critiqued the existence of sexism at the meeting. She stated,

Very much has been written and spoken of the Negro, but for some reason very little has been said about the Black woman. [She] has been shunted into the social background to be a child bearer. This has been principally been her lot (Adi and Sherwood 1995 p.98).

Ashwood was clearly attacking any assumption that Black women can only occupy a biological bond to Black liberation struggles based on an ability to produce children for the 'race.' Ashwood also critiqued the unequal working conditions and the unequal pay of Black women in Jamaica proclaiming that 'the Negro men of Jamaica are largely responsible for this, as they do little to help the women get improved wages' (Adi and Sherwood 1995, p.99). Ashwood had also highlighted the basis on which a transnational existence had become a basic way of life in the Caribbean stating that, 'Because of the low standard of living, our people find it necessary to emigrate to various places, and our women have gone with our men to Cuba, Panama and America' (Adi and Sherwood 1995 p.99). What we are reminded of here is that the transnational anti-colonial space was not only highly racialised it was also highly determined by economies of gender and class. For Black women engaged in the politics of anti imperialism, self-determination required an acute awareness and fortitude to cross borders of gender, borders of poverty, as well as the borders of colonial territories in order to become not only visible and heard on the transnational stage, but to be self-actualised whether politically or economically<sup>2</sup>. It was quite pertinent that Ashwood's critique of the marginalisation of Black women as child bearers resonated with Jacques' personal circumstances. As the mother of two small children, Jacques was unable to travel physically to Britain to attend the Manchester conference because of her commitments as a mother to her two young boys (Taylor 2002). Yet, as Jacques's role as convenor demonstrated, her marginalised status, although real, was never absolute. Indeed, she was still able to shape the development of the emerging Pan African agenda in Britain from the then colonised territory of Jamaica. The material borders of gender, economics, nationality and place set very real

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<sup>2</sup> Amy Ashwood Garvey had also developed numerous business ventures in Britain including a Jazz Club frequented by Pan Africanists in Britain as well as a Boarding house for Black female students and white working class women in London (see Martin 2007)



limits on the ability of Black women and men to participate in struggles for liberation.

However, Ashwood and Jacques both demonstrated that such borders were made porous by their own agency and ability to create, negotiate and transform interlocked territories of colonialism and imperialism between Britain and the Caribbean into spaces that facilitated revolutionary dialogue and political transformation in Africa.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the life long hostile and problematic relationship between Ashwood and Jacques, both women, unwittingly at least, share the remarkable position of creating an early Black transnational feminist politics responsive to the conditions of Black people in general and Black women in particular. However, as Ashwood herself had pointed out in her critique of the male centred focus of the Congress, the story of Black Nationalist diasporic struggles against colonialism has too often been framed through the experiences of Black men to the exclusion of Black women. This goes back to my earlier point in chapter one of this thesis in relation to Fanon's construction of decolonisation as a space of male solidarity, of 'philiic bonds,' between decolonised men as equals in a form of 'brotherly love.' Such patriarchal frameworks undermine concepts of Black male and female political solidarity in de/colonial struggles. They further perpetuate the marginality of the 'Black female thinking body' providing the amnesic environment in which the decolonising legacies of Black women and their far reaching radical politics can be forgotten. Even in recent intellectual accounts regarding the formation of 'Black Britain' very little attention is given to the role Jacques and Ashwood had played in developing a Pan-African transnational feminist politics which directly impacted upon the political trajectories that define the political formation of Black Britishness (Hesse 2000; Gilroy 1993; Gilroy 2007). In Paul Gilroy's photographic history of Black Britain, the book features a photograph of Amy Ashwood Garvey sharing the stage

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<sup>3</sup> The congress was attended by Kwame Nkrumah who was strongly influenced by Pan Africanism. See (Ali and Sherwood 1995)

with John McNair of the independent Labour Party. Although other prominent figures of Pan-Africanism such as George Padmore, Jomo Kenyatta and Du Bois are mentioned and named within the text as representing an 'international cast of Black leadership,' Ashwood is not referred to at all, despite the fact that she was an integral leader amongst her peers (Gilroy 2007, p.65). African women have critiqued the male-centred concepts of Pan-Africanism as well as intellectual accounts that have formulated and reconstructed Pan-Africanism as a male enterprise (Horace Campbell 2006). One of the failings in remembering the 'originary moment' of 'Black Britain,' if indeed Black Britain exists, is the failure to reconfigure Black decolonised political resistance as a shared discursive space occupied by Black female voices engaged in radical libratory struggles on British territory. Until we can recall a historical sense of the past that wards off the cultural dispossession of Black women (Diawara 1993), we will continuously remember and revere a history that impedes how we critically understand the present, thus failing to recognise how processes of oppression become gendered. We will consistently fall victim to blind memories that rely upon male centred discourses that valorise the important and valuable work of radical and revolutionary Black men in raising Black consciousness at the expense of the equally valuable contributions of Black women engaged in anti-colonial struggle.

### **Before 'Black Britain'**

The Pan-Africanism congress of 1945 provided an historical framework for seeing Blackness in Britain, beyond its 'hybrid' coupling and coalescence with the nation, in other words beyond Stuart Hall's (1992) later appeal for post-colonial settlers to embrace being both 'Black *and* British' (I will discuss this point in more detail in the following chapter). Besides, at this point in 1945, representatives at the congress came from Caribbean, African and South

Asian territories colonised by the British which indeed would have made them both Black and *colonised* British citizens. Their response to the nation was one of agitation for the sole purpose of freeing themselves from 'the yoke of British imperialism' (Adi and Sherwood 1995, p.9). The Pan African movement had established not only a multifarious and complex political network but an equally dialogic response to racism and colonial oppression that had connected locally specific responses to racism with broader global opposition to colonial domination, racial discrimination and imperial subjugation (Fryer 1984). It was the continuing history of subjugation, servitude and domination as 'British citizens of empire' which they had come together to reject in Manchester. Thus their relationship to Britain was contested along the lines of demanding independence, freedom and equality.

For post-colonial Black people living in Britain today the relationship between blackness and Britishness still remains somewhat vexed. I am not suggesting a neat linear line of vexation has remained the same and can thus be traced tidily through colonialism, neo-colonialism to a 'post-colonial' present. I am suggesting however, that the goals of independence, freedom and equality have remained unfinished and as urgent as ever for Britain's postcolonial Black citizens (Adi and Sherwood 1995; Campbell 2006).

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have argued that the nation state continues to disavow blackness and racism through multiculturalism. The nation can thus imagine itself as being both open and vulnerable to what Sara Ahmed calls 'multicultural love.' Here the nation can claim to be injured and wounded by the way its tolerance and 'acceptance' of the multicultural situation has not been matched. Multiculturalism is believed to have failed to *return* or reciprocate the love given to it by the nation (Ahmed 2004). The wounds inflicted by multiculturalism upon

the 'tolerant' nation permits and legitimizes the return of 'sameness' or more specifically, white monolithic Britishness, where multicultural subjects must learn to love the *difference* outside of themselves (Ahmed 2004, p.138), that difference being Britain. Whilst multiculturalism has a national configuration, it has also been reconfigured by Black diasporic populations in Britain producing discourse that are contested along the lines of unity and diversity. I have also suggested that Pan Africanism is an important precursor of this binary split, offering Black communities in Britain a rich resource for constructing transnational models of blackness that affirm Black humanity and human worth.

In the following chapter I will develop my arguments further by analysing the disjuncture between blackness and Britishness. I will deconstruct the notion of Black Britishness that has emerged during the 1980s and early 1990s and question its relevance for blackness in Britain at the start of the twenty-first century. I will examine these issues in relation to discourses on 'mixed-race' Britain and formulations of blackness beyond state borders as an anti-racist practice.

## Chapter 4

### DIMINISHING BLACKNESS

#### Transnational Blackness beyond the 'Black British' paradigm

##### Introduction

There are a number of reasons why the nomenclature 'Black British' has remained a tenuous and contested political location for Black populations in Britain. In this chapter I will explore why our contemporary transnational situation destabilises this notion further. I am suggesting that the continuing disavowal of blackness and racism specifically in media discourses and amongst wider political and social fields in Britain continues to undermine what I will call the 'optimistic moment of Black Britishness.' That moment occurred between the mid 1980s and early 1990s where a 'veritable renaissance' of 'Black British' cultural representation had created a new form of Black visibility in Britain and beyond (Mercer 1994). This new visibility came into existence through the representation and cultural production of Black British film, visual arts, poetry, literature, music and television as well as through the academic writing of Black British scholars during this period such as Kobena Mercer (1994), Paul Gilroy (1987;1993) and Stuart Hall (Dent 1992; Owusu 2000). At the height of this moment, Stuart Hall (1992) suggested that 'blacks in the British diaspora must, at this historical moment, refuse the binary of Black *or* British' (Hall 1992, p.29). For Hall the '*or*' represented a site of '*constant contestation*.' In his view the aim of the struggle was for 'a new kind of cultural positionality, a different logic of difference' which he argues was encapsulated by the cultural historian Paul Gilroy. According to Hall, Black people in Britain should replace the '*or*' with '*and*', thus refusing the essentialising binary of Black *or* British.

Instead the preferred ‘*and*’ could help us to realise the potentiality or possibility of this hybrid location (Hall 1992). For Hall the logic of coupling rather than binary opposition meant that,

You can be Black *and* British, not only because that is a necessary position to take in 1992, but because even those two terms, joined now by the coupler ‘and’ instead of opposed to one another, do not exhaust all of our identities. Only some of our identities are sometimes caught in that particular struggle (Hall 1992, p.29).

However, after nearly two decades since Hall’s discourse on being both Black *and* British, has the optimism of this moment gone? Has the expectant ‘*and*’ deployed by Hall to heal this ‘constant contestation’ delivered the desired end to the entangled struggle of being Black British? I will attempt to answer these questions more specifically in this chapter in relation to the predicted ‘mixed race’ future and ‘mixed race’ histories of Britain and the changing transnational formation of blackness in contemporary British life. I will approach this analysis through the lens of a less than remarkable documentary text, *The Great British Black Invasion* which charts the changing face of Black Britain in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I will explain that this documentary works as a micro representational text to the larger continuing omission of specific forms of regional blackness found in Britain in cities such as Liverpool, a city with one of the longest settled Black populations in the UK (Brown 2006). I will further discuss the political implication of *Invasion*’s discourse on racialised absorption blackness and ‘diminishing blackness’ as well the configuration of blackness as a transnational cultural and political framework. ‘Mixing’ and ‘absorption’ are terms that describe the faux embrace of racial intermixture. And at the same time these terms actually, and somewhat paradoxically, also work to reinforce deeply racist ideas about British racial ‘purity.’ I will conclude by suggesting that the

transnational space for Black communities in Britain defined as ‘mixed race’ or otherwise remains a critical yet complex location to build alternative concepts of blackness. Through the dynamic utilisation of diasporic resources, transnational notions of blackness can act as revolutionary interventions ‘that undermine the practice of domination’ (hooks 1992, p.20) helping marginalised human beings to recover their human worth.

### **Mixed futures/mixed histories**

Within the UK, the ‘racial’ forecast for African Caribbean populations suggests that this particular ethnic group will eventually decline as a distinct ethnic category from Britain’s multicultural map (Platt 2008). According to the report, *Ethnicity and Family- Relationships within and between ethnic groups: An analysis using the Labour Force Survey* (Platt 2008), Britain is facing a ‘mixed race’ future:

At the other end of the spectrum, Black Caribbean men and women were the most likely of any group to be in an inter-ethnic partnership (48 per cent of men and 34 percent of women in couples were in an inter-ethnic partnership); and this increased between first and second (or subsequent) generations and between older and younger men and women. Rates were also higher among couples with children. For 55 per cent of Caribbean men living with a partner and children under 16, and 40 per cent of Caribbean women, that partner was from a different ethnic group. It therefore appears a trend that is set to continue and that will result in an increasing number of people with diverse identities of which Caribbean heritage forms a part. It also means that those who define themselves as singularly Caribbean are likely to decline over time, as

increasingly complex heritages emerge among those with some element of Caribbean descent (Platt 2008, p.7).

For many years now, it has been suggested that the fastest growing population in the UK will be of 'mixed origins.' For example, in the early 1990s, it was reported that around 53 per cent of African Caribbean men age 16-24 and 36 percent of Caribbean women of the same age were married or cohabiting with white partners (Modood et al., 1997). In our increasingly globalised societies, where diverse mobile populations move around the globe for temporary or permanent settlement, patterns of sexual interaction across racialised, national, religious and linguistic borders are set to continue (Bhattacharyya, et al. 2002). However, it is worth pointing out that the practice of 'race mixture' is not new to British soil. The long historical presence of Black populations in Britain, in particular African, Caribbean and Asian populations has been documented in the social histories that trace the Black presence in Britain back to the Roman era (Fryer 1984, Walvin 1994, Christian 1998, Ramdin 1987). Since the rise of the British Empire, the continuity of this presence has been directly linked to transatlantic slavery and the expansion of British imperial and colonial endeavours (Fryer 1984, Ramdin 1987). Metropolitan cities such as London, Cardiff, Liverpool and Bristol were some of the major British seaports involved in the transatlantic slave trade. It was at these ports that many Africans enslaved and in servitude first glimpsed British soil and began to make an impact upon local white populations (Christian 1998). During the nineteenth century, amongst the Black settler communities and visitors that emerged within the major British slaving ports, the practice of interracial marriage became widespread between Black males and white females (Fryer 1984, Christian 1998). The most common explanation for intermarriage suggests that on the whole the Black population during this period (numbering approximately 10,000 in total) had largely consisted of young African males who heavily out



numbered the presence of African women (Fryer 1984, p.235). The practice of interracial marriages and the integration of African men into larger white populations became a common practice amongst earlier noted individual Black settlers to Britain such as Olaudah Equiano, Ukawsaw Gronniosaw and others who came before them (Fryer 1984). Early Black radical figures to emerge onto the British scene were of 'mixed origins.' Personalities such as William Davidson one of the infamous Cato Street conspirators who attempted to blow up the entire Cabinet of the British Government in 1820 alongside Robert Wedderburn a working class hero who advocated press freedom in Britain whilst proclaiming that slaves had the right to kill their masters, both had fathers from Scotland and Black mothers from Jamaica (Fryer 1984). The Jamaican nurse and healer Mary Seacole the celebrated heroine of the Crimean War (1853-1856) who risked her life to nurse wounded and dying soldiers in the British Army also shared a 'mixed' Jamaican and Scottish ancestry (Fryer 1984). In the early twentieth century, in port cities such as Liverpool, Black male settlers to the city whether as students, seamen or factory workers inevitably formed intimate interracial relationships and families with local white women (Christian 1998). What I am referencing here is that the idea of a 'mixed race' future in Britain is neither novel nor without historical continuity. Indeed we cannot consider the possibility and implications of mixed futures without considering the living contextual legacy of mixed heritage communities in Britain. Thus as Peter Fryer (1984) had noted in response to the question as to what actually happened to Britain's earlier nineteenth century Black populations, it would appear that the decedents of 'interracial' couplings no longer thought of themselves as constituting a distinct Black community and over time became part of the British poor (Fryer 1984, p.235). As such it would be reasonable to suggest that a significant number of 'white' families in Britain share a hidden history of Black ancestry. As Fryer explains,

The records of their lives are obscure and scattered, and they have for the most part been forgotten by their descendents. But there must be many thousands of British families who, if they traced their roots back to the eighteenth or early nineteenth century, would find among their ancestors an African or person of African descent (Fryer 1984, p.235).

Increased awareness of the historical continuity of early Black settlers would enable twenty first century Black populations in Britain to form more complex discursive engagements with the notion of blackness and its emergence within the British Isles. Furthermore, a more complex rendering of the pre-twentieth century Black experience in Britain would further contribute to debunking the implausible myth of a racially sealed pure white Anglo Saxon race as synonymous with being British.

The early historical negotiation of blackness and Britishness has thus been a dynamic, entangled and often arduous engagement determined by transnational forces that established the conditions for systems of slavery and exploitative labour, imperialist economic expansion and racial domination (Fryer 1988). In parallel to this, blackness in Britain has also unfolded along the lines of intimate interracial relationships between mobile and settled Black populations. As I will show in this chapter, blackness in contemporary Britain is erroneously staged in popular hegemonic texts as a relatively recent ‘invasion’ that began with post World War II migration, a narrative that continues to elide the historical legacy of Britain’s darker and often hidden roots.

### **‘Absorbing’ blackness**

‘Mixed-heritage’ histories have lengthy ancestral lineages into Britain’s historical past (Christian 1998). The documentary *The Great British Black Invasion* made by Juniper TV and screened in the UK by Channel 4 in August 2006 is one example of how ‘mixed-heritage’ histories in cities such as Liverpool become obscured by the narrative of mid twentieth century post-war migration from the Caribbean. It is worth stating that *Invasion* was not a landmark piece of television documentary filmmaking. In fact, it is because of its intrinsically unremarkable format and scheduling (early evening, easy going weekend entertainment) that I wish to draw it to our attention. Indeed its fleeting disposability and intentional frivolity as an informative yet ‘light weight’ TV makes *Invasion* both inconspicuous to critical attention and at the same time deserving of it. I see *Invasion* as symbolic if not symptomatic of the routine disavowal of Black and Brown communities in Britain, despite its obvious attempts at being an ‘inclusive’ and ‘diverse’ piece of social commentary on multicultural Britain. Before I examine the issue of Black Liverpool and mixed race histories in relation to *Invasion*, I will discuss the problematic way in which the documentary engages with generic notions of ‘Black Britishness.’

### ***Invasion* and the Black presence in Britain**

*Invasion* erroneously charted a cartoon-like history of the Black presence in Britain in a rather unexceptional fashion. The documentary sought to provide a quasi-historical update on the recent cultural and population shifts that are influencing the contemporary formation of ‘Black Britain.’ However, I contend also that the programme makers pitched the tone of the television documentary to a predominantly (but not exclusively) white British audience presumed to be out of touch with the contemporary predicament of their fellow Black

neighbours and citizens. The documentary employed the voice over of Fay Ripley, a British female actress who became a British household name after starring in the popular ITV drama series, *Cold Feet* in the 1990s. It is not Ripley's employment as a narrator that I am questioning, but rather the story Ripley is given to narrate. For example, within her script, Ripley suggests that racial stereotypes of Black and Brown people that were once commonplace in everyday culture are no longer fashionable or popular in contemporary Britain. These stereotypes included myths such as 'Black people came from the jungle' and that Black people were 'really good dancers.' She declares that these stereotypes were once 'good for a laugh,' but not anymore. The narration gloated that,

It's all changed now. Who wouldn't like a slice of Thierry Henry's panache? But even if Black is the new Black, the people you think of as Black are not the same people at all. They're all quite different; from different countries; even from different continents. And most of our ideas about them are wrong. You think it all started with the Windrush? No, the first to come were the spitfire pilots and entertainers.

Ripley's jovial voice-over and upbeat take on the historical emergence of Black people in British society was, aside from being woefully inadequate, one of the first signs of the programme's privileging of the white gaze. Here the temporal emergence of the Black presence in Britain is framed within a nationalistic divisive framework which takes its lead from the title of the programme where blackness is staged as an invasion. The language of 'othering' Britain's ethnic populations demarcates the boundaries of access, inclusion and exclusion within the narrative structure of the documentary. It also suggests a subtext of 'benevolent' racial tolerance by the privileged viewer towards the other's invasive presence.

In the quote above, the use of the terms ‘you’ and ‘our’ presupposes a cohesive national gaze. This claim is supported by the objectification of Black people as ‘them’ and ‘they.’ The terms ‘You’ and ‘our’ demarcate national insiders who are invited to adopt the position of voyeuristic subjects over ‘them,’ the objectified Black occupiers. Othering blackness in this way establishes who will be privileged and spoken to and who will be objectified and spoken about. This homogenising logic of the out-of-touch gazing white audience serves a larger media spectacle regarding how Black and Brown bodies and communities are made both visible and invisible in recent media discourses concerning public fears over the global War on Terror. According to *Invasion*, viewers may have missed the substantial changes that are taking place amongst Black Britain’s populations because local South Asian groups have become much more visible and the focus of much public attention recently, particularly, to borrow Bhattacharyya’s term, as ‘dangerous Brown men’ (Bhattacharyya 2008). As stated in Ripley’s voiceover, ‘And while Britain’s Asians have been in the spot light, Black Britons have been changing beyond all recognition.’ Here, the eclipsing racial visibility and ‘threat’ of South Asian Muslim communities was visually reinforced on screen by the documentary’s use of news clips and video footage of the July 7<sup>th</sup> bombings in London. As a consequence of such extensive media exposure, the documentary suggests that the public visibility of South Asian communities has consequently made Black communities more invisible. This shift in visibility that *Invasion* registers is much more complex than the documentary suggests. Gargi Bhattacharyya (2008) argues that such a shift is an *adaptation* of earlier racist mythologies where the demonised figure of the ‘dangerous Black man’ becomes the ‘dangerous Brown man’ expanding the net of western racialised anxieties. As Bhattacharyya explains,

Importantly, there is a shift to include new communities and develop racial myths for new circumstance. In the process, there is a concerted campaign to suggest that 'race' is no longer the issue and that those who previously suffered racism are now with us (as opposed to against us) (Bhattacharyya, 2008, p.96).

What Bhattacharyya describes is the changing and evolving terrain of racism, where new racialised stereotypical configurations can emerge as tools in the process of demonising and criminalising different ethnic groups for different reasons at different moments. Indeed *Invasion* also deployed the use of new stereotypes to mark the shifting terrain of Black Britain,

*Ripley*: Now this will be a shock. Recent migration from Africa is so great that there are more Africans in Britain today than West Indians. And some have come a long way to don Britain's least loved uniform... Got a parking ticket recently? I bet it was from a Nigerian.

Whilst engaging in the production of new stereotypes seen here as the autocratic, power hungry, dictatorial Nigerian Traffic warden, *Invasion* also attempted to highlight some national, ethnic, and cultural differences amongst Black migrant populations in the UK:

And mistaking a Jamaican for a Trinidadian is like calling the English, French. They're from different countries in the Caribbean and there's no love lost between them.

These national and cultural differences amongst Black communities in Britain are staged as a new revelation that needed to be explained to unsuspecting (white) audiences. Such differences between continental African and Caribbean ethnicities are represented as being fixed to the point that they have nothing in common with each other beyond a shared phenotype. Indeed, the documentary suggested that intra-Black racialised prejudices were so deep they were akin to white racism:

*Ripley:* Africans first met Afro Caribbean's here in Britain. And different histories of slavery led to attitudes worthy of Alf Garnett himself.<sup>1</sup>

*Caribbean interviewee:* They used to call us white man slaves.

The divisive borders of Britain's Black communities are depicted as irretrievably contentious and in constant conflict based on the historical legacies of slavery and colonialism. It is clear that within Black communities conflicts along the lines of geographic region, ethnicity and nationality have existed and continue to exist between and amongst African and Caribbean communities; Ghanaians vs. Nigerians, Jamaicans vs. Trinidadians, Nigerians vs. Jamaicans. These intra-Black cross-national, 'inter' and 'intra' generational rivalries, prejudices and chauvinisms can be seen as an outcome of internalised racism, a legacy of the values learnt from colonial education systems in former colonised territories. Deborah Gabriel (2007) argues that such internalised forms of racism can also emerge through the politics of 'colourism,' 'a process of discrimination based on skin tone among members of the same

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<sup>1</sup> Alf Garnett a working class antihero of the British sitcom *Till Death Do Us Part* and *In Sickness and In Health*, was a loveable rogue who peddled in speaking the unspeakable, 'coons', 'kikes' and 'wogs' (Malik 2002). Although Garnett's views were meant to be ridiculed by the British viewing public, in the climate of growing anxiety regarding immigration on the back of Powell's 'Rivers of Blood Speech', his racial diatribes had endeared him to the white audiences.

ethnic group' (Gabriel 2007). Within Black popular culture in the UK, antiquated internalised forms of racism have consistently been highlighted, parodied, mocked, and critiqued by 'Black British' comedians such as Gina Yashere, Curtis Walker and Felix Dexter as well as by earlier Black comedy sketch shows such as *The Real McCoy* (BBC) and *Blouse and Skirt* (BBC). The most popular and successful Black situation comedy on British television, *Desmond's* (Chanel 4 1989 – 1994) sought to educate audiences around the differences and prejudices that existed amongst Black communities as a way of challenging the negative assumptions within intra-Black prejudicial attitudes and thinking. *Desmond's* not only demonstrated that differences in attitude existed between generations of 'Black British' born children and their parents, but also between African and African Caribbeans' regionally and politically. These differences necessarily challenged the racially monolithic notion that Black people were all the same whilst providing a space where Caribbean and African colonised attitudes towards each other could at least be challenged and unlearned if not transcended within the context of a complex Black and multiracial community in south London. As Sarita Malik (2002) points out, like the US situation comedy *The Cosby Show*, *Desmond's* was 'an explicitly 'corrective' text; designed to work against the types of 'negative' images of comedic blackness which had hitherto been on television' (Malik 2002, p.101). It was also a corrective interventionist text that challenged the damaging racially colonised attitudes of internalised racism that remain a part of intra-Black folklore, attitudes that were crudely represented in *Invasion*.



### **The ‘mongrel nation’**

However it is in the area of ‘interracial’ mixing where *Invasion* slips further into problematic territory. In the jarring comic book spirit of the production, *Invasion* concluded, in a holistically regressive tone, that Britain would eventually become a ‘mongrel nation.’ Mark Christian (2000) provides a useful historical framework for understanding the racist notion of this unfortunate term:

Mongrel: mostly associated with the result of the interbreeding of dogs. However, racist organisations such as the Ku Klux Klan of the US have often used the term to define the outcome of ‘racial mixing’ between Africans and Europeans. This form of definition is used by the KKK in order to create a ‘moral panic’ in the ‘white race.’ It is a highly derogatory term and should be avoided if one is to define persons of mixed origin descent (Christian 2000, p.xxvii).

The derogatory racist implications and pseudo scientific connotations of the term ‘mongrel’, with its underlying subtext to intermixture as a form of degenerate animalistic breeding, is a sharp reminder of the casual racism the programme claimed had been expunged from Britain’s social landscape, and presumably from the documentary itself. We can also read it as a sign of the cultural and historical denial of Britain’s existing ‘mixed race’ communities who are obviated as an integral part of the fabric of the nation. By using the term mongrel to forecast the changing ‘racial’ boundaries of Britain, *Invasion* had forgotten Britain’s history of entangled ‘racial’ roots.

Before its conclusion *Invasion*’s casual jaunty tone foretold the ‘inevitable’ ‘end of blackness’ in Britain. The documentary cheerfully predicted with buoyant optimism, the

eventual disappearance of Black populations into the dominant white British mainstream. This disappearance was twofold; one because of voluntary repatriation by first generation 'returnees' to the Caribbean and two because of high levels of 'cross racialised intermixing.' The programme pointed out that Black people from the Caribbean islands and their descendents are the most likely Black ethnic group to 'disappear' first: 'The "Afro Caribbeans" look like they may disappear. Some are going back but, but many others are simply being absorbed in to the British mainstream.'

That 'intermixing' is a significant feature of contemporary life choices in Britain and in other parts of the globe such as the Caribbean, South Africa, Latin America and the US remains a fact (Parker and Song 2001, Bhattacharyya et al. 2002) However, this seemingly modern trend has a longer historical precedence and context within the formation of Black communities in Britain and in the formation of Britain as a whole which is repeatedly underrepresented. For example, the Black 'mixed race' populations of Liverpool, as mentioned above, were not represented within the narrative logic of the documentary. Within *Invasion*, it is clear that the temporal orientation of the Black presence in the UK conveniently overlooks and ignores a significant 'mixed race' heritage population in Britain that perhaps can make more concrete claims for an 'indigenous' Black British status. The fact that *Invasion* got it wrong by omitting the presence of Black communities both in and from Liverpool is not the single point I want to make here. They could have got that bit right and it still would have failed as a poor piece of filmmaking on the Black presence in Britain. However, its omissions are, as I have alluded to before, symptomatic and symbolic of how Black Liverpoolian and 'mixed race' histories are often marginalised within discourses that configure and reconfigure the historical emergence of Black Britain (Christian 1998). Mid twentieth century African and Caribbean immigration and settlement establish the framework

and terms of reference for locating blackness and its invasive presence in the British context. This is despite the fact that although small in number, Black populations in Britain have been here for centuries in cities such as Liverpool, London, Cardiff and Bristol, a legacy that can be traced back to Britain's transatlantic slave trading connections (Fryer 1984). As Mark Christian notes, the Black community in Liverpool was also formed by the city's university structure, which attracted male African students. Two world wars had brought West African seamen from British colonies to Liverpool, African American men to British military bases and African Caribbean men to the city's munitions factories (Christian 1998). Thus, within *Invasion*, Britain is configured outside of this history, making the representation of mixed race heritages ahistorical. Instead, Britain is constructed as an ethnically unified and culturally homogenous island, a fixed cultural space where whiteness as a racial ideal and ideological assumption underpins a cohesive matrix between national identity, history and regional culture. This ideal was ruptured by Black migration from British colonial territories. A Black constituency such as that found in Liverpool, which had historically been settled into the fabric of Britain before the *Windrush* era, is unable to fit neatly into the programme's concept of 'invasion.' It also defies the neatly formed concept of Britishness as being synonymous with whiteness. The evocative use the term 'invasion' allows the mid-twentieth century arrival and settlement of the Black populace to be viewed as an alien incursion, staged as a recent storming of social, cultural, geographical and biological borders. Such imaginings are symbolic of the 'amnesic disavowal' of blackness in the formation of the nation as discussed in the previous chapter. I can only speculate as to why the programme ignored or overlooked the Black presence in Liverpool. However it is a significant omission, illustrative of the much wider failure of hegemonic narratives of the nation and of the Black presence to take seriously the complex history of Black and 'mixed race' narratives in Britain beyond the familiar plot

line of post second world war immigration. The omission of Africans of ‘mixed’ origin heritage from the notion of Britishness reveals much more about how racism has remained a defining if not dominant factor in the Black ‘mixed race’ experience in Liverpool (Christian 1998).

### **Keeping racism in the mix**

The historical presence of Black populations in Liverpool and in other cities such as Cardiff are consistently marginalised and silenced in grand narratives of Englishness and ‘Black Britishness’ as *Invasion* illustrates. This further underlines the reality that, despite high levels of interracial mixing alongside long histories of ‘mixed race’ communities, deep rooted racially structured social inequalities in Britain have not ended. In other words, ‘the existence of ‘mixed race’ populations does not in itself end racism,’ (Parker and Song 2001, p9).

The documentary failed to take seriously the social implications of the changing configuration of blackness in Britain, specifically the question of how despite the apparent welcoming of ‘intermixture,’ the phenomena itself has had very little impact upon the mechanisms that support structural forms of racism. Racism has remained a persistent problem that affects the lives of many Black and ‘mixed race’ heritage groups (Christian 2000; Parker and Song 2001). Whilst *Invasion* acknowledges incidents of Black racial prejudice towards mixed race populations, the documentary overlooks the ways in which structural racism affects Black and mixed race populations as a whole. A study by France Winddance Twine (2004) introduces the concept of ‘racial literacy’ to highlight ways in which white ‘transracial’ birth parents cultivate ‘Black’ identities in their children of multiracial heritage as a form of anti-racist practice. Twine uses the term ‘racism-cognizance’ to refer to ‘white parents who identified racism as a serious problem for their children and had

concluded that it is either undesirable or impossible for their children to manage ‘everyday racisms’ if they are not taught how to identify and respond to racial hierarchies and resist racism(s) (Twine, 2004 pp.881-882).

### **Disappearing Blackness**

The continuing impact of racism on Black, Brown and ‘mixed-race’ populations should lead us to question the unsettling celebratory tone of *Invasion* premised on the prospect of the gradual ‘disappearance’ of blackness from Britain, or, to paraphrase the euphemistic and ambiguous term deployed by the documentary itself, the ‘absorption’ of blackness into the ‘British mainstream.’ This celebratory welcoming may reflect a change in white British attitudes towards ‘mixed race’ relationships (Bhattacharyya et al. 2002). However, it should further force us to question how Britain itself, as an ‘island race’, has ‘managed’ its relationship with blackness or non-white others, at different stages of its national socio-historical and cultural formation. In this sense, the documentary’s pseudo multiculturalism and its cosmetic aesthetics of inclusion and diversity are unravelled by an embryonic and latent discourse on white privilege. This privilege on the one hand appears to welcome Britain’s ‘racially intermixed’ future by paying no attention to its hybrid past, whilst on the other, through the rhetoric of ‘mixing,’ ‘absorption’ and ‘disappearance,’ it appears to see its intermixed future as an easy way to obviate and camouflage questions of race and racism. The welcoming of a ‘mixed raced’ future can subsequently mask the socially entrenched levels of racial discrimination, cultural racism and structural disadvantage that have consistently faced many Black communities constructed or defined as ‘mixed’ or otherwise (Christian 2000). The prediction that Black people will eventually disappear by being ‘absorbed’ into the British mainstream seems to indulge a white supremacist fantasy that works against the grain

of conventional discourses on white 'racial' purity. White supremacist fantasies typically insist on the preservation of racial purity to protect the 'white race.' Instead this fantasy of absorption works differently. It makes the simple equation that more sexual and 'racial' intermixture across Black and white biological borders equals more progress in the eradication of 'race' in society because blackness will disappear by becoming more biologically 'absorbed' into the white nation. Blackness and all of the 'baggage' that comes with it can simply be washed away into the gene pool of mainstream Britain, thus cleaning the scourge and debris of racism from the nation's collective memory. In this sense the logic of white supremacy is more complex and is not always so monolithically concerned with biological notions of genetic purity.

***Blanqueamiento - 'The gradual whitening of blackness'***

Across the Atlantic similar notions have emerged regarding 'disappearing blackness.' Theories of *mestizaje* (race mixture) are commonplace in Latin American countries, where the intermixture of African, European and Native/indigenous cultures has formed hybrid 'racial' populations (Godreau 2006). In her study on blackness as an exception in Puerto Rico, Isar P. Godreau (2006) recalls a comparable celebratory tone towards the gradual disappearance of blackness in Puerto Rican culture, where ideologies of *blanqueamiento*, reinforce notions of 'the gradual 'purging' of Black features from the general population.' Godreau argues that such discourses encourage and enable dominant nostalgic and romantic representations of blackness as remnants of a bygone era whilst whitening discourses are part and parcel of future modernity and the need to 'rescue' national traditions in Latin America. Godreau writes,

In March of 1995, *The Sun Juan Star*, one of Puerto Rico's leading newspapers, announced that 'Puerto Ricans will 'bleach away' many of the physical traces of its African past by the year 2200, with the other Spanish-speaking Caribbean following a few centuries later (Bliss 1995: 30). The article, which was written to commemorate the 122<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the abolition of slavery in the island, also seemed to be commemorating the future abolition of blackness itself. 'In two centuries,' said the historian Luis Diaz Soler, one of the experts interviewed, 'there will hardly be any blacks in Puerto Rico' (Godreau 2006, p.171).

The gradual whitening of blackness she argues 'goes hand in hand' with discourses of *mestizaje*. Such discourses she suggests 'tend to exclude blacks, deny racism, and delegitimize indigenous claims and demands' (Godreau 2006, p.171). David Theo Goldberg also argues that Latin American states resist blackness in the national self image by 'pushing it back into the shadows of both the physical and cultural landscapes' (Goldberg 2009, p.228). In this sense, he argues that whitening or *blanqueamiento/branqueamento*, is not simply reproductive in the biological or phenotypical sense, 'it also involves socio-cultural "enlightenment", acquiring the morals and customs, the sensibilities associated with whiteness.' Acquiring such sensibilities require the shedding of blackness or indigenous Indianness (Goldberg 2009, pp.229-228). In the UK, Parker and Song (2001) writing in the field of 'mixed race' studies, have also commented on the celebratory response to 'mixed race' people in contrast to classical formulations of 'mixed race' pathology, where miscegenation was thought to lead to the genetic deterioration of the nation and indeed the human race:

By contrast, in recent years both the popular and theoretical discussion of ‘mixed race’ has taken a more positive turn. Popular discussions in newspapers, radio, and television programmes laud ‘mixed race’ people as embodiments of the progressive and harmonious intermingling of cultures and peoples. Among theorists, Donna Haraway has observed, ‘Cross-overs, mixing and boundary transgressions are a favourite theme of late twentieth century commentators (...).’ Inverting received wisdom; hybridity, mongrelisation (sic) and syncretism are no longer pathologies, but celebrated as exemplars of contemporary cultural creativity (Parker and Song 2001, p.4).

Historically, white colonial and imperialist cultures and societies with racialised hierarchies have produced conditions which formulate hybridised, racially stratified cultures. Mark Christian (2000) observes that the practice of miscegenation in the ‘New World’ was fostered within unequal power relations between white colonisers and oppressed Black populations. Under such systems, mixed unions were almost always based on force, from rape to concubinage (Christian 2000, p.122). Thus, the question of autonomy and power remain important as contextual factors that determine how mixing bodies can relate to each other within racially stratified societies. Whilst today individuals can freely choose to be in a relationship with someone whose ethnicity is different from their own, this has not guaranteed protection from racism nor has it been a reliable indicator of improving race relations.

Indeed, my concern here is with contemporary ‘celebratory’ discourses that seem to be distant from, but at the same time, are dependent upon an epistemology of biology where ‘race mixing’, specifically ‘white’ race mixtures with non-whites, are seen as a progressive ‘thermometer’ or measuring of improving social conditions (Platt 2008). This is troubling. It



is troubling precisely because ‘race mixture’ or miscegenation is not a new phenomenon in Britain. But more to the point, it is a very dangerous basis for any form of progressive social policy or politics. As Christian observes,

Given the historical legacy of miscegenation in regard to white Europeans and African descended peoples, it is a misnomer to consider it as a contemporary phenomenon ...

Without careful consideration of the historical forces that have shaped racialised relations we cannot hope to understand the complex nature of the present situation

(Christian 2000, pp.122-123).

It is important to note that in the report *Ethnicity and family: Relationships within and between ethnic groups* (Platt 2008), commissioned by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, the term ‘racism’ is not used once within the document. Indeed, the report explores patterns of inter-ethnic partnerships across the different ethnic groups in Britain. It notes that, inter-ethnic relationships have often been seen as indicative of the extent of openness in different societies and of the extent to which ethnic identities are adapting and changing over time. They are therefore taken to be a reliable ‘thermometer’ of ethnic relations in particular societies (Platt 2008). However it is my contention that although the prevalence of mixed race couplings may be an indicator of shifting social attitudes to ‘mixed race’ relations, the true openness of society’s attitude towards inter-ethnic relations cannot successfully be measured without linking these attitudes to the prevalence of racism in processes that continue to exclude and marginalise different ethnic groups. Therefore, they are ambiguous and unstable measurements for gauging our progress towards dismantling systematised forms of racism.

Discourses that infer that more sexual intercourse between ‘different’ ethnic groups equates to a progressive anti-racist strategy - even when such discourses appear to be operating outside the sphere of ‘biology’ by functioning within the realm of social trends and cultural practice - should always be scrutinised. I am arguing that, despite histories of social intermixture between different ethnic groups as historically exemplified in cities such as Liverpool, histories of ‘intermixture’ have not halted the dire effects of systematic and structural forms of racialised oppression on minority groups (Christian 1998). If we move beyond the biology of mixing bodies and interrogate discourses that lend themselves to an epistemological logic of purity and mixture, then we must consider as Godreau has noted, how these discourses ‘tend to exclude blacks, deny racism, and deligitimise indigenous claims and demands’ (Godreau 2006).

### **Troubling terms of race**

The notion of ‘race mixture’ is itself problematic as it implies that before ‘mixture’, racial purity and stability were the norms and mixture an aberration. Jennifer Deverer Brody (1998), in her study on race, gender and ethnicity in Victorian England notes that the concept of race mixture presupposes pure forms and that the reproduction of purity requires the erasure of hybridity (Brody 1998 p.1). In this sense a unified ‘dry’<sup>2</sup> sense of Englishness depends upon overlooking and ignoring hybridity to maintain the impossible fiction of ‘a land-locked island of Albion free from contact and contamination’ (Brody 1998, p.5). Thus hybridity in dominant narratives of the white nation functions as an unsettling smear upon imaginary projections of white purity and Englishness. As Brody observes, rather than emphasising ‘connectedness, contact or commonality, English literary texts often stress the nation’s

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<sup>2</sup> Brody makes a distinction between ‘wet and ‘dry’ versions of English history, ‘where ‘wet’ means muddled, muddled, and meddled with (hence impure), and ‘dry’ means officially sanctioned and purified’ (Brody, p.6).

continual covering over, absorption, or exaggeration of differences' to maintain the myth of a stable English identity (Brody, 1998 p.6). She further suggests that, 'repeated ruptures in the narration of the nation are smoothed by sanitized, sanctioned versions of history' (Brody *ibid.*). If we consider Brody's analysis in terms of how *Invasion* narrates the nation, the constructed sense of Britishness is 'sanctioned' by the privileging of a presumed white hegemonic gaze, 'sanitised' by the nation absorbing and exaggerating the difference of the Black subject, whilst the text 'smoothes over' Britain's historical legacy as a hybrid 'racial' nation by not taking seriously the Black presence in Britain beyond the narrative of mid twentieth century Caribbean settlement. Instead *Invasion* opted for a reactionary discourse towards an invasive Black interloper whilst at the same time expunging the socio-historical narrative of the Black 'mixed heritage' presence. This I would argue negates the welcoming of future cosmopolitanism promised by 'racialised-mixing' which, therefore, appears to be rather shallow and cosmetic in light of the fact that, this development is not at all new, nor without precedence. For what use do such celebrations serve if they are not accompanied by values and practices for social equality and justice?

My thesis argues that absorption stands as a sort of assimilation and containment of blackness and other forms of 'otherness' within the nation. Blackness in this binary logic exists in direct tandem to whiteness as an object that can be gradually absorbed and then 'mixed away' into whiteness, until it gradually fades and disappears (Brody 1998). In a social climate where the knee-jerk rejection of progressive multiculturalism has become fashionable, the notion of 'absorption' connotes processes of homogenisation. In the case of blackness in Britain, absorption is not always necessarily centred on bio-politics or degrees of phenotype, skin shade or hair texture. Most clearly, absorption can also come in the form of policing ideas, thinking, beliefs and practices. However, diminishing blackness, signified in the

context of *Invasion* by the biological intermixing of Caribbean Black migrant communities with white populations, is represented as an inevitable, if not Darwinian ‘natural’ order, that in the end will stabilise the continuity of the nation. Blackness in this kind of racialised logic is conceived as an unsustainable intrusion, an aberration whose rupturing tendencies and legacies must be contained through narratives of ‘disappearance’ and ‘absorption’ that maintain the continuity of ‘normative national sameness’ (Goldberg 2004).

Thus the ‘Black British’ subject lives in a persistent malaise of social and historical ‘racial concealment’ through an engagement with processes of amnesia in the erasure of blackness from the British body politic. In other words racialised ‘*rupture* in the narration of the nation’ remains contentious and can be concealed through the persistent notion that Britishness or indeed Englishness equates, in the end, to the myth of biological whiteness. As Brody notes, such concealments are not only implausible but also impossible to maintain (Brody 1998).

### **Reframing Black Liverpool and that moment of optimism**

So how is my discussion on *The Great British Black Invasion*, blackness and ‘mixed race’ populations in the narration of the British nation relevant to the question posed at the start of this chapter? The question being as to whether the ‘optimistic moment’ of being Black and British has finally passed? In answer, I would say that it has not totally disappeared, but that the terrain of this optimism has shifted beyond the national framework towards a more explicit transnational axis. To explain this in more detail, it is necessary to highlight that within academic accounts of ‘Black British cultural studies’ the cosmopolitan ideal of mixing multi-ethnic communities has held much political promise and theoretical appeal for some time in Britain (Baker *et al.* 1996; Owusu 2000). Hybridity and cultural mixes were, as Parker

and Song have noted, the cultural order of the day, which underscored the optimism of that moment. Contemporary cities such as London were imagined at this stage to be a workable cosmopolitan model for British multiculturalism (Hall 2004). Indeed, that earlier moment of optimism can be seen as emerging from the specific provisional location of London. Whilst London remains an important setting for interpretations of Black cultures in Britain, it is nonetheless regionally specific and cannot always be a representational micro construct of 'blackness *and* Britishness' (Hesse 2000; Hesse 2009). In the online article, 'The Divided City: the Crisis of London', Stuart Hall (2004), discusses the demise of contemporary multicultural cities such as London, which represented a hopeful example of the heterogeneous metropolis. Hall now argues that neo-liberal globalisation and its disastrous consequences are reproducing in the city the growing inequalities of the world (Hall 2004). He notes that certain significant global shifts have taken place, including post-industrialisation, globalization and migration, which have also brought with them the social dislocations that accompany these processes including deepening levels of intolerance and inequality (Hall 2004). Whilst *The Great British Black Invasion* recognises that Black Britain is changing in context to these global shifts, specifically globalization and migration, the documentary's latent anxiety perpetuated the familiar notion of Britain as a hermetically sealed nation whose only way of coping with these changes is to absorb or obviate the invasive presence of migrant human beings. Black Liverpool seems not to be explicitly acknowledged as part of the now familiar narrative of the British 'white' nation, nor it seems, was it part of that 'optimistic moment' in the 1990s of plural 'blackness *and* Britishness.' And yet it too, like London, provided another unique perspective on 'Black British' cosmopolitanism. Liverpool suggested that the 'optimism' of cosmopolitanism had already been tempered, compromised and restricted by systematic deprivation and intergenerational

inequality, poor public services, poorly maintained housing, heavy handed and overtly discriminatory policing and the salient presence of white supremacy (Christian 1998). At the same time, Liverpool's 'cosmopolitanism' also created a politically defiant transnational space remaking the city as a place with distinct African and Black diasporic orientations that were historically rooted and culturally created by its decidedly heterogeneous Black populous (Christian 1998 and 2000; Brown 2006). Indeed, at the heart of enunciating 'Black Britain,' Liverpool's 'specific' and 'particular' expressions of blackness present complex questions of how notions of nation, region, race, class and gender work to make blackness in Britain a dynamic and yet contested diasporic transnational place (Brown 2005).

### **Transnational Blackness and Liverpool**

Mark Christian's 2000 study, *Multiracial Identity* reveals the complexity of theorising mixed racial identities within the context of white supremacy. His study provides some empirical insight into the views of Black 'mixed race' communities in Liverpool. Scholars on Black communities in Liverpool, including Christian (Christian 1998 & 2000; Brown 2005 & 2006), are keen to point out that Liverpool's mixed race populations were not afforded any special privileges that protected them from racism because of their interracial status. On the contrary, Christian argues that people of 'mixed origins' in Britain have historically been branded social misfits whilst social research carried out in the 1990s found that in relation to Liverpool, the Black community has experienced an unparalleled system of racial oppression in the UK (Christian 1998).

Christian (2000) is concerned with the ways in which 'mixed race' communities in Liverpool have created their own social reality in response to their location as citizens of the city as well as being connected to a wider global Black constituency. In Liverpool, blackness

was far from monolithic. Rather than being fixed entities, racial labels had changed politically over time and place, from the derogatory and widely rejected term ‘half-caste,’ to the unique and specific ‘Liverpool born Black.’ As Christian explains,

Identification with such a term as ‘Liverpool-born Black’ often indicates a sense of racialised consciousness in which a person ... can articulate a distinct life experience. ‘Liverpool-Born Black’ is certainly something unique to the city of Liverpool, as you do not hear terms such as ‘Birmingham-Born Black’, or ‘London-born Black’, for example, elsewhere in Britain. Rather it appears to be a term created solely in the context of the Black experience in the city of Liverpool (Christian 2000, p.26).

In constructing what Christian calls the ‘racial self’, most respondents to his study accepted of a Black identity. This identity was often qualified by gender - ‘Black woman/man;’ by nation – ‘Black British;’ and by location – ‘Liverpool born Black.’ Blackness was also defined within the context of African, Caribbean, American and European parental kinship ties. Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe (2001), through her interpretation of the oral testimonies of African/Caribbean and English/Irish mixed heritage women in Bristol, argues that “‘mixed race” subjectivities are both self-constructed as situational, negotiable and fluid as well as externally constrained by static, essentialist and binary notions of Blackness and Whiteness’ (Ifekwunigwe 2001, p.42). Ifekwunigwe seeks to establish a space for African and European mixed heritage people to reconcile their mixed ancestry in such a way that blackness can be affirmed individually and collectively as a response to racialised oppression without ‘compromising allegiances and attachments “mixed race” people may have to white identities, cultures and family’ (Ifekwunigwe 2001, p.58). But as David Theo Goldberg reminds us,

whiteness and blackness 'are structural conditions of possibility and restriction, not simply social identities' (Goldberg 2009, p.226). Rather than seeing blackness as a site of limitation or as a construct that denies access to white parental heritage, for "mixed race" populations in Liverpool, blackness opened up a complex set of possibilities which were both gendered and transnational in their inception and cultural practice.

Jacqueline Nassy Brown's (2005) textured anthropological study *Dropping Anchor, Setting Sail: Geographies of Race in Black Liverpool* makes an important insight into how racialised identities were mobilised in Liverpool explicitly as *political* categories as opposed to the racialised logic of genetic ancestry. Brown's detailed study on Black Liverpool provides us with a complex reading of the transnational social space. Brown observes that for Liverpool-born blacks 'Black' identities were not inherited but created by the local conditions of white racism. As Greg, a respondent in her study explains,

[Black is] a political definition of what we have to do for ourselves living in a white racist environment. I see it more in terms of that. But my father was West African ... He was Nigerian and he didn't really have to find an identity within England ... He was pro-West African, pro-having children in Britain; he wouldn't define it as Black ... I know from being in Nigeria that my statements about being Black are predominantly not understood (Brown 2005, p.71).

As Brown observes, 'Greg frames the relationship between Black and African identities in terms of difference, not [biological] descent.' Blackness thus becomes a form of political practice rather than simply an inherited racial biology (Brown 2005, p71). Greg's account is even more revealing in the way the process of 'becoming' Black is situational. Here a white



racially-stratified environment creates the conditions for politicised transnational forms of blackness. This politicised praxis may not be occupied or shared by all people sharing the same phenotype, as Greg's relationship to his father shows. Brown also makes an important intervention by demonstrating how the Black transnational space, a central component in the formation and production of Liverpool's Black identities, can also be split by the politics of gender, providing men and women 'with quite different motivations for seeking affirmation from blacks elsewhere' (Brown 2005, p.42). Brown argues that whilst Liverpool's African men created the city, 'Black women's migration to the United States expanded the space within which Black Liverpool presently exists' (Brown 2006 p.88). Brown's respondents explained the exclusionary gendered practices and sexual tensions that sent 'some Black Liverpoolians down the diasporic path.' Here Black women from Liverpool married Americans GIs and moved to the United States because they felt excluded from Black male desire in Liverpool (Brown 2005, p.47). Whilst 'Black women said they were perpetually overlooked by Black men ... the latter commonly recited the refrain that 'the Yanks stole our women'' (Brown 2005, p.47). Brown also observed that Black American iconography in the form of the Black Power movement as well as African American music and personalities were all accessed by Liverpoolians as a counter-hegemonic diasporic resource, as a way to feel good about themselves (Brown 2005, p.53). Interestingly, the city's engagement with the transnational space was not only triggered by the structural effects of white racism, but by blacks rejecting different forms of blackness across boundaries of 'race', gender and generation. Both Brown and Christian have observed the existence of difficult relationships between some African/African Caribbean parents and their 'mixed race' children. In some cases Liverpool-born blacks felt they needed to go beyond kinship relationships to acquire a

Black identity that equipped them with a countercultural politics that could effectively challenge white racism (Brown 2005; Christian 2000). As Brown writes:

Displaced by their fathers, young Black Liverpoolians accepted the invitation to universal belonging being issued from Black American quarters (Brown 2005. p.52).

In light of Brown's and Christian's research, I am arguing that Liverpool's 'optimism' beyond the 'Black and British' paradigm, was concerned with the transnational space as a location to assemble Black identities that enabled a sense of wholeness and belonging to other forms of blackness that confirmed their worth as human beings. An important part of this project is recognising that blackness can be defined and redefined beyond monolithic, static or limiting or limited conceptions. As bell hooks reminds us,

It is only as we collectively change the way we look at ourselves and the world that we can change how we are seen. In this process, we seek to create a world where everyone can look at blackness, and Black people with new eyes (hooks 1992, p.6).

The transnational space became located within the local vicinity of Liverpool as much as being genealogically routed to kinship networks which tied Liverpool born blacks to West and East Africa, the Caribbean and the United States. Barnor Hesse's observations suggest that the transnational engagement of Black Liverpoolians with Black America demarcates how regionalized and urban Black affinity with some of the diasporic lineages of the Atlantic world can usurp the coupling of Black Britishness as a national identity. He writes, 'Black regionalism must be understood as a precursor to and a correlative of Black Britishness'

(Hesse 2000, p.103). However, Black regionalism in Liverpool was far from parochial. As Hesse has noted further, ‘Liverpool as a city was able to look outwards and forwards towards the Atlantic rather than inwards and backwards towards Lancashire’ (Hesse 2000, p.102). Blackness was also being *made* and created within the transnational space as it became knitted and woven into the fabrics of Black American anti-racist politics and countercultural discourses that supported Black Liverpool’s articulation of self-worth and self respect.

### **Conclusion**

The original ‘optimistic moment’ of the 1990s has now been tempered by temporal distance and by the increasing circulation of transnational practices, in which Britishness and blackness are identities being constantly redefined by transnational forces. That moment has also been kept in its place by Britain’s and indeed Europe’s racial articulation of itself in ‘terms of the denial, exclusion, and ultimately the purging of those not white ... from first its ideational conception and then also from what it has taken as its territory’ (Goldberg 2009, p.187). Hall’s proposal that Black people in the UK had needed to adopt a ‘Black *and* British’ identity so as to not exhaust all of our identities, was one way of disrupting the singularity of essentialist notions of blackness and Britishness. Hall was proposing a politics of cultural pluralism and representation by attempting to align and integrate blackness into the British body politic. However, the ‘optimistic moment’ failed to register the complexity of blackness itself beyond the politics of plural identities, in such a way that it overlooked the reality that ‘structural conditions of possibility and restriction’ will always be at play for blacks and non-whites so long as racism exists (Goldberg 2009, p.226). Hall’s suggestion, whilst building on anti-essentialist critiques to problematize monolithic homogenising notions of blackness, ends up relying on the stability of the very notion that blackness is static, in order to develop an

anti-essentialist position as an alternative way forward. The problem here is that anti-essentialist formulation suggests that blackness is simply not enough and thus needs to be modified by a pluralistic notion of Britishness, a notion that is itself problematic. I am saying that even in without pluralistic modifying notions of Britishness, blackness in Britain stands as a complex, plural transnational location with complex and uneven lineages that usurp the need for it to be qualified by national forms of quasi or performative pluralism.

Brown (2005) and Christian (2000) have shown affirming a Black identity provided Liverpool's mixed race population with a set of complex options in terms of shaping their political identities. In some cases blackness was actively pursued to challenge prevailing conditions of white supremacy. Brown's study suggests that those who went in search of blackness did not always retrieve the same uniform results. Both men and women found different models of African Americanised blackness that contrasted sharply with what some participants perceived as the apolitical blackness of their African paternal genealogies, from which they often felt alienated. The women in Brown's study also found gendered models of blackness that, according to Brown, significantly challenge the dominant historical narrative of Liverpool's formation as an 'African city', a narrative that predominantly identifies and affirms the role of African male seafaring travellers as the forefathers and shapers of blackness in Liverpool. The oral testimonies in Brown's work suggest an alternative and much more discursive narrative at play. Women travellers had also played a role in shaping Liverpool as a Black transnational space through their marriages to American servicemen, their subsequent migration to the US (where on arrival they were seen as novelties due to their combination of 'blackness' and Liverpoolian identities) and as returning travellers to Liverpool to visit or resettle. Brown argues that rather than reifying Black female travel and experience over male narratives of seafaring, she is much more concerned with,

how particular practices, such as travel, and processes, such as community formation, come to be infused with gender ideologies (or ‘gendered’), and how such gendering effectively determines the different social locations men and women can legitimately occupy (Brown 2005, p.56).

Brown’s study helps us to realise the ‘centrality of gender ideologies to the production of diasporic space’ (Brown 2005, p.56). I have utilised Brown and Christian’s research on Black Liverpool in this study to interpret a form of ‘loving blackness’ where identities are created and made in such a way as to reclaim Black life. In this respect, loving blackness is far from a monolithic enterprise that reproduces monolithic notions of Black humanity.

Thus it is necessary to ask can Black people in Britain really continue to talk about the plausibility of the ‘Black British’ subject. This question may appear to concede a victory to the racist xenophobes who would like nothing more than to see the annihilation of blackness from a white supremacist racialised Britishness. Take for example The BNP chairman Nick Griffin whose party leaflet claims that Black and Asian Britons ‘do not exist’ (Guardian 23 April 2009). In this respect, here, through the dynamic utilisation of diasporic resources, transnational notions of blackness can act as revolutionary interventions ‘that undermine the practice of domination’ (hooks 1992, p.20) helping marginalised human beings to recover their human worth.

If blackness is continuously undermined by hegemonic narration (*Invasion*), by narratives of its disappearing presence, as well as by extremist exclusionary notions of whiteness and Britishness (BNP), what relationships are Black subjects forming with Britishness and blackness beyond national borders? In the next chapter, I will discuss how

Black peoples are forming dynamic transnational connections which consciously and unconsciously decentre and transcend nationhood by constructing identities on routes of popular culture and migration that shed some new light on the layered and complex expressions of Black life in the UK.

## Chapter 5

### SLIPPING AND SHIFTING

#### The changing parameters of Blackness in Britain

##### Introduction

As a consequence of globalisation, the changing formation, pattern and shape of Blackness on British soil is occurring with such speed and complexity that it is now disrupting our former, perhaps simpler notions of 'Black Britishness.' These dynamic shifts make the task of locating 'Black Britishness' and its meaning even more tenuous and difficult. So why am I arguing that Black Britishness has become a tenuous location? To answer is to rearticulate the obvious fact that we are and have been for sometime now, living in an increasingly 'global' world (Song 2005, p.60). The consequences of our globalised situation are that we are increasingly interconnected through distinct flows or 'scapes' that circulate our planet with scant regard for national sovereignty carrying capital, information, images, people, ideas and technologies (Appadurai 2004). Miri Song (2005) observes that globalization is a dialectical process. Rather than producing a uniform set of changes, globalisation consists of mutually opposed tendencies. Song argues that on the one hand globalisation can be seen as a process of gradual homogenization dictated by the West in, for example, what we eat and what we wear. But on the other, globalisation can also produce new hybridized identities in the context of declining national identities where more and more people are said to be involved in more than one culture (Song 2005, pp.60-61).

In this chapter, I will attempt to show how the turbulent currents generated by these global ‘flows’ are impacting upon the everyday spheres of Black life in Britain, gradually eroding the coupling of ‘Black and Britain.’ I will also show that Black diasporas in the UK are ‘transnational, spatially and temporally sprawling sociocultural formations of people’ (Song 2005, p.61), tempered by deep-rooted social inequalities that affect young Black people in Britain as well as ‘newly arrived’ refugee, asylum and migrant populations. I am using the ‘transnational’ as a framework to illustrate and to,

describe the ways in which globalization challenges social organization and identity construction. Scholars using these terms are interested in how heightened social, economic, and political interconnectedness across national borders and cultures enables individuals to sustain multiple identities and loyalties, create new cultural products using elements from a variety of settings, and exercise multiple political and civic memberships (Levitt and Waters 2002 cited in Song 2005 p.61).

But rather than just focusing on the construction and organisation of identities, I am also questioning the political and ethical value of Black Britishness within a highly contentious national situation where racism and the popular vilification of migrant groups continue to shape the lives of various Black and migrant populations in Britain. I will begin with a brief examination of contemporary ‘grime music’ in the UK and then move on to a lengthier discussion on migration and racism and their continuing impact upon our understanding of what ‘Black Britishness’ means in 21<sup>st</sup> century. These two examples of Blackness and racism in Britain may appear unrelated. However, I am situating them within a wider populist discourse driven by circuits of fear (Kundnani 2007, p.184). Such fear-inducing discourses



thrive on the demonization of Black youth and asylum seekers in different ways whilst chastising Muslims for having ‘alien’ values, excluding the underclass for having no value, and expelling asylum seekers for being ‘both valueless and alien’ (Kundnani 2007, p.184). Furthermore, both examples are important to the ways in which we understand the slippery and shifting parameters of Blackness in Britain today. Whilst the visibility and popularity of Black popular culture can be read as a sign of Black ‘settlement’, this can conceal discourses on the continuing marginalisation of young Black people in Britain. This Black visibility also contrasts with the invisibility and vilification of refugees and asylum seekers who are consistently configured as perpetually alien outsiders. Both discourses demonstrate in different ways the changing, contradictory and unsettling tensions within Black populations in Britain. I will therefore conclude by introducing bell hooks’ concept of loving Blackness and ask whether this idea is an ethical political position for divergent and different Black and migrant populations to find some common ground to develop a politics of solidarity and anti-racism within a transnational context.

### **‘It’s Grimey’ - Black Popular Culture in Britain**

Globally, hip-hop music no longer sits at the margins of popular culture within global circuits of music. Indeed, it has with certainty shifted to the centre. Within the global economy, Black transatlantic cultural forms such as hip-hop and RnB as well as Jamaican dancehall music, are highly lucrative cultural commodities. Due to its commercialisation, hip hop is now accused of producing hegemonic representations of globalised Blackness (Codrington 2006). Paul Gilroy describes African American popular music and culture as ‘being reduced to the role of soundtrack to the new imperium’ (Gilroy 2007, p.304). Here, Gilroy seems to be making a rather sweeping point that cleanly implicates African American music and culture as part of

the axis of globalised US imperialism. He too holds African American culture to account for creating a generic US-centred form of Blackness that has become the ‘lingua franca for bored and disenchanted youth everywhere’ (Gilroy 2007, pp.304-306). As a result Gilroy warns us that ‘many young Black Britons have no idea that their social and economic predicament might differ from the position of African Americans trapped in an environment where rigid segregation remains an unspoken norm’ (Gilroy 2007, p.306). Gilroy is suggesting that many young Black people in Britain have access to unique and distinctive historical experiences that can not be fully articulated, in any meaningful way, by simply imitating commodified US representations of Blackness. Whilst the sentiment of Gilroy’s argument may be true, I want to show that amongst a generation of young Black artists in the UK Grime and hip-hop scene, many have demonstrated an historical appreciation of their distinctive heritage as Black quasi-citizens in Britain.

Within the continuing traffic of globalised, commodifiable and hegemonic Blackness, aspects within UK hip-hop are also eagerly engaged in consuming and reproducing ‘hyperbolic’ modes of Blackness. By ‘hyperbolic’ I am referring to representations of monolithic and hegemonic Blackness that are mapped onto what Robin D. G. Kelley (2006) calls the bankrupt images of gangsterism and materialism that continue to dominate the globalised narratives of commercial hip-hop. Or indeed what Tricia Rose (2008) has called rap’s calling cards of hyper-sexism, homophobia as well as self-destructive and violent portraits of Black masculinity. In the UK, Channel AKA on Rupert Murdoch’s Sky Digital TV service streams late night ‘underground’ xxx-rated low budget ‘porno’ style UK hip hop videos. AKA is one example of a media platform where hyperbolic Blackness UK style is both reproduced and consumed. At the same time, however, and contrary to Gilroy’s legitimate concerns, amongst those who participate in UK hip hop cultures, some are doing

more than simply aping or imitating commodified African American cultural exports. Through the genre of 'Grime' music, some are also asserting aspects of the political particularities of their cultural, socio-historical and economic predicament of being young human and Black in London.

Grime music is an innovative syncretism of 'street English', reggae, dancehall, hip hop, drum n base and UK Garage, that constructs a distinctive East London soundscape (McKinnon 2005). Its syncretic character is also an example of the dialectical process of globalisation as discussed above by Miri Song that represents a multiplicity of globalised intersecting identities. More to the point however it also articulates what Barnor Hesse has called the 'historical discontinuities' of Black Britishness where, in a 'historical series of signifying sequences', we see that Black Britishness has 'recurrently been articulated precisely because there have been constant narrative displacements and interruptions of historic continuity' (Hesse 2000, p.113). I am suggesting that the narrative disruption of grime, can also occupy a distinctly transnational expression.

### **Black Boys and Eski Beats**

In 2007 UK Grime artists, Bashy, 'The Street Commentator,' released his track *Black Boys*, firstly as a solo performance, then followed by a remix featuring over 20 different Grime lyricists, creating what has since been called a moment of unprecedented and rare unity within the UK Grime scene (Devlin, circa 2007-2008). As an intentionally 'positive,' record (it was released to coincide with Black History Month in the UK), in a music scene known for being 'eski' - meaning brittle, cold and rugged - *Black Boys* unapologetically set out to dismantle the mainstream 'negative' media stereotypes of young Black boys as a monolithic group of

criminal perpetrators of gun and knife crime in London.<sup>1</sup> Bashy, the 24 year old former post office worker and bus driver stated ‘I wanted to do something positive and aspirational, and something that’s not been done before.’ *Black Boys* reproduces Blackness and the problems facing Black youth in Britain predominantly through the lens of Black masculinity within a rites of passage narrative that highlights the male transition from boyhood to manhood:

(Chorous)

*Black Boys, Black Boys,  
Yeah We're All Black Boys,  
And One Day We're Gonna Be Black Men,  
One Day We Might Have Black Boys  
And We Gotta Teach Them To Be Black Men* (Bashy 2007)

Despite repeating a long tradition of masculinising blackness by reducing blackness to the experiences of Black males, *Black Boys* had also created a rare public space for young Black men as well as a scattering of women and white males to collectively ‘spit’<sup>2</sup> an insightful piece of social commentary on young Black life in London. Whilst the solo single paid homage to a long eclectic list of ‘Black British’ public figures from the world of politics, grime, sport and entertainment (including Bernie Grant, Beverley Knight, Wiley, Trevor McDonald, Mark Louis Frances, Sade and Ms Dynamite) the remix went a step further by highlighting the ambiguous representation of popular images of Black people in the British media and public imagination. In one verse, *Black Boys* highlights the contradictory representations of Black athletes and footballers celebrated for being as British as ‘bangers and Mash and tea’ whilst in everyday life, Black boys are stereotyped as criminals and thieves. The remix also asked its audience to contextualise the contemporary racism experienced by young Black people in London within earlier histories of racial discrimination

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<sup>1</sup> In 2003, Culture Minister Kim Howells launched an attack on rap music calling its proponents ‘idiots’ whilst claiming it ‘glamorises’ gun culture. See: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/2752681.stm>

<sup>2</sup> The term ‘spit’ means to deliver a verse of rap.

in Britain; ‘They make us feel like the enemy, but have you forgotten “No Blacks, No, Dogs or Irish”’ - a reminder of the discriminatory housing practices by private landlords during the mid twentieth century settlement of Caribbean migrants to Britain. The track also narrates the historical continuities between the sacrifices made by Black citizens for Britain; ‘we went through two world wars for this country ... our granddad blood poured for this country,’ with the persistence of contemporary racism; ‘still you want to call us a monkey.’ Alongside Bashy’s *Black Boys*, other artists within the grime music scene have also expressed their own contested relationship to the nation. In his track entitled *Slippin’* (2007), Grime artist Wiley a leading pioneer of Grime music, expresses his contestation through narratives of multiple boundaries and affinities across spaces and locations. He states,

*I was slippin’ in southwest London  
No strap, no ‘chete on my ones with the gash  
I had to splurt from southwest London  
Wrong place, wrong time no you can’t have a stripe  
[Listen, yo]  
I’m real the people know  
I go places where you don’t go  
You can find me in the hood murkin’ a show  
It’s all normal, I’m up for making the dough  
And if you wanna rob me don’t be an amateur  
‘Cause if I get away I’ll be back in a mo  
Tell me to convert if you wanna  
‘Cause I swear the only answer you will hear is no  
I will return to my country one day  
but only when I’ve got enough dough  
I won’t get cozy here in England  
I’m goin’ back to Trinidad and Tobago  
Listen, if I was you I wouldn’t watch my dough  
‘cause I would never let two pound go  
And I won’t stay around so you can get stripes  
You’ll see me again and I’ll be on my own (Wiley 2007).*

On this track, Wiley demarcates spatial territories of belonging and alienation between the UK and the Caribbean leading us to enquire as to where and how Black Britain is emerging

between these two contested transnational locations. Within *Slippin*, Black Britain emerges from the local specific 'hood' space that interconnects the UK and the Caribbean. Here, inner city London becomes the 'normal' yet 'dicey' everyday intermediary territory situated between England and Trinidad and Tobago, the diasporic space he calls 'my country.' An expressed desire to return to Trinidad and Tobago in contrast to a deliberate reluctance to becoming too 'cozy in England,' marks the 'transruptive politics of Black (unsettlement) in Britain' (Hesse 2000, p.134). In this narrative, diaspora becomes a space of psychic cultural dependence, of hope and economic investment. Indeed, his imagined return 'to my country' is dependent upon hustling or making enough 'dough' (money) one day.

This enterprising and entrepreneurial cultural formation of Black Britain has been noted by Stuart Hall (2000) as emerging from a contradictory space of desirable Black style, Black social exclusion alongside Black victimisation and systematic structures of deprivation (2000, p.128). Indeed, as one artist explains in the *Black Boys* remix, 'from a place called "have not" where we make do with the space that we have got there's no hand outs here on the Black Block.' Hall's observation underlines this 'hustling' sentiment as he argues that this generation,

Are not reliant on any kind of corporate or collectivist culture to make a life for themselves. We have to understand this development in its context. In the last two decades the majority of Black people have seen the decline of the welfare state; the political culture which supported more collective aspirations to a better and more secure life has withered away (Hall 2000, p.128).

Hall is registering the discord between the ‘hustling’ aspirations of young Black people to occupy and carve out a meaningful space for themselves in British society against the falling away ‘of institutional apparatuses concerned in principle at least to advance the welfare state’ (Goldberg, p.331). Alongside social security and welfare safety nets, the welfare state between the 1930s and 1970s, saw an investment in public education, national health systems and the emergence of state bureaucracies as major employers of historically excluded groups (Goldberg 2009, p.331). Under Thatcherism and then New Labour (Hassan and Barnett 2008) neoliberal democracies had expanded the privatisation of ‘property, revenue generation, utilities, services and social support systems’ (Goldberg 2009, p.332). In this era of neoliberalism, social welfare commitments to education, work, health care and housing have become increasingly under-or defunded, gradually eroding the small social gains made by those historically excluded and thus exacerbating their inequality even further (Goldberg 2009). David Theo Goldberg argues that the demise of the welfare state should be seen in the context of securing privatised interests from ‘those considered to have little or no standing, the welfare of whom is calculated to cost too much, economically or politically’ (Goldberg 2009, p.332).

As we can see in the lyrics of *Black Boys* and *Slippin*, grime music like hip hop, has grown out of extreme social and economic disenfranchisement. Tricia Rose argues that in the US, the creativity of hip hop emerged under extreme social and economic pressure (Rose 2008, p.266). The ‘do for self’ rugged entrepreneurial creativity and consciousness espoused and evident in *Slippin* and *Black Boys* is an indication of how young Black working class people claim a sense of autonomy over space which is critical in a situation where Black men and women continue to experience high levels of social disenfranchisement and limited access to structural forms of power. However it is also a reflection of how, as Hall suggests,

the individualistic politics of ‘hustling’ has now taken over from collective group politics. In this social context, where the hustle has become the normative mode of survival, the once perhaps inviting notion of a conciliatory sense of ‘Black Britain’ has also been ‘slippin’ away. Furthermore, the ‘hustle’ is not confined to the ‘street’ or to one generation or social class. It has become the *lingua franca* for 21<sup>st</sup> century Black and migrant people in Britain who more often than not are left to their own devices to hustle their own way through the social inequalities and intensifying forms of discrimination since the demise of collective anti-racist politics (Kundnani 2007).

By focusing briefly on the UK Grime scene, I am attempting to question why some British born third and fourth generation Black children are still feeling unsettled in Britain. Why are they still struggling to benefit from those battles which were fought by their parents, grandparents and great-grandparents before them to gain a sense of belonging and access to an inclusive sense of British citizenship? I am also registering that the concept and utility of diaspora has not lost its currency in terms of being an important resource in the formation of Black identities for the current generation of Black people in Britain. Whilst it cannot be claimed that grime music is a rejection of Britishness, it can be argued that the notion of a ‘Black British’ identity becomes entangled, contested and submerged within the complex circulating currents of Black transnational/diasporic influences.

The global Black diaspora is thus a contradictory space that reproduces Black hegemonic narratives (as Gilroy observes) and at the same time produces important cultural resources that allow young Black people and their comrades to create spaces to validate Black life in Britain through a transnational perspective. Third and fourth generation Black communities in Britain are choosing to map their identities beyond the coupling of being ‘Black British,’ and much more through a globalised framework that allows for complexity



and recognises the bonds of multiple intersecting nationalisms, as Wiley demonstrates in *Slippin*. Indeed, these themes of social alienation, racism and spatial belonging, alongside the dialogical blending and referencing of transnational musical forms and influences within grime<sup>3</sup>, form part of a diasporic discursive mode of Blackness that destabilise the ‘cosiness’ of the ‘Black British’ coupling.

In this chapter, not only am I attempting to turn our attention to the cultural and social (dis)continuities that exist in the ‘slippery’ formation of Black communities in Britain, I am also trying to indicate their shifting parameters. At the micro level of globalisation, one indication of the shifting formation of Black Britain is the appearance of African digital media on British television platforms such as Sky Digital. Although North American and Caribbean representations of hyperbolic Blackness remain predominant in popular culture in Britain, the emergence of UK based African TV stations serving the demographic interest of continental diasporic Africans such as *OBE* (Original Black Entertainment TV), *BEN* (Bright Entertainment Network) and *Passion TV*, are reshaping the digital media landscape. With a distinctive African continental and Christianised diasporic consciousness represented through various genres such as news, film, music videos, soap opera’s, documentaries, talk shows and Christian ministries, these channels serve as cultural indicators of the shifting demographics of transnational diasporic Blackness in Britain.

As mainstream British ‘free to air’ broadcasters’ appear to abandon their public service remit to provide ‘a broad range of high quality and diverse programming which, in particular appeals to the tastes and interests of a culturally diverse society’ (Channel 4, 2009

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<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that the scope and limitations of this thesis do not allow for a deeper exploration of grime music and culture in relation to the problematic issues of gender and sexism as well as the complex identity formations of ‘tough’ street savvy female grime artists. Furthermore much could be gained by a closer analysis of how aesthetic and performative aspects of Blackness for young ‘white’ men and women in the grime scene remains a potent cultural currency where notions of Blackness can be selectively, blended, appropriated, adapted and performed across ethnicities and ‘white’ transnational heritages in London.

[Online]), new digital channels are now providing a platform to screen African television content. In the arena of digital television, African American Blackness is now being supplemented with a much more dialogic interplay of Blackness from divergent regions of the globe, most notably with content from Nigeria and South Africa. This recent development in the provision of African television content is one rather blunt yet important indicator of the demographic shifts taking place in the formation of 'Black Britain', where migration from Africa to the UK is changing the formation of Black communities. On a macro level, the presence of 'new communities,' including migrant workers, asylum seekers and refugees, provides further and more visible indications of these migratory shifts. The presence of new, emerging migrant communities in Britain also forces us to rethink the meaning, relevance and definition of 'Black Britain'.

### **New migration and new racisms**

From 1945 to the late 1990s, it can be argued that hegemonic and dominant forms of Blackness in the UK had a distinctively postcolonial Caribbean texture. However, in this new century, other shifts are taking place in the formation of 'Black Britain'. As Paul Gilroy notes,

Black communities are being actively re-composed by the pressure of local circumstances, by the new arrivals whose experience of racism leads them to either seek or refuse political allies, and by inter-generational adaption as well as novel and unstable geo-political conditions. The forms of solidarity these communities produce in answer to the racisms that still circumscribe them are not like the defensive formations built by the post 1945 wave of citizen migration (Gilroy 2006 p.xii).

In this segment I will discuss these recent demographic shifts in Britain in relation to ‘new migration’ and national anxiety over refugees and asylum seekers. I am attempting to show that as Caribbean communities are slowly being dislodged from the centre of Black identities in Britain (determined by the recent histories of African countries such as Sierra Leone, Somali and Nigeria [Gilroy 2006, p.xii]), the notion of ‘Black Britain’ becomes a divisive category that both includes and excludes different migrant populations, creating migrant social hierarchies and divisions.

**No more saris, no more steel bands, no more samosas**

Up until 10 years ago, in the streets of Birmingham where I live, evidence of ‘settled’ post-colonial migrant communities from the Caribbean and the South Asian diaspora were commonplace. In popular public discourses that sought to celebrate cultural ‘diversity’, these communities were once flagged up by the now derided signifiers of British multiculturalism – ‘saris, steel-bands and samosas.’ Over the past decade or so, ‘settled’ older migrant diaspora communities and their descendants have now been joined by emergent ‘new communities [sic],’ including migrant populations from the Congo, Somalia, Congo DRC, Iran, Sudan, Poland, Iraq, Gambia, Ghana, Afghanistan, Kenya, Eritrea, Zimbabwe and a new generation of Caribbean migrants particularly from Jamaica (Birmingham Scrutiny 2007). Nigel Harris (2002) writes that between,

the mid- to late 1990s, there was an increase in the numbers of people seeking asylum in much of Europe. There were terrible wars in the Horn of Africa, the Balkans, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka, and the collapse of order in Iraq, the Congo, Algeria,

Colombia and elsewhere, producing the familiar flight of those fleeing terror' (Harris 2002, p.132).

Birmingham has not been untouched by these global ruptures. Areas of the city, for example, Aston, Bordesley Green, Small Heath, and Sparkbrook, which for many years have been the cultural and economic centres of the Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Kashmiri communities are now spaces also shared by communities from Ethiopia, Sudan and Somalia (BBC Birmingham 2006). In 2006 a BBC Birmingham online news report by Mohammed Sharif investigated the emergent population of Somali residents in Birmingham. In his report, contributors from Somalia and Sudan talked about how they had come to arrive and settle in Birmingham. Jack Aymam explained, 'I have a lot of friends here in Birmingham. People come to Stratford Road in Sparkbrook to socialise with their own community; it makes them feel less homesick. Birmingham is great because there are lots of different cultures.' Another contributor named Mohammed, the Secretary General of the Somali Elders Council UK highlighted that,

Somalis come to Britain because they understand the British culture more than any other European country. There was a big exodus of Somalis to the UK in 1988 when the civil war started in our country. A lot of Somalis came to Britain and claimed asylum and refugee status, the majority of Somalis have been granted their stay here (BBC Birmingham 2006).

Sharif concluded that many Somalis had come to Birmingham for a better life to seek better job opportunities and to achieve academic goals (BBC Birmingham). In 2007, The Human

City Institute, a Birmingham-based ‘think tank’, published their report into the housing needs and aspirations of the Somali community in Birmingham (Jones 2007). The report found that a substantial number of Somalis came to Birmingham as refugees. However, the document also highlighted that,

Many members of the community have not come directly to Birmingham as refugees but, rather, have come via other European countries (primarily Holland and the Scandinavian countries), where they obtained refugee status and citizenship i.e. they have come to Birmingham as European Union (EU) citizens (Jones 2007).

But as one interviewee for this research points out: ‘Is the Somali from Europe a refugee? On paper no, but they have a lot of common needs with refugees’ (cited in Jones 2007).

As yet, there is no accurate data regarding the size of the Somali population in Birmingham, although some community estimates suggest a population of some 40,000 (Jones 2007). According to Jones (2007), the Somali community in Birmingham has been concentrated in the most deprived areas of the city, a pattern that is also replicated in other parts of the country where recent Somali populations have developed, for example London, Liverpool, Bristol and Sheffield (Jones 2007). In Birmingham, Somali families have mainly been housed in poor quality housing both in the private rented sector and within the local authorities housing provision. Housing in both sectors was seen as ‘sub standard’ with damp, condensation and poor maintenance identified as key problems (Jones 2007).

Nationally, in the UK, immigration and its relationship to social housing provision are highly contentious issues underpinned by casual ‘commonsense’ racism, inaccurate media reporting and sensationalist hyperbolic spite. There is no evidence that social housing

allocation favours foreign migrants over UK citizens (Rutter and Latorre 2009). Yet, the popular press in Britain produce and reproduce myths concerning ‘illegal immigrant handouts’, fuelling the falsehood that ‘immigrants’ receive preferential treatment over ‘indigenous’ white populations in the allocation of social housing. Indeed, the so-called housing ‘crisis’, a myth perpetuated by the popular press and the far right to stir the cauldron of hate and popular racism against asylum seekers, was successfully exploited by the British National Party during the 2009 European Elections (BNP 2009). Their web site claimed Britain’s ‘open door policy and unrestricted, uncontrolled immigration’ was driving house prices out of the reach of young people and leading to a shortage of council houses for ‘indigenous’ whites (BNP 2009). Liz Fekete (2009) argues that in recent times a new anti-refugee discourse has emerged in popular culture where refugees and asylum seekers are demonised as ‘bogus’. Indeed, in popular hegemonic public discourse new migrants are frequently criminalised as foreign ‘abusers’ and alien ‘parasites’, ‘scrounging’ from the British immigration and benefit system. Dehumanising newspaper headlines such as ‘queue jumping immigrants,’ ‘immigrant scroungers’ and ‘bogus’ asylum seekers, forms the language of demonization that is too often regurgitated in the national British press.

This brand of xeno-racism – a non-colour coded form of institutional racism - reflects how migrant communities have been both demonised and excluded as ‘a suitable enemy’ (Fekete 2009) of the British public for supposedly abusing British social security benefits and taxpayers money (Hall 2009). However, in the area of housing, most new migrants including asylum seekers, students and work visa holders rent private accommodation because they have no ‘special’ entitlement to social housing (Rutter and Latorre 2009). In response to widespread media hysteria that suggest migrants are prioritised in the allocation of social housing, and in doing so displace non-migrants (whites), the Institute for public Policy

Research was commissioned by the Equalities and Human Rights Commission to conduct research in social housing allocation across Britain (Rutter and Latorre 2009). The report found that:

- New migrants to the UK over the last five years make up less than two per cent of the total of those in social housing.
- Some 90 per cent of those who live in social housing are UK born.
- Most of the newly-arrived migrant group who occupy social tenancies are refugees who have been granted permission to remain in the UK

(Rutter and Latorre 2009).

The TUC report, *Hard Work Hidden Lives*, further reported that migrant workers were too scared to complain about their housing conditions as their accommodation was often tied to their employment (TUC 2005, p.193). The *Making the City Work* report found that ‘in contrast to the image of migrant workers as ‘benefit scroungers’ and working ‘off the books’, 94% of people [interviewed] paid tax and National Insurance, whilst fewer than 1 in 5 (16%) claimed any kind of state benefits (Working Tax Credits, Child Benefit etc)’ (Evans et al 2005).

Although it continues to be ‘vilified’ migration represents ‘a process that both excites extreme emotions and enables the performance of absolutely necessary tasks in society’ (Bhattacharyya 2005, pp.155-156). Migration is a necessary function in the day to day operation of capital cities such as London, where the city’s economy significantly relies on the cheap and exploited labour of migrant workers (Evans et. al. 2005). London’s cleaners, hotel workers, and care assistants provide vital services to the capital. Without them, London would, without doubt, grind to a halt (Evans et al. 2005). These largely unrecognised workers

are vital to the reproduction of urban life, yet remain invisible to most city dwellers and public policy makers. Indeed, their conditions of work do not feature in policy debates about poverty alleviation, or economic and social exclusion, and, according to the *Making the City Work* report, there is an urgent need to look at this issue now (Evens et al. p.30). Migrant workers are now literally 'making our cities work'. Migrant workers earn major profits for their employers, providing key services for the city, and allowing large public and private sector organisations to ignore their responsibility for the conditions of work (Evans et al. 2005).

The search for work is one of the most common reasons for migration to the UK, as well as to be with family, or to join friends and acquaintances, suggesting a process of 'chain migration' is taking place (Evans et al. 2005). Indeed, the process of chain migration has long been evident within most migrant populations, including Caribbean communities in Britain. Through the process of migration, dynamic transnational links and family cultures continue to be a feature of Caribbean family life (Chamberlain 2005). Third and fourth generation 'Black British' born Jamaican off-spring are being joined by our cousins, aunties and uncles from 'yard'. Our newly arrived family are often helped by our elder relatives - grandparents, uncles and aunts - as it was often this earlier generation that felt committed to 'send' for their relatives and support them on their arrival in England. These young men and women account for a migrant class that straddles being visible as a part of a transnational network of kinship and family ties, and invisible as a faceless undocumented population of cheap and exploited migrant labour. Anyone who arrives to work in Birmingham's city centre before the morning rush hour will if they stop to look hard enough see the many different faces of cleaners and domestic workers, men and women of different age groups and at different stages in their migratory journeys entering the city's civic and commercial institutions. You will see the now dwindling first generation of African Caribbean women who came to England during the



1950s and 1960s, arrive to work at 6 am, some having just finished an earlier night shift. In anecdotal conversation with some of these women, including my own friends and family, they explain that they have now retired but continue to work past retirement for complex reasons. In some cases it is to generate funds to aid their retirement and return back to the Caribbean or to help send remittances in the form of money or ‘barrels’ back home. For others, it is a continued commitment to sustain a standard of living in England that enables them to contribute to the welfare, education and upbringing of their grandchildren in the hope that this new generation do not have to face the same level of educational, occupational and economic disadvantage which faced many of them as women when they first came to Britain. However many of the women explain that they also work because they had no choice but to work in low paid employment. Here again we see the logic of the ‘hustle’ as a matter of survival, a will to make something out of nothing.

Working side by side with these women are a generation of recent migrants, young men and women from East Africa, West Africa, the Caribbean as well as Eastern Europe. In the *Making the City Work Report*, which examines low paid employment in London, the authors note that with regards to the ethnicity of migrant workers, the majority of respondents defined themselves as of Black Minority ethnic origin. Black Africans were the dominant ethnic group and accounted for nearly half of all workers (44%). White British workers accounted for only 8.5% of the sample. There were other non-Irish white workers (20%), originating mainly in Eastern Europe. The remaining workers were spread across the ethnic groups and some 11% of workers chose the ‘other’ category, which included a variety of categories such as ‘Hispanic’ and Caribbean (Evans et al). Many young people from ‘Third World’ territories are part of a global network of mobile men and women who work abroad for long indefinite periods. Poor economic opportunities in their countries of origin force them to leave their

often very young children with aunties, parents and other extended families when the opportunity arises to seek employment abroad (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002).

In the *Making the City Work* report respondents were often well educated in their 'home' countries acquiring tertiary level qualifications. Many had experienced de-skilling and downward social mobility on entering the British labour market and expressed their frustration that they were unable to secure jobs suitable to their skills (Evans et al. 2005). Of course some migrant workers with 'valued' skills are 'more welcome' than others by the UK government. Arun Kundnani (2007) argues that at the end of the 1990s the introduction of legal routes for skilled migrant workers from non EU countries was linked to New Labour's alliance with the corporate world. British immigration policy was being led by what Kundnani calls the 'hidden hand of capitalism', where New Labour's 'positive' immigration policy selected those migrants who had the most to contribute to the British economy and society;

This system allowed for the migration of thousands of professionals, such as doctors, nurses, teachers, IT workers and business managers. The NHS, in particular, was becoming increasingly dependent on migrant workers. During the 1990s, of the 16,000 new staff recruited to work in the NHS, half had qualified abroad (Kundnani 2007 p.142).

As a policy of 'managed migration' was introduced, undocumented migrants lived with the constant fear of getting '*dip*' (deported). 'Illegal' migrant workers from the 'Third World' lived with a more acute and tangible awareness of their unsettled transitory and vulnerable transnational status. This was in comparison to other migrants from 'affluent' countries in the EU Australia, the United States and New Zealand who were valued as 'highly skilled' migrant

groups (Kundnani 2007). As Kundnani highlights, ‘in 2003 and 2004 there were 1,488 successful ‘operations’ against illegal working and 5,111 illegal workers were ‘detected’ and presumably arrested and imprisoned or deported’ (Kundnani 2007 p.151).

### **‘The deportation machine’**

The deportation machine (Fekete 2007) operates most severely against asylum seekers. In Fekete’s view, deportation targets for asylum seekers are enforced through officially sanctioned state violence (Fekete 2009). She writes,

Deportations on routine passenger flights are neither popular nor economic. At least twelve people have died during violent, forced deportation attempts. Heart failure, asphyxiation, and a combination of panic and stress have been the official causes of death. Not surprisingly, passengers are shaken when they see crying children frogmarched on to planes, or have to witness violent control and restraint methods against adult deportees ... (Fekete 2009, p.137).

Indeed, in 2007 *The Independent* newspaper investigation uncovered widespread claims of abuse of asylum seekers by British immigration escort teams (Verkaik 2007). A dossier of 200 cases collated by doctors, lawyers, immigration centre visitors and campaign groups over a two year period, unearthed claims of physical and mental mistreatment of some of the most vulnerable people in the UK asylum system. The claims included allegations of physical and sexual assault and racist abuse by immigration removal officers hired by the government as private security contractors to carry out the enforced removal of asylum seekers (Verkaik 2007). The case of Beatrice Guessie is one example of the brutalisation of asylum seekers by

UK and French removal officers. Beatrice was beaten and kicked by security officers during her deportation to Cameroon. She was also kicked in the groin so hard that blood poured from between her legs (Verkaik 2007). On her arrival in Cameroon, Beatrice, 29, was unable to walk alone without support and collapsed on the floor. Cameroon officials refused Beatrice entry to the country on the grounds that if she were to die in prison, the Cameroon authorities would be blamed for her death. On her return to the UK, a psychiatrist said Beatrice was 'traumatised by events.' She was treated in hospital for severe genital bleeding and multiple bruising over her body (Verkaik 2007). As Emma Ginn of the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns says, 'it is easy to abuse when the victim is deported out of sight, out of mind ... The Government does not monitor the safety of its deportees. Silence makes us complicit' (Ginn 2007).

Yet, for many migrants the UK is seen as an attractive destination because of its reputation as a tolerant and multicultural society (Evans, 2005; BBC Birmingham 2006; Jones 2007). However, absent from the pledge to British citizenry which new unsuspecting migrants are supposed to give to 'Queen and Country' is the unspoken caveat that they need to prepare for new and virulent forms of xeno-racism (Sivanandan 2006). Refugees and asylum seekers living through the threat and violence of deportation find not only are they exposed to imprisonment, their children of schooling age are too (Fekete 2009; Hayter 2000). It is not uncommon to find migrant children as the victims of xeno-racism, where they are held with their parents or guardians in immigration detention centres (Fekete 2009). In March 2000, New Labour opened the Oakington Immigration Removal Facility where asylum seekers including families with small children, have their asylum applications assessed on site. Here, families are routinely separated whilst men are kept apart from women and children (Hayter 2000). Fekete highlights that as 'European governments expand the criteria for detaining

families, particularly in pre-deportation detention, more and more children are being detained, sometimes for lengthy periods' (Fekete 2009 p.179). It is the detention of children in families as well as those separated and unaccompanied, that is regarded by children's right lobbyists as the most serious breach of the state's responsibility towards children, 'even a form of officially sanctioned child abuse' (Fekete 2009 p.179). As A. Sivanandan reminds us, children 'are the measure of our possibilities; how we treat them is the measure of our humanity. The moment we categorise them as foreign is the moment we lose both' (cited in Fekete 2009, p.177).

It has been estimated that migration has added approximately £6 billion to economic growth, around one-sixth of total growth in the UK economy during 2006 (TUC 2008 pp.15-16). Our global world of cheap, disposable and exploited migrant labour is also a world of globalised personal human interconnections mapped by transnational family ties.

### **'Ethnic' hierarchies and the new Blackness in Britain**

What I am attempting to construct in this chapter through outlining the axes of migration and earlier through exploring Black popular culture, are the limitations of 'Black Britain' as a social construct to comprehend the complex, uneven and unequal formation of Blackness in the UK. To return to my earlier point in the previous chapter, the 'optimistic moment' of Black Britain has been slipping away. As a social construct, the much celebrated 'Black Britain' of the 1980s and 1990s has gradually been submerged by increased traffic in transnational processes such as migration, caused by the forces of globalisation (from the top down and bottom up) and the deepening disavowal of national forms of racism, both popular and institutionalised.

At the level of national politics, high profile ‘Black Britons’ in the public eye work very hard to overstate their allegiance to Britishness. Some have calculated the costs of multiculturalism alongside migration and have concluded, in line with popular opinion that British values and Britishness are under threat. For example, Trevor Phillips, the former head of the Commission for Racial Equality and the current Chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, fuelled populist myths about immigration by claiming that some migrant communities are becoming ‘marooned’ outside of mainstream Britain. According to Phillips, some individuals and migrant groups are doing comparatively well, whilst others are not. The failure of some migrant groups to integrate would, he argued, have dire consequences for the nation in future; Britain is ‘sleepwalking our way to segregation. We are becoming strangers to one another,’ and in years to come will produce ‘US style ghettos.’ Having made this now infamous speech, Phillips, was hailed for being ‘brave’ by the right wing newspaper *The Daily Mail* (2006) and praised by *The Times* (2005) for breaking taboos and puncturing the complacency of Britain’s progress as a multicultural society. Indeed, in spite of the daily repetitive discourse on anti-immigration which is closely linked to anti-Muslim hysteria fuelled by the British press, Phillips was commended for breaking the imagined silence on this debate by helping to ‘create a climate’ in which the problems of immigration and multiculturalism could be discussed (The Times 2005). However, his speech had also provoked a strong critical attack from the left. Sociologists Finney and Simpson (2009) used statistical information to dismantle Phillips’ arguments as well as other ‘common sense’ myths that are circulated on segregation, immigration and integration. Finney and Simpson (2009) argued Phillips had misread the facts on racism and immigration, saying that he,

has increased misunderstanding of key social trends in Britain and on this basis could easily contribute to a rise in fear and racial hatred; [and] has set a bad example of how it is possible to argue your case by misquoting statistical evidence, deliberately misleading the public and policymakers on statistics as a result (Finney and Simpson 2009 p164).

As Finney and Simpson argue, Phillips was the first to make the link between the so-called self segregation of Muslim communities and terrorism in Britain. However *The Cantle Report* following the 2001 riots in Oldham and Bradford observed no link with terrorism (Finney and Simpson 2009). Other prominent ‘minority figures’ have also been hailed as ‘brave non-white Britons.’ These include the BBC senior news reporter George Alagiah who was admired for his attack on the ‘excesses of multiculturalism’ which he feared was producing an apartheid Britain where immigrant communities lived in enclaves. And the Archbishop of York, John Sentamu, was also praised for his bravery because he claimed multiculturalism, had betrayed England and the English since,

Multiculturalism has seemed to imply, wrongly for me, let other cultures be allowed to express themselves but do not let the majority culture at all tell us its glories, its struggles, its joys, its pains’ (Times Online 2005).

Thus, it appears that only a few of us are permitted to benefit from being ‘Black and British.’ Its privileges come at the price of othering new or ‘troublesome’ migrants and by proclaiming that our first bond should be to the nation, not to our respective heritages or to other migrant groups. Effectively, Black Britain has been split into two camps: The first camp are members

of older migrant populations, colonial and ex colonial subjects whose families settled in Britain after the demise of the British Empire, but who now have experienced some level of social mobility into the 'higher strata' of public life in Britain. They are the beneficiaries of the multiculturalism espoused by Roy Jenkins in 1966, when the former home secretary outlined integration in terms of equal opportunity, diversity and mutual tolerance (Kundnani). Indeed, this camp is often the symbol of diversity in Britain, an example of 'good' multiculturalism, where the nation can feel inviolable against claims of racialised intolerance and discrimination because of Black Britons minimal representation in otherwise exclusive social and political circles. This small camp of 'Black Britons' can manoeuvre amongst the elite enclaves of the British media and entertainment industries as well as the Government so long as they stick to the rules; the central rule being, to avoid any meaningful discussion of race and racism at any cost despite its intensification and deepening stranglehold across the whole spectrum of British life (Kundnani 2007). As Sivanandan reminds us, new racism encourages older migrant populations to forget that 'They [refugees and asylum seekers] are us, 40 years back. We are they, now' (Sivanandan 2002). He states,

We are in the higher echelons of the media, of government, of business, of education. We are sociologists and police chiefs, ministers and principals of schools. We are now, in this information society, entered into the engine-room of power and yet we do nothing about the refugees and asylum seekers (Sivanandan 2002 [Online]).

And yet our entry into the 'engine room of power' is set upon slippery and far from stable grounds. For as the beneficiaries of multiculturalism - Phillips, Alagaiah, Santamu and others - began to attack its very existence, the second camp, in very specific and uneven ways, were



experiencing deeper social divisions and more entrenched forms of social alienation within an increasingly hostile and complex racial climate. In this multifaceted camp British and foreign born Black populations, young, old, poor, immigrant, asylum seeker, refugee, Muslim, male, female, were excluded from the multicultural dream despite being fully embroiled in the nightmare of its demise. The UK has a long history of criminalising Black and migrant populations. Historically, the Black male body has become a vehicle for legitimising police harassment, police brutality and genetic racial profiling. A recent example of this criminalising process is reflected in the racial disparity of Black and minority groups on the UK's National DNA Database (NDNAD). According to Black Mental Health UK (2008),

About 4 out of every 10 Black men have a record on the database, compared to about 1 in 10 white men. For young Black men, the bias is even worse: about 3 out of 4 young Black men, aged between 15 and 34, have records on the DNA database. Vulnerable people, including children and people with mental illness, also often end up with records on the database as a result of being arrested by the police (Black Mental Health UK 2008 [Online]).

Despite the very serious danger that the unlawful retention of DNA records and the racial bias in the database is effectively criminalising a generation of young Black men (Black Mental Health UK 2008[Online]), Trevor Phillips, would like us to believe that Britain as a society has been transformed, so much so that terms such as 'institutional racism' are no longer relevant and should be abandoned (Phillips 2009). In an article for the *MailOnline*, Phillips argues that as a concept, 'institutional racism' is corrosive and it is his belief 'that Britain is by far - and I mean by far - the best place to live in Europe if you are not white' (Phillips 2009

[Online]). Is Britain racially reformed to such an extent that concepts such as institutional racism are no longer relevant? Not according to Doreen Lawrence (2009), 16 years after the brutal murder of her son Stephen Lawrence, who was stabbed to death in London by racist thugs in 1993. Ten years after the McPherson enquiry into Stephen's murder which introduced the term institutional racism into the public consciousness, Doreen recalls how the police automatically presumed Stephen to be the criminal at the scene of his murder. Black families, she said, are still seen as the perpetrators rather than the victims of crime. Stop and search figures for London between January and March 2007 showed that as Black people we are four times more likely to be stopped and searched than a white person and three times more likely to be arrested (Lawrence 2009).

### **Racial excesses of white privilege**

This type of discrimination is part of a wider process of structural and systematic forms of racial discrimination and disadvantage. It is also informed by a wider popular culture of 'harmless' jaunty racism, racism's routine disavowal and the sprightly racial excesses of white privilege. Take for example Carol Thatcher, daughter of the former UK Prime Minister Margaret, who in 2009 stated she was the victim of bullying by her colleagues at the BBC after her racist comments about the French tennis player, Jo-Wilfred Tsonga were leaked to the British press. In the green room, she 'allegedly' called Tsonga a 'golliwog frog' and a 'half-golliwog' off-air after a TV recording of the *One Show*, a popular BBC One magazine programme (Times Online 2009). The Golliwog, a direct product of the Blackface minstrel tradition, was meant to objectify, demean, insult and ridicule people of African descent. As a popular racist caricature it was until 2001 found on the jars of Robertson's jams and marmalade spreads. Golliwogs were popular objects in the children's books of Florence Kate

Upton and later in Enid Blyton's children stories. Most recently they were on sale at one royal palace in Scotland. Since the controversy over Thatcher's comments they have been withdrawn from sale in that palace. In April 2009, Thatcher defended her use of the term by saying her words were taken out of context and that the whole incident is a symptom of 'today's obsession about political correctness - and that remains a topic that has to be addressed and some common sense injected to it' (Leach 2009). Indeed, racial slurs are often dismissed or trivialised as harmless banter these days. Anyone who takes offence over such comments are often labelled as oversensitive or as belonging to the 'politically correct brigade'.

In the ensuing debate over Thatcher's sacking we saw mostly white commentators in the media and press engaged in the now routine theatrics of a 'race row.' A debate ensued over Thatcher's unapologetic use of racism, and indeed whether it was racism or not, and over whether the BBC were being overzealous in sacking the presenter over something that was said in a 'private' conversation. The Mayor of London, Boris Johnson had defended Thatcher saying that her 'indiscretion should not have been punished so severely' (*Times Online* 2009a). He himself had to apologise the year before for calling Black children 'piccaninnies' with 'watermelon smiles' (*Times Online* 2009a). Not long after the 'Golliwog' controversy, we learnt that the future King of the UK, The Prince of Wales, refers to a close friend of South Asian origin, as 'Sooty', whilst his son, Harry, was caught on video by a popular tabloid newspaper referring to a fellow soldier as a 'Paki'. Although Harry issued an apology, his fathers and his own remarks were excused and explained away by their victims as 'nicknames' and terms of endearment between friends and colleagues (*Telegraph* 2009a & 2009b). In each instance the racism spoken from the mouths of the speaker was disengaged from the person. Their sounds offended, but they themselves could be disconnected from the

offense. Here, racial insults are devoid of racism and racists. Such casual dismissal of racism allows virile and more dangerous forms of racism to go unrecognised and unchallenged. By its disavowal, the barbarity of racism becomes more unremarkable and more entrenched, making it all the more dangerous.

In a climate where the cult of monocultural homogeneity defines the parameters of access and expulsion from the British nation, what is the future of being Black and British? An important tradition of scholarship in the UK has argued that Blackness in Britain should be seen as integral to rather than as permanently outside the notion of Britishness. Paul Gilroy (1987/2006) has contended that white British racism has made Blackness and Britishness mutually exclusive categories. Writers such as Shirley Anne Tate (2002) have argued that in Britain choosing to be Black and British is a 'subversive location,' that demands the adoption of a double or multiple consciousness in order to negotiate the racist discourse that states Black and British are mutually exclusive. Les Back (1996) has suggested that Britain's multi-ethnic urban communities have created new syncretic forms of Britishness at a local level where the semantics of race, nation and belonging have undergone important transformations, creating a workable multiculturalism from the ground up. Claire E. Alexander (1996) adopts a similar approach to Back (1996) by suggesting that 'street level' youth culture creates Black British identities that go beyond entrenched pathological notions of Black youth as persistent 'problems' in Britain. Indeed, I would like to add that 'Black Britishness' from the bottom up has made an important and irreversible contribution to popular culture in Britain and indeed shapes the contours of how multiculturalism is both lived and perceived to be both successful and workable. The presence of multifarious Black migrant populations has radically altered the racialised, and more importantly, the cultural landscape of Britain. Our presence is a challenge to mythical and nostalgic representations of Britishness built on the imagined

exclusivity of whiteness as a stabilising hegemonic entity. The presence of migrant groups reminds us that such homogenous imaginings are false and are persistently destabilized by historical and contemporary patterns of movement and migration:

Why the English, or the British, should consider themselves superior to foreigners, and how the English, or British, should be defined is a mystery. Notions of national culture and national homogeneity have little basis in reality. Britain, like most other countries, is the product of immigration. The two things that immigrants have in common is that they have nearly always been the object of prejudice and hostility when they first arrive in Britain, and that they have subsequently in different ways made large and valued contributions to the wealth and culture of the country (Hayter 2000, p. 165).

However, whilst diverse migrant populations grouped under the labels of Black and British do alter and disrupt any false notions of cultural homogeneity in the British national character, these disruptions, as Stuart Hall has observed, are both vulnerable and often temporary and guarantee no secure political gain (Hall 2004). If we consider Hall's (1992) earlier reconciliatory construction of Blackness and Britishness to rightly challenge the racist assumptions behind their presumed mutual exclusivity, Back's (1996) and Alexander's (1996) street level syncretic Black Britishness as creating important spaces to articulate other ways of being British, and Tate's (2002) provocative notion of 'Black Britain' being a 'subversive' location, we still must arrive at the conclusion that the ideological and political idea of Black Britain has yet to deliver the wide and deep socio-political gains which Black and migrant

communities need to make far reaching progress on the issue of racial justice and inequality in Britain.

I'm not sure on what terms we can safely talk of the Black British subject anymore if only a few of us can benefit from its promise. This coupling seems close to exhaustion in other ways too. Black and migrant populations in Britain can be willing transnational agents through our diasporic heritages that can provide cultural relief from our continuing social and political alienation. But we are also forced into transnational global networks of migration in order to provide cheap exploited labour to service the global economy, whilst at the same time, being maliciously maligned in this process.

As Britain becomes increasingly more disillusioned and anxious about the meaning of its own national identity and its influence and status on the global stage, we are also witnessing an increase in racial hostility towards migrant populations and widespread racialised religious intolerance of Muslim communities throughout Europe and the UK (Fekete 2009; Bhattacharyya 2008; Kundnani 2007). This xeno/anti-muslim/anti-Black/anti-immigrant -racism and hostility to cultural diversity has its roots in the traditional lexicon of right wing politics in Britain (Kundnani 2007). However, as Kundnani argues, since 9/11 and the riots in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford in the summer of 2001, cultural diversity and multiculturalism are now attacked by 'liberal' thinkers and those on the centre left for creating a generation of young Muslims who have forgotten 'what being British is about' (Phillips cited in Kundnani, 2007 p.123). Of the liberal left, Kundnani writes,

They have argued that an over-tolerance of cultural diversity has allowed Asians in northern towns to self-segregate, resulting in violent tensions on the streets of Britain. They have argued that public confidence in the welfare state is being undermined by

the presence in Britain of immigrants of a different culture. And they have argued that multiculturalism has encouraged Muslims to separate themselves and live by their own values, resulting in extremism and, ultimately, the fostering of a mortal home-grown terrorist threat (Kundanani 2007, p.123).

Whilst a politics of anti-Blackness (Bashi 2004) is still a fundamental component of western racism, anti-Muslim hysteria has widened the net of western racist discourse to include the vilification and dehumanisation of Muslim men and women (Bhattacharyya 2008; Kundanani 2007). Blackness has also been caught in this web of fear, particularly as two home-grown British bombers were of Jamaican parentage (Goldberg 2009, p.179).

Within this climate of pick and mix, multifaceted racism where racism switches and shifts targets within discourses of fear, 'Black Britishness' has fragmented. And like the contemporary struggle to define Britishness itself, the ways in which we have come to understand and come to terms with the meaning of 'Black Britishness' are also under threat. It can no longer be seen as the optimistic cosmopolitan experiment of the 1980s and 1990s that, in the end, bequeathed limited privileges to a few whilst establishing new hierarchies of exclusion for the rest of us.

And yet there is no doubting the fact that many Black citizens in the UK are quite comfortable with calling themselves British even more than some white citizens (*TimesOnline* 2007). Yet, within Black 'urban' working class spaces, Britishness can also be marked and reduced to a set of micro geographic coordinates. For example, so-called 'postcode gangs', where local working class and Black youths defend their area postcode or territory from 'outsiders', have divided Britain's inner cities into 'glocalised' microscopic bits of England, sometimes with deadly outcomes. Such micro geographic spaces can form the borderlines of

gang related violence and activity (BBC News 2007). They also reveal how these small residual spaces of belonging are related to a wider sense of powerlessness and social alienation. In official and popular discourse, these marginalized spaces, sometimes known as 'ghettos' or 'inner city enclaves', are seen as existing outside of the narrative of belonging to Britishness. These spaces are more likely to be seen as the source of contemporary Britain's problems, an illustration of the damage that is being inflicted upon the nation.

It is possible to argue that Black Britishness can also be defined in legal or structural terms such as citizenship and entitlement. However, this too is a precarious and an uneven position for many Black people in Britain when we consider the continuing criminalisation of Black life and the 'illegal' or ambiguous status of some recent 'Third World' migrants who are often left outside the entitlements of 'legal' citizenship. As a consequence 'Third World' migrant groups and individuals become vulnerable to all forms of domination exploitation, violence and widespread vilification. In *Divided Cities*, Stuart Hall (2006) argues that recent migration flows into the UK driven by new developments in globalisation, rather than easing tensions, have thus created a more complex overlapping system of 'civilisational' differences. These 'clash of cultures' and systems of difference exist alongside older racialised repertoires producing what has been called 'differential racism:' 'a racism of racialised differences complexly articulated in relation to, but also between, different groups' (Hall 2006, p.47). Hence a wider western culture of state power and domination over migrant citizens has produced sub-cultures of inter and intra ethnic hierarchies where marginalised groups seek power over other marginalised 'others'. Indeed, what does it mean to be 'Black British' when some of us who proclaim to belong to this secondary group now feel we have the right to attack and exclude new migrants because, supposedly, they have not earned the 'right' to belong or to call themselves British? Anecdotal evidence suggests that older settled migrant



populations are willing to partake in the domination and vilification of new migrant groups based on the misconstrued belief that these new arrivals encroach upon the basic resources earlier settlers had earned and struggled for the right to claim – resources such as housing, jobs and healthcare (*Dispatches* 2008). In these circumstances, ‘Third World’ asylum seekers, migrant workers and refugees find that not only are they living at the bottom end of the social hierarchy of ‘Black Britain,’ but also excluded from the historical and cultural narrative of how Black Britain is articulated, recollected and recounted. This exclusion may signal deeper problems of social insecurity. As resources become evermore finite, migrants may be feeling the need to protect and hold onto the very little that they do have.

Being both Black and British has become even more contentious and contradictory at a time where the notion of Britishness itself and what it means to be British appears vacuous and in crisis. Although Stuart Hall (1992) has previously argued that it was necessary for Black people in this country to be both ‘Black *and* British’ and thus to choose otherwise would be a site of ‘constant contestation’, Blackness and Britishness are yet to be fully reconciled. This is despite various efforts to reformulate an idea of Britishness that moves away from narrow exclusionary notions of whiteness in the hope that practical workable models of cosmopolitan multiculturalism can exist (Hall, Stuart 2004). Globalised forces such as migration and fears over national security and terrorism, coupled with complex articulations of race and racism, have remained potent obstacles to a ‘settled’ and formally accepted notion of cosmopolitan multiculturalism in Britain. These forces - globalisation and nationalism – alongside the break up of Britain into Englishness, Scottishness and Welshness, continue to undermine the political meaning of Black Britain.

**‘Constant contestation’**

As part of the condition of being Black in Britain I would like to suggest that ‘constant contestation’ is part of the historical and contemporary context that defines and shapes the production of Blackness in Britishness. I say this because although Blackness cannot and should not solely be defined by its proximity to racism, the racialisation of Black and migrant life in Britain continues to be defined by the vexed politics of racialised ‘difference’ and cultural ‘sameness’. The presence of new communities of Black and migrant populations from divergent geographical locations, living amongst un/settled and racially disenfranchised former migrant groups and white working class communities who experience uneven and unequal legal rights to citizenship, represents the continued rupture at the seams of what ‘Black Britishness’ means. Complex Black populations and networks are being formed in the UK along and across the lines of transnational settlement and movement. These lines are demarcated by a nationalistic discourse on race which ‘serves as an invisible border line demarcating both who formally belongs or not and what can or cannot be said about it’ (David Theo Goldberg 2009, p.176). The perceived ethnic stability of older communities understood to be ‘Black British’ is continuously being redrawn and dislocated by the recurring circuits and movements of people. ‘Black Britain’ has changed and is changing in tandem with complex notions of what Blackness means as a form of global consumption, cultural production and how Blackness is constructed in connection to multiple nations and geographical territories. The evolving presence of global diasporic migrant populations from multiple geographic regions in Britain represents not so much what it means to be British, but much more what it means to constitute global cultures and identities that slip into and out of nationalist forms of social cohesion. The presence of these complex emerging and circulating ‘ethnoscapes’ within the urban landscapes of Britain comprising of ‘tourists, immigrants,

refugees, exiles, guestworkers and other moving groups and persons' (Appadurai 2004) have since 9/11 and 7/7 sparked fierce debates over the success and failure of multiculturalism echoing the continued genealogy, ecology and economy of racism as it relates to the entry and exit of moving populations through British borders. The constant contestation of being Black in Britain will continue to exist along the fraught lines of racism, migration and belonging as social divisions deepen and as racism seeks new victims to blame for poor governance. Prescribed identities from the state designed to assimilate migrant groups will not ease these tensions. On the contrary, such tensions will be exacerbated by the State's grudging accommodation of some migrant groups, its systematic ill-treatment of new migrants and by the systematic failure to deliver progressive solutions to the problems of social injustice and racialised inequalities. For Black people, celebrating or promoting the aesthetic and anti-essentialist virtuosities of being 'Black and British' is no longer sufficient if a clear ethical stance on justice, equality and anti-racism is absent from its articulation. Old and new Black and migrant communities must refuse to partake in the processes of domination that dehumanise and devalue our existence. Instead we must see our different and specific migratory journeys as sources of shared struggle and the foundations for a robust debate on the ways in which we can pursue urgent political justice, freedom and equality away from racialised forms of domination within our local spaces shaped and determined by global forces.

### **Conclusion - Loving Blackness within a transnational context**

This chapter has attempted to show the changing formation of Black transnational populations, cultures and identities in Britain and the impact of the transnational space on the very notion of 'Black Britain' itself. This is taking place in the face of an increasingly strident

racism within popular public discourse against different marginalised groups. This in turn has produced an increasing climate of fear and hatred directed toward migrant groups who find themselves bereft of coherent anti-racist strategies to tackle a growing racist discord in Britain. This leads those of us who are interested in building anti-racist strategies to re-examine how varied forms of blackness can fight racialised forms of discrimination and oppression. How do we go about achieving an ethical politics of solidarity that can value human life when ‘difference’ is more often a source of division and conflict where ‘some are more equal than others.’ bell hooks argues that our postmodern condition should not separate the politics of difference from the politics of racism. Indeed, what she calls ‘radical postmodernism’ should call attention to ‘those shared sensibilities which cross the boundaries of class, gender, race, etc., that could be fertile ground for the recognition of common commitments, and serve as a base for solidarity and coalition’ (hooks 1991, p.27). But she also argues that radical politics are hopeless if they are devoid of a love ethic:

Without love, our efforts to liberate ourselves and our world community from oppression and exploitation are doomed. As long as we refuse to address fully the place of love in struggles for liberation we will not be able to create a culture of conversion where there is a mass turning away from an ethic of domination (hooks 1994, p.243).

In her seminal essay ‘Loving Blackness as Political Resistance’, hooks further writes:

A culture of domination demands of all its citizens self-negation. The more marginalized, the more intense the demand. Since Black people, especially the

underclass, are bombarded by messages that we have no value, are worthless, it is no wonder that we fall prey to nihilistic despair or forms of addiction that provide momentary escape, illusions of grandeur, and temporary freedom from the pain of facing reality (hooks 1992, p.19).

But is the concept of loving blackness, as articulated by an African American feminist speaking from the specific historical, social and cultural context of the African American experience, relevant to Black life in Britain? I am arguing that loving lackness is a necessary anti-racist strategy because it addresses the need to correct the increasing devaluing of Black life in Britain. Indeed there is little public debate on why the lives of Black and Brown communities in Britain should be considered as valuable and why our human worth should be defended. Whilst racism and racist discourses continue to evolve and spread in relation to old and new migrant groups, we are also witnessing a systematic failure to understand and address the impact of racist violations against racially marginalised groups. One important aspect of this thesis addresses the ways in which groups who are racially excluded utilise the transnational space in ways that contradict and transcend racism and its need for Black self-negation. In this sense, loving blackness becomes an ideology of hope which can form the basis for a new politics of solidarity that seeks to make connections between national and transnational forms of racism whilst recognising the need for discourses that value Black life and humanity as a whole.

In the next chapter I will examine the key African American theorists concerned with concepts of 'loving blackness,' including bell hooks, Cornell West and Michael Eric Dyson. I will suggest that discourses concerned with 'loving blackness' are a necessary and important critical intervention for a socially engaged public discourse on the transformative

power of love in validating and valuing Black life. However these discourses I argue are also concerned with the 'racial healing' of America as a nation. I will suggest that in order for loving blackness to be effective outside of the US it needs to be mobilised within a transnational context to address the global phenomena of racism.

## Chapter 6

### THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF LOVING BLACKNESS

#### Introduction

So far this thesis has attempted to engage critically with contemporary racism and its historical, representational, epistemological, social, and cultural formation in the context of transnational blackness in Britain. I have demonstrated how blackness has been denigrated through racialised discourses which in turn leave racial inequalities in tact. I have shown the many divergent ways in which different forms of blackness have been and continue to be denigrated, mainly within the western social context of Britain and the US, alongside the damage caused by historical and contemporary processes of racial violence and power. In this chapter the focus shifts to a discussion of love and repair as approaches to racist violations. This shift turns to a tradition of African American scholarship, where a response to racism and white supremacy has enlisted a passionate defence of a *love* as a weapon against multiple forms of domination. Within this debate, love is configured as a form of social justice and psychic repair against the socio-psychic devastations of racism.

bell hooks and Cornell West are two of America's most influential Black intellectuals. In very different ways hooks and West are concerned with a socially-engaged public discourse on the transformative power of love. For both intellectuals, love is a rich critical source for validating and valuing Black life in America in response to the continuing degradation of blackness and the persistent condition of white supremacy. In this chapter I

will discuss hooks' and West's approaches to love as a tool to bring into existence deep and meaningful social transformation on the issue of racism. In the face of social despair and the psychic-political vacuum left behind by the 'assassination' of racial justice, specifically through the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, this chapter will consider hooks' thesis on love to repair the damage caused by diminished forms of racial justice.

I will examine West's 1992 essay 'Nihilism in Black America' and his assertion that the African American community is facing its demise due to this 'nihilistic threat' (West 1992, p.38). For West, this threat emerges from deepening conditions of lovelessness and hopelessness in Black America. I will then contextualise West's nihilistic thesis in the context of Hurricane Katrina and the 'loveless' federal government response to this epic tragedy.

I will analyse the influence of spirituality and psychoanalytical theories within hooks' notion of loving blackness and summarise key arguments within hooks' work, specifically her politicised notion of a love ethic and how this ethic is tied to psychic and social transformations. I wish to intervene in this debate to reconfigure and mobilise loving blackness within a transnational context. My concern is that hooks' and West's conceptualisation of radical political love is by and large rooted within the specific discursive project of healing America's racialised condition. In this thesis the lens of blackness has a transnational incarnation that is immediately felt and understood by Black diasporic communities globally. Thus in order for loving blackness to become meaningful beyond the American condition, I am arguing that it is necessary to locate it within a transnational framework. I will conclude by suggesting that Caribbean families provide one example of loving blackness within a transnational context through migrant networks of love and care. However, these networks of care are also fraught with loss and pain when migrant parents are separated from their children, thus producing a form of 'tough love.' I am suggesting that



loving blackness in the context of highly racialised societies has a transformative role to play in 'transnational' networks of blackness where globalised, ethical discourses on validating Black life are both necessary and timely.

### **'Loving Justice' Malcolm and Martin**

Spirituality in Black America has been intimately woven into African American struggles for freedom and justice. bell hooks reminds us that the call for justice was one that too often ended in sacrifice. Speaking about the assassinations of Dr Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, hooks writes,

Both Martin Luther King and Malcolm X were assassinated at the point when they began to hone a truly revolutionary vision of liberation, one rooted both in a love ethic and the will to resist domination in all its forms. Martin and Malcolm did not live long enough to fully integrate the love ethic into a vision of political decolonization that would offer practical guidelines for the eradication of Black self-hatred, as well as strategies for building a diverse beloved community (hooks 2001, pp.213 -214).

The debate between Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X was in some ways a debate on what were the most strategically useful approaches to tackling and overcoming white supremacy and its ravaging effects on Black America (Dyson 2000). Was the message of 'brotherly love' offered by King in conflict with the call for 'self love' as espoused by Malcolm X? Both revolutionary leaders had engaged with discourses concerned with a love ethic as part of the solution to ending racism in the US. In the chapter entitled 'Loving Your Enemies,' Martin Luther King writes in *Strength to Love*,

Probably no admonition of Jesus has been more difficult to follow than the command to ‘love your enemies.’ Some men have sincerely felt that its actual practice is not possible. It is easy, they say, to love those who love you, but how can you love those who openly and insidiously seek to defeat you? Others, like the philosopher Nietzsche, contend that Jesus’ exhortation to love one’s enemies is testimony to the fact that the Christian ethic is designed for the weak and cowardly and not for the strong and courageous. Jesus, they say, is an impractical idealist (King 1964, p.47).

King goes further by suggesting that far from being a dreamer or an impractical idealist, Jesus was in fact a practical realist. For King, the practicalities of loving your enemy are firmly rooted in the principal of forgiveness. The ‘forgiving act’ as King calls it, should always be initiated by those who are the victims of injustice and oppression, as opposed to the perpetrators of oppression. For King an inability to forgive equals an inability to love. Forgiveness equalled reconciliation, a coming together, without which we are unable to love our enemies (King 1964, p.48).

Michael Eric Dyson argues that in King’s mind, white bigotry was a sign of the great need for white forgiveness (Dyson 2000, p.33). King believed in the humanity of Black people but he also believed in the latent goodwill of racist whites (Dyson 2000). As Dyson argues,

King’s claim that Southern Whites really hungered for redemption was proof enough to his Black critics that loving the hell out of bigots was a deluded, even destructive, strategy for social change (Dyson 2000, p.34).

Dyson suggests that King's strategy of loving your enemy gave Black people an ethical advantage of 'moral superiority' over whites, which was hard for whites to accept since Black people were supposedly racially inferior (Dyson 2000, p.34). Nevertheless, King's strategy of occupying the moral high-ground was no guarantee to ending racism.

For Malcolm X, love was manifested firstly in a love-for self engendered by acts of self-love, justice and atonement (Haley 1965). Malcolm saw that one way African Americans could combat the negative dehumanising affects of racism was to combat Black self-hate. Self-hate was contextualised within the aggressive US national framework of a racial segregation. Malcolm also contextualised this oppression within a globalised context in that by hating Africa, Black Americans would simultaneously hate themselves (Malcolm X, 1992). Thus the transformation of self-hate was linked to developing a psyche that recognised the conditions of racial oppression and exploitation in parallel to validating Black humanity, Black self-worth and a global Black heritage (Malcolm X, 1992).

For Malcolm, forgiveness did not rest upon the law of unconditional love for your enemy or upon a theological orthodoxy of God's love of all humanity. Forgiveness in Malcolm's view was only workable if clear conditions of accountability were in place. Only then could forgiveness have any deep or meaningful effect on America's racially fragmented society. Those conditions of accountability were atonement and justice. Although such conditions were seen as desirable by Malcolm himself, he remained doubtful as to whether a genuine culture of atonement was possible within America's white supremacist society. Even if a culture of atonement did exist, Malcolm questioned the demands that would be made on such a culture by asking what would the God of Justice demand for the robbery of Black people's labour, their lives, their true identities, their culture, their history and even their human dignity (Haley 1965). Hence by questioning the very demands of atonement, namely

reparations for crimes committed, Malcolm was assessing whether the damage from such crimes was even reparable, thus placing them beyond atonement and forgiveness on the basis of their gravity. Malcolm's political transformation after leaving the Nation of Islam had led him to believe that the goal of solving America's racial problems was the responsibility of all *sincere* people, Black and white alike. However, Malcolm had not adopted a position of racial integration as advocated by King. For Malcolm if white folks were sincere about ending racism, they would need to engage in decolonising white supremacist ways of thinking within and amongst their own communities. In the meantime, African Americans were to push forward with the work of healing the legacy of self-hate and engaging in their individual and collective recovery. With different groups working separately within their own communities, Malcolm envisaged the collective salvation of America's soul.

For Malcolm, America could only be salvaged if human rights and dignity were extended to Black folks (Haley 1965). Malcolm called for a deeper sense of humanity and moral responsibility in order to confront the causes of racial conflict in the US. For Martin Luther King, as well as acknowledging the darkness of racial injustice, he insisted that no permanent solution to America's race problems would exist until the oppressed developed the capacity to love their enemies (King 1963, p.53). Whilst King wanted to recognise and validate the humanity of white Americans by avoiding monolithic generalizations about whiteness, he failed to realize how the will to dominate and the will for power would not be relinquished by the capacity of Black people to forgive their oppressors for their violation against Black life. As hooks writes,

Focusing on the power of forgiveness, King also often overlooked the importance of accountability. For genuine forgiveness to be transformative, white people,

undergoing a conversion process, by which they divest themselves of white supremacist thinking, would necessarily have to focus on accountability and atonement. Having also abandoned a love ethic when it comes to the issue of social justice, most enlightened white citizens respond with rage at the suggestion that the nation must atone to its Black citizens for the unique genocidal assaults experienced in the past and present day. Every white person who has committed themselves to anti-racist struggle understands that there is no shame to be had in assuming accountability for the collective wrong done to Black people by the agents of white supremacy, most of whom have been and are white. Indeed, assuming responsibility and accountability empowers (hooks 2001, p221).

What remains clear within King's message of forgiveness is that firstly, loving and forgiving your enemies without the enemy taking responsibility for their actions, dissolves accountability, thus quelling any expectation held by the oppressed that their oppressor may want to end their reign of oppression. Secondly, the arduous work of ending oppression ultimately rest in the hands of the *oppressed* if forgiveness becomes the ultimate strategy against racialised denigration. Thus loving and forgiving your enemies become acts of faith rather than tangible actions towards ending domination in all forms. King writes,

May we solemnly realize that we shall never be true sons of our heavenly father until we love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (King 1963, p.55).

Although 'loving our enemies' could be read as an ultimate act of self-love, it is not. A requirement of 'loving' is that love itself needs to be reciprocated or else instead of love we

are left with inequity, imbalance and injustice. By forsaking our dependence on others to change and thus taking full responsibility to liberate ourselves and taking charge of our own path towards liberation, we need to be mindful that such a position can dissolve the accountability of those in power to end oppressive forces such as racialised and other forms of domination. To this extent, the abuses of the structurally powerful are allowed to continue, even if we feel we are doing the right thing by loving ourselves and loving our enemy through endless cycles of suffering. Indeed, structural forms of power and domination – capitalism, racism, (hetero)sexism - are dependent on a ceaseless and never-ending capacity for suffering by those being oppressed; ‘But be ye assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer’ (King 1963, p.55). Although King’s vision was to create a beloved community of equality and justice, ceaseless suffering would not furnish the path to a loving political society where developing a culture of repair would enable the healing and well being of the oppressed. A beloved community could only exist if racism and other intersecting oppressions of class, gender and sexuality were to be dismantled and where the social moral consciousness of the collective would afford all of its citizen’s respect and the right to human dignity.

hooks believes the death of Malcolm and Martin has left a legacy of psychic despair and devastation in African American communities:

No work has been done that examines in an in-depth manner the extent to which the loss of our leaders created major mental-health problems for Black people, whose wounded morale had been sustained and rejuvenated under their loving guidance (hooks 2001, p.214).

Citing her earlier writing on the same topic, hooks describes how a sense of collective grief had taken hold of the African American community with the assassinations of Martin and Malcolm. With their death went the hope that racial justice would one day become the norm (hooks 2001, p.215). The legacy of collective grief argues hooks, left an emotional vacuum which created the conditions for a mass embracement of the values of ‘white supremacist capitalist patriarchy,’

It set the stage for the takeover of poor Black communities by a drug economy which brought in its wake a hedonistic ethos of violence, consumerism, and amoral pursuit of pleasure powerful enough to usurp and destroy the foundations of communalism, a love ethic, and a belief in the healing power of forgiveness, faith and compassion (hooks 2001, p.215).

The African American philosopher, theologian, preacher and public intellectual Cornel West, refers to this condition as ‘the nihilistic threat’, a condition of lovelessness that has ravaged poor African American communities. Alongside hooks, West keenly advocates a love ethic as a means to transform social relations of domination. For West white supremacy has shaped the plight of Black America to such a degree that the overwhelming majority of Black people in America remain at the bottom of the social ladder facing what he sees as the most basic issue in Black America, the nihilistic threat to its very existence (West 1992, pp.27-47). The threat of nihilism is not simply a matter of relative economic deprivation and political powerlessness but primarily a question of the profound sense of psychological depression, personal worthlessness, hopelessness and social despair that have, in his view, taken hold of poor Black communities in the US (West 1992).

### **Cornel West and the nihilistic threat to Black America**

Often when Cornel West and I speak with large groups of Black folks about the impoverishment of spirit in Black life, the lovelessness, sharing that we can collectively recover ourselves in love, the response is overwhelming. Folks want to know how to begin the practice of loving (hooks 1994, p.248).

West argues that within public discussions on the plight of impoverished Black Americans, public opinion tends to be divided into two camps. The first camp belongs to what West calls the 'liberal structuralists' who analyse the continuing social crisis facing Black America through the lens of structural constraints and obstacles such as 'a subtle historical and sociological analysis of slavery, Jim Crowism, job and residential discrimination, skewed unemployment rates, inadequate health care, and poor education' (West 1992, p.37). The second camp, who he refers to as the 'conservative behaviourists', focus on perceived behavioural impediments that undermine Black social mobility, such as a waning protestant work ethic of 'hard work, deferred gratification, frugality, and responsibility' which 'behaviourists' believe are absent from much of poor blacks in America (West 1992, p.37).

West is critical of both positions, arguing that 'liberal structuralists' are concealing the threat of nihilism in fear that a focus on social despair, psychological depression and personal worthlessness will deflect our focus away from the structural obstacles to Black social mobility, whilst the conservative behaviourists not only misconstrue the nihilistic threat, they inadvertently contribute to nihilism by failing to acknowledge the insurmountable cases where Black people have adopted an ethic of hard work and have still remained at the bottom of the social ladder. He also criticizes conservative behaviourists for treating a discussion of Black victimisation by white supremacist practices as if taboo:



What is particularly naïve and peculiarly vicious about the conservative behavioural outlook is that it tends to deny the lingering effect of Black history – a history inseparable from though not reducible to victimization. In this way, crucial and indispensable themes of self-help and personal responsibility are wrenched out of historical context and contemporary circumstances – as if it is all a matter of personal will. This ahistorical perspective contributes to the nihilistic threat within Black America in that it can be used to justify right-wing cutbacks for poor people struggling for decent housing, childcare, healthcare and education (West 1992, pp.38-39).

West argues that African Americans had created cultural structures of meaning that were powerful buffers to ward off the nihilistic threat. His well cited essay entitled ‘Nihilism in Black America’ outlines the nature of this nihilism:

*Nihilism is to be understood here not as a philosophic doctrine that there are no rational grounds for legitimate standards of authority; it is far more the lived experience of coping with a life of horrifying meaningless, hopelessness and most importantly lovelessness. This usually results in the numbing detachment to others and a self destructive disposition toward the world. Life without meaning, hope and love breeds a coldhearted, mean-spirited outlook that destroys both the individual and others (West, 1992) (Italics in the original).*

West locates nihilism within an historical context of systematic Black oppression in the US. He charts what he believes to be the primordial moment of Black America’s ‘disease of the

soul' through the history of slavery and enslavement, arguing that the enslaved African struggle against degradation and devaluation was in part a struggle against nihilism. Hope and meaning were indispensable to the psychological survival of earlier generations of subjugated Black Americans. West puts forward the view that hope and meaning lay at the heart of generations of subjugated Black people and their unremitting struggle and their resistance against adverse New World conditions. For West, the fundamental enemy of Black survival in America is neither oppression nor exploitation but the *nihilistic threat*. This threat is seen as the main cause for what he sees as the collapse of hope and loss of meaning amongst impoverished African American communities. Black civic traditions and communal networks, such as the neighbourhood, the church, mosques and families, were major barriers against the nihilistic threat but have now been weakened:

These traditions consist primarily of Black religious and civic institutions that sustained familial and communal networks of support. If cultures are, in part, what human beings create (out of the antecedent fragments of other cultures) in order to convince themselves not to commit suicide, then Black foremothers and Black forefathers are to be applauded (West 1992, p.40).

In West's view, nihilism is the response of impoverished African Americans who are bereft of resources to confront the workings of the US capitalism. Whilst this does not mean that individual Black people are not responsible for their actions, it does mean that the nihilistic threat contributes to criminal behaviour, feeds off poverty and shattered cultural institutions (West 1992, p.41). West argues that what he sees as 'non-market values' such as love, care and service were handed down by preceding generations through traditional cultural structures

of meaning and communal networks of support. However, love, care and service have now been ‘edged out’ by American corporate culture. He suggests that in our contemporary reality, corporate market culture has also spawned a market morality that stigmatises blackness and Black bodies reducing them to objects for personal pleasure and gratification. However, West does not mention the ways in which these values have also become intrinsically co-opted and commodified by a culture of corporate morality, specifically if we think about what Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild (2002) call the ‘care drain’ through the global importation of care and love from poor countries to rich ones (I will discuss this point later in this chapter), or what David Theo Goldberg refers to as the ‘privatisation’ of wellbeing (Goldberg 2009).

Like all Americans, West argues, African Americans have been greatly influenced by nonmarket values. Corporate market institutions, particularly in the culture industries – television, radio, video, music – have had an adverse influence on the undermining of traditional morality in order to stay in business and make profits (West 1992, p.42). West writes, the ‘eclipse of hope and collapse of meaning in much of Black America is linked to the structural dynamics of corporate market institutions that affect all Americans.’ However, West warns,

Under these circumstances, Black existential angst derives from the lived experience of ontological wounds and emotional scars inflicted by white supremacist beliefs and images permeating U.S. society and culture. These wounds and scars attack Black intelligence, Black ability, Black beauty, and Black character daily in subtle and not-so-subtle ways (West 1992, p.42).

West's retrospective view of 'traditional' modals of Black morality and the durability of civic institutions of the past has been critiqued elsewhere. Michael Eric Dyson suggests that 'a belief in nihilism is too, well, nihilistic' (Dyson 1997, p.139). Dyson critiques West for his 'nostalgic' view of 'traditional values', values that West claims were established by our Black forefathers and foremothers to ward of the nihilistic threat (West 1992). David Theo Goldberg's response to West's defence of traditional morality notes that they are 'as tied to racist, sexist and homophobic commitments', as to love and respect (Goldberg 1997, p.121). For Dyson, West's theory of nihilism is driven by a type of nostalgia that casts the current generation of young African Americans as 'moral strangers', ethically estranged from the moral practices and spiritual beliefs that helped previous generations of African Americans through harsh and dangerous times (Dyson 1997). Dyson supports West's view that earlier generations of African Americans had refused to give up on the struggle for freedom and equality. Unlike West, however, Dyson sees that the determination to keep up 'the good fight' has not gone away and that the attempt of contemporary Black folk to make a way for themselves beyond the limitations of their circumstance has not ceased:

But I guess I just don't see where nihilism is winning, where the attempts of Black folk to make a way out of no way have ceased ... The real miracle of contemporary Black life is that there are still so many sane, sensible, struggling, secular, sanctified, spiritual and spunky Black folk who just said no to destruction way before Nancy Reagan figured out what crack was. In other words, those Black folk of the past are us Black folk of the present (Dyson 1997, pp.139-139).

For Dyson, nihilism is not as detrimental as West would have us think. The more or less exclusive focus on the effects of nihilism on the African American underclass in West's analysis obscures the ways nihilism impacts upon the African American middle classes. Do they not suffer from the effects of nihilism? Indeed taking into account the penetrative reach of market values, does America itself not have a problematic culture of nihilism which permeates through and across class, race and gender formations? As bell hooks (1992) has pointed out, Black intellectuals and professionals may have attained access to certain levels of material wealth but this does not make them more immune to the lust for money and power than any other Black group. Equally, she suggests, material privilege has not kept at bay the 'Black professionals' own encounter with hopelessness, helplessness and powerlessness. Indeed, hooks accuses Black middle class intellectuals and professionals of being willing to 'participate in the commodification of blackness in ways that ultimately perpetuate the existing social order' (hooks 1992, p.49). This is despite the reality that being Black and middle class in America is much more tenuous than it is for non-blacks occupying the same socioeconomic bracket (Goldberg 1997, p.112).

For Dyson, also, love alone is simply not enough to ward off the devastating effects of Black suffering. It must be accompanied by fundamental social resources such as employment, education, housing and food. He adds that these resources cannot guarantee a successful outcome (evidenced by the vulnerable social gains made by the Black middle class) but without them a bad outcome is highly likely (Dyson 1997). As hooks states clearly, any discourse on love needs to be strategically aligned to practical programmes for political and social transformation and empowerment (hooks 1992, p.50). Otherwise, we are in danger of perpetuating the prevailing social order without ending the conditions that support

lovelessness and structures of domination and degradation. Dyson argues that nihilism is not so much the problem but as more a *symptom* of the basic predicament of white racism,

I don't mean the here just the nasty things many white folk believe about Black folk. I'm referring to the systematic destruction of Black life, the pervasive attack on the Black sense of well-being, the subversion of Black self-determination, and the erasure of crucial narratives of Black self-esteem that are foundational to American versions of democracy. Nihilism is certainly self-destructive. That's because Black folk were taught – and have had it reinforced across time, geography, and ideology – that our Black selves weren't worth loving or preserving. Nihilism is the outgrowth, not the origin, of such harsh lessons. Without the destruction of white supremacy, Black nihilism will continue to grow (Dyson 1997, pp.136-137).

David Theo Goldberg makes the point that given the fact that intensified commodification and the morality of the market are conditions that also impact upon non-blacks in the US, West's employment of the nihilistic threat obscures a discourse on *how* these market mechanisms exacerbate white supremacy (Goldberg 1997, p.114). This is an important point. It is important because West is attempting to forge a critical position between what he sees as the conservative behaviourists and the liberal structuralists by establishing an existential analysis of the degradation of Black life. However, as Goldberg points out, if Black people are suffering more intensely from the accumulative threat of nihilism, then,

These effects necessitate an analysis of how historical shifts in the modes of accumulation transform white supremacy, and how such transformations have served

both to licence and rationalize different exploitative practices in relation to whites and blacks (Goldberg 1997, p.11).

Goldberg's critique poses a dilemma for West in that by focusing on nihilism, West unintentionally 'draws the focus away from the political economy' thus 'entailing that structural issues remain largely hidden from view' (Goldberg 1997, p.114). Thus West's position seems to make an involuntary slip into the conservative behaviourist tradition by ultimately proposing an existential 'self-help' strategy. I suspect that this slip is not what West intended in his analysis. Indeed, the strategy proposed by West to combat the perceived threat of nihilism is the politics of 'conversion.' For West, a politics of conversion, through new models of progressive Black leadership and the affirmation of ones own worth, would offer poor Black Americans the chance to believe there is hope in the future and a meaning to struggle:

Like liberal structuralists, the advocates of a politics of conversion never lose sight of the structural conditions that shape the sufferings and lives of people. Yet, unlike liberal structuralism, the politics of conversion meet the nihilistic threat head-on. Like conservative behaviourism, the politics of conversion openly confronts the self-destructive and inhumane actions of Black people. Unlike conservative behaviourists, the politics of conversion situates (not exonerates) these actions within inhumane circumstances (West 1992, p.44).

West believes that a love ethic must be at the heart of a politics of conversion. Whilst he sees the need for analyses of racism, sexism and class subordination, such analyses are not, he

believes, enough to tame the threat of nihilism. Nihilism he argues is a disease of the soul similar to alcoholism and drug addiction and can only be tamed by love and care (West 1992). Self-love and a love of others are both modes towards increasing self-valuation and for encouraging political resistance in one's community (West 1992). Crucially for West, these modes of valuation and resistance are not only rooted in progressive leadership but also in subversive memory, a memory that takes the best of one's past without romantic nostalgia and is guided by a universal love ethic (West 1992). However, as Dyson argues, it is precisely a nostalgic view of the past that underpins West's belief in the nihilistic threat (Dyson 1997).

In West's work the concept of love is closely linked to a concern for America as a nation in which nihilism is one of the many instances of cultural decay in a declining empire that is racially polarised (West 1992). Historically, the negative racial caricatures invented to define Black people and blackness itself as a separate sub-human form have evolved and morphed blackness into a devalued counterpoint to a white hegemonic norm. In 1982 West argued in 'A Genealogy of Modern Racism,' that the 'notion that Black people are human beings is a relatively new discovery in Western civilisations. The Afro-American encounter with the modern world has been shaped first and foremost by the doctrine of white supremacy.' West traced a genealogy of modern racism, in other words, the ideological route of 'white supremacy', back to the recovery of classical antiquity in the modern west and the 'classical aesthetic values of beauty, proportion and human form' as expressed within classical culture (West 1982). West refers to these western aesthetic values as the 'normative gaze.' He further argues that the normative gaze, alongside pseudo scientific disciplines such as phrenology (the reading of skulls) and physiognomy (the reading of faces), formed the intellectual legitimacy of white supremacy (West 1982). To counter the accumulative intergenerational affects of white supremacy (its historical, ideological and social effects on



Black life) and its intersection with the social neglect and urban decay, West's love ethic seeks to generate a sense of justice amongst 'downtrodden people' (West 1992). This justice would be a critical affirmation of Black humanity through self-love that works closely with a concern and love for others (West 1992). In short, love as a form of justice would be a cure for 'Nihilism.'

But again the politics of conversion may obscure the cumulative effects of long standing historically rooted and socially generated forms of racial injustice if sufficient attention is not given to the structural mechanisms that support Black suffering. As Dyson argues, a politics of conversion resembles a politics of self-help (1997). On its own, the politics of self-help is an insufficient mechanism to combat the deep and profound traditions and conditions of social neglect, economic disparity and political abandonment. In his book, *Is Bill Cosby Right (or has the Black middle class lost its mind?)*, Dyson explains,

The poor cannot erase the blight of white supremacy by behaving better, no matter what advocates of racial uplift or personal responsibility like Bill Cosby suggest. Assuming personal responsibility cannot remove vicious structural barriers to economic mobility. Exercising personal responsibility cannot prevent the postindustrial decline in major northeastern cities, nor can it fix the crumbling infrastructure that continues to keep the poor, well, poor. Being personally responsible can't stop job flight, structural shifts in the political economy, the increasing technological monopoly of work, downsizing, or outsourcing, problems that middle-class folk, who are presumed to be more personally responsible than the poor, face in abundance these days (Dyson 2005, pp.216-217).

In this book, Dyson is angry at Black middle class groups who have abandoned poor working class communities and at the same time accuses them for their own racial disenfranchisement. For Dyson, 'nihilism shifts the burden for getting Black America back on track to suffering Black folk. That seems a tall order for a people already strapped with sparse resources and weighted down with nihilism' (Dyson 1997, p137).

West is arguing in part, that Black people despite the major historical and social burden of systematic subjugation and disenfranchisement, are ultimately responsible for *instigating* the transformation of our condition. Whilst keeping in mind the structures of oppression, he is unwavering in his approach to highlighting the failings of Black leadership and the self destructive thoughts and actions Black people can have toward each other (West 1992). But as Dyson argues, the responsibility Black folk have to combat the perceived nihilistic threat is indeed 'a tall order' if the correct structure of laws, duties, and obligations that have the power to change behaviour are not in place (Dyson 1997, p.138). Using Martin Luther King's love ethic to illustrate his point, Dyson argues that, 'True enough, King's life and ministry were regulated by a love ethic. But he saw righteous power, that is, power linked to justice, as the imperfect but indispensable social translation of love' (Dyson 1997, p138). The harsh reality facing many poor Black communities in America is that social justice has been all too elusive and self-help has been one *de facto* mode of survival in the face of racial attack and increasing social 'invisibility' within the poor populations of Americas (Goldberg 2009). This crisis of social abandonment was no more evident when, in late August 2005, Hurricane Katrina hit the city of New Orleans. Once again a spirit of self-reliance became the imperfect but necessary strategy for self preservation in the face of annihilation by a catastrophic natural disaster and an astonishing act of government neglect.

**Neoliberal nihilism, Katrina and the (in)visible Black American underclass**

West is quite right in his analysis of the impact of corporate values and corporate institutions in shaping American culture in general and some aspects of African American culture in particular. This is especially true when we consider the marginality of countercultural discourses in popular African American musical genres such as hip-hop and r'n'b and the subsequent rise of ostentatious and garish modes of commercialised Black music that appear to celebrate the African American corporate male, the 'hypersexual' Black female body, and hip hop's 'entrepreneurial dynamic' (Dipannita Basu 2006). Aspects of Black popular culture in America are very much a part of the 'market morality' of contemporary neo-liberal corporate American culture. Whilst fetishised notions of blackness as 'hypersexual,' desirable and 'hyper-dangerous' abound in visual culture the majority of poor African Americans get caught between the hypervisibility of corporate neoliberal tropes of blackness whilst being largely excluded from the wealth and profits generated by the intensification of American capitalism and the commodification of blackness. As West argues, African American consumers of market morality are like most Americans, seduced by the comfort and convenience that capitalism has to offer. However, where many African Americans differ greatly from most other Americans, stems from the fact that a significant majority are victimised by the very system that seduces, forcing too many to remain impoverished at the bottom of this capitalist social order. The commodification of Black life has not only undermined blackness as a political category, it has also helped to entrench even deeper levels of lovelessness afforded to Black life and Black bodies. Commodified blackness and the reification of an elite class of visible Black individuals such as, for example, Barack Obama, Oprah Winfrey, Colin Powel, Beyonce Knowles, Condoleezza Rice, Russell Simmons, has diverted our attention away from the ways in which many African Americans continue to be

socially ravaged by the impact of race, class, gender and poverty discrimination amongst other forms of domination in American society.

*Nihilism and the Katrina catastrophe*

The crisis of lovelessness afforded to blackness literally surfaced through the flooded toxic waters left behind by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. In this tragedy, West's original observation that 'many Black folk now reside in a jungle with a cut-throat morality devoid of any faith in deliverance or hope for freedom,' would have been an apt prophetic description of Katrina in all of its ugliness and heartbreak as the overwhelming majority of victims, Black, Brown and poor, were abandoned and left to fend for themselves in the face of the damage and filth of Katrina's deadly flood waters. In the original social context of West's (1992) essay, the 'lovelessness' and 'cut-throat' morality that resided within the urban 'jungle,' although created by capitalist neglect, had belonged to America's Black underclass. This social group was the victim of corporate excess, government neglect and increasing welfare cutbacks. However in the aftermath of Katrina, clearly, a culture of 'lovelessness', 'cut-throat morality,' 'nihilism' and a lack of care, rested firmly in the hands of the neoliberal American government as opposed to the impoverished Black and Brown communities of New Orleans. As Dyson (2006) points out, both the Bush and Clinton administrations played a helping hand in making Katrina an epic and shameful catastrophe,

Clinton criticised Bush for his leadership in the federal government's response to Katrina, noting the disproportionate burden borne by the Black poor. Yet, because some of Clinton's presidential decisions hurt poor blacks, neoliberal neglect is sometimes just as large a factor in their suffering as conservative assault. It may have

been Bush's hands stretching forth to rebuke the interests of poor blacks in Katrina's aftermath, but the misery of the Black poor has been indelibly marked by Clinton's fingerprints (Dyson 2006, p.23).

Before the Katrina devastation, New Orleans could have been considered, to paraphrase West, as one of the many Black urban centres within the US where Black people were bereft of material resources to confront the workings of the US capitalism (West 1992). Dyson (2006) highlights how before the storm, more than 90,000 citizens of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama made less than \$10,000 a year. The New Orleans's poverty rate ranked seventh highest out of 290 large U.S. counties. Of all the children of African American descent in New Orleans 69 percent lived in poverty (Dyson 2006). As such New Orleans was an exemplary location for the festering threat of nihilism that in West's analysis had taken hold of much Black America. However, Goldberg has observed that the broader structural backdrop and political context of the Katrina catastrophe was driven by a longer trend of the 'social disappearance' and 'expanding invisibility' of poor Black and Brown Americans (Goldberg 2009 pp.66 -105). This 'disappearance' and 'invisibility' formed part of a broader commitment by 'fundamentalist fiscal radicals' to,

Defund social programs in education, health care, emergency management and response, popular culture and the arts through extreme forms of tax reduction while increasing military, security, and prison expenditures and investments [which] brings public funding to the point of bankruptcy (Goldberg 2009 p.80).

As Goldberg argues, this meant the conditions of wellbeing were increasingly privatised, in a process where the lives of the rich (overwhelmingly white) were being guarded from those of the poor (overwhelmingly Black and Brown), whose fate was more likely prison than work (Goldberg 2009 p.88). For the Katrina disaster this logic of privatised wellbeing meant federal resources to protect the city were becoming less and less available for its most vulnerable residents. As Goldberg writes:

The well to do could scramble for safety in their air-conditioned tank-sized vehicles while the poor were reduced to a decaying and in some cases deadly doomed stadium. The tens of thousands unable to flee the evacuation order in New Orleans as the hurricane bore down were overwhelmingly Black, as revealed at the Superdome and Convention Center. Family and other networks could support the mobile while the immobile were left to flounder in a flooded and rotting city, many losing contact with family members sharing their fate. The less lucky lost their lives. The wealthier got to watch from afar while the stricken got to share the streets with floating bodies, excrement, oil pollution. The privileged seemed to need no medical care while the poor restricted to the city got none, even where doctors from further afield were volunteering their help. The rich were free to roam the country, the poor rounded up and subjected to prison like conditions even when bussed off to safer turf, their crime nothing else than abject poverty and the color of their skin (Goldberg 2009, p.88).

Global news coverage of Katrina saw African Americans being described not as American citizens but, in the language of displacement, as ‘refugees’, as quasi-citizens. Within the visual literacy of globalised media, their abandoned predicament meant their horrifying story

became comparable to other narratives of displacement and dislocation much further afield in African territories. As phenotype, blackness once again became disassociated and displaced from the narrative of Western citizenship. As Anna Hartnell points out,

News reports did focus on the government's apparent abandonment of its own people, but a hysterical and arguably racist undercurrent was almost compulsively drawn to rumours of rape and murder – nearly all of which turned out to be untrue (Hartnell 2008[Online]).

In pointing to the underbelly of American racism and how racist attitudes determine and shape responses to catastrophic life or death situations, Katrina's victims were caught between the representational history of racialised blackness and decades of deep seated structural poverty and social neglect. Katrina also proved that the US federal government was not afraid to adopt military tactics honed in foreign territories upon its most vulnerable citizens:

In the name of securing the city, New Orleans was quickly turned into an armed military camp. Combat ready forces went door-to-door urban warfare style, kicking down locked entrances searching for survivors to evacuate at the end of often fully loaded AK47s. While critics were rightly bemoaning the dehumanizing conduct of war abroad, few seemed to notice that for domestic purposes America was mimicking tactics of militarization honed in the desert war (Goldberg 2009, p.89).

Amongst the death, suffering and neglect, those who were not wealthy and white were left to fend for themselves whilst waiting in misery for federal government assistance. Rather than

the threat of nihilism from within it was annihilation from without that many had to fear. Rarely have the victims of an indiscriminate natural disaster been criminalised and demonised in the minds of the public by the media and public officials, to the point where many were left to die unnecessarily whilst others suffered the humiliation of being labelled rioters, looters, rapists and hoodlums. At the point when the majority of survivors were trying stay alive in the face of a woefully inadequate emergency response by the US Government, Katrina's Black and poor victims were being threatened with a shoot to kill policy. Indeed, privately employed soldiers off-duty from protecting politicians and corporate entities in Iraq, were firing at random 'upon perceived looters with the tacit blessing of the more constrained National Guard (Goldberg 2009, p.89). Darnell Herrington, a Katrina survivor, recounts his ordeal of being shot and left to die in circumstances that invoke older histories of predatory racist murders;

My cousin hollered, 'You're shot.' I got up and tried to jump over the tree stumps on the street, and as soon as I got in mid-air another blast hit me in my back. And I fell on the ground again. Somehow it was a miracle, I got up again, and I began to run. I heard [the white guy] saying, 'Nigger, you gotta run.' I ran around a corner and I saw this Black guy sitting on the porch, and I said 'Man, help me.' And he said, 'Come on,' but he was in the house with some white people. When I went to the back of the house, this white lady said 'I can't help you. You gotta get out of here.' So I ran away from their house. And I ran up to this truck with two white guys, and I said, 'Please, please, please help me.' I felt like I was going to die. And the older white guy said, 'Get away from truck. We can't help you. We're liable to shoot you ourselves.' And they pulled off and called me a nigger. It's like [white people] were using the



opportunity to do something they've been waiting to do. And I'm thinking about racism and all that's running in my head. I'm like, 'I can't believe this.' After everything we've gone through, and everything I've been through, I would have never imagined this happening to me (Dyson 2006, p.16).

It is not clear who had shot Darnell. But it is clear that Darnell feared he was going to be punished by death at the hands of whites in an act of violent vengeance and racist resentment. When the hip hop artist Kanye West said George Bush 'doesn't care about Black people' he was articulating what some have described as a deeply institutional rationality of the US state government that has existed for the past 20 years:

Since the Reagan administration, and exacerbated dramatically under George W. Bush, the state has been restructured in such a way that poor people generally, which means especially Black and Brown citizens, are not to be taken into consideration, cared for, or exhibited compassion by the institutional apparatuses representing the state (Goldberg 2009, p.91).

A loving or caring response to save the lives of Louisiana's poor Black population seems not only unthinkable but delusional. It was openly reported that if the victims of Katrina had been overwhelmingly white Americans, then the response by the federal government and local emergency services would have been dramatically different (Dyson 2006). Indeed, white Katrina victims were actively separated from blacks in many of the holding centres for fear that they would be attacked. Behind such racial stereotypes lay some of the most basic reactionary assumptions behind our common sense thinking about race and how we act upon

race. On the surface level, these assumptions reveal deeply embedded social judgements attached to 'whiteness' (visible, worthy of protection, life and well being) and 'blackness' (hyper/in -visible, dangerous, worthy of death, punishment and suffering). Beneath the surface, however, as Goldberg argues, race constitutes the making of modern state populations;

Race accordingly has been one of modernity's principal modes, interactive with the likes of class, ethnicity, and gender, of categorization and abjection, incorporation and ablation, citizenship and alienation. In short, of belonging and distantiating, of claim(ing) and reject(ion) (Goldberg 2009 p.366).

Dyson suggests that the failure of the government to respond in a timely manner to Katrina's Black victims should be seen in an historical context of a segregated conscience within white society where Black grief and pain have consistently been ignored (Dyson 2006, p.24). It can be argued that the vast sums of money (\$2 billion) raised through charitable donations for Katrina victims (as well as for Hurricanes Rita and Wilma) were testimony to public acknowledgement and recognition of Black grief and pain. Whilst such an overwhelming charitable response demonstrated compassion for Katrina's victims, the government failed to capitalise on such episodic acts of care and concern (Dyson 2006). The Black poor of the Delta, Dyson argues, lacked the social standing that might have evoked empathy from George W. Bush and the federal government, 'If they had been white, a history of identification – supported by structures of care, sentiments of empathy, and an elevated racial standing – would have immediately kicked in' (Dyson 2006, p.25). As images of African Americans left to suffer the dehumanising effects of Katrina were broadcast around the globe, the deep-

seated disdain for the poor Black of New Orleans by the American government exposed the durability and structural apparatus of racial thinking, of racism and racial stereotyping that deeply permeate and compromise the purported democratic principles of American society.

When we examine the catastrophe of Katrina, West's love ethic is dependent on the 'turning of the soul' of 'white supremacist capitalist patriarchy' towards respecting and caring for the economically poor – Black, Brown and white working class communities made invisible by neoliberal neglect. As Katrina had shown us, in sporadic public moments of emergency and natural disaster, care and compassion can be funnelled through charitable acts of giving. However on a systematic structural level, an ethic of love as a form of social justice rests much more on the question of power and resources and how they are shared, controlled and distributed before disaster strikes. West's love ethic is an important critical intervention, shedding light on the necessity for a critically engaged public discourse on love. However, West's theory of nihilism carries the danger of eliding questions of accountability and structural change. The structural order of western states continues to be mobilised by race in spite of the best 'self-help' efforts made by blacks and others to combat racism. The consequences of not paying full attention to the social structures of race are that the conditions of those victimised by racism and the mechanisms that sustain racialised domination risk being made invisible.

The call to engage with the politics of love is a necessary one particularly at a time where a growing culture of lovelessness permeates the hostile attitudes and structural instruments of racialised states. Racialised states seek to govern those deemed different and 'other' on racially muted but no less racially aggressive terms (see Goldberg 2009). As hooks reminds us, it is impossible to talk about new ways of living without facing up to the realities that face people of colour where being poor in combination with the threat of natural disaster

can tip the scales for millions toward displacement, illness, and death' (hooks 2006, p.123). It is also impossible to talk about Katrina solely as an American 'national' disaster. Most tellingly, Katrina's Black victims and their representation in the media, was framed within discourses on migration and refugees. Black American citizens became globalised and linked to global Black populations, not as an act of liberty, but by being associated with other acts of marginalisation and exclusion. Their blackness was removed from western citizenship and relocated within the narrative framework of Black global migration as a trope for displacement, invisibility, erasure and non-belonging.

### **hooks and 'loving blackness'**

In her book *Salvation: Black People and Love* bell hooks (2001) argues that Black people were perceived by those who had colonised them as lacking the human capacity to love because they were dehumanised and uncivilised (hooks 2001). 'Love' as the foundation of political struggle has been a continuous and important theme throughout hooks' writing as a Black feminist cultural critic. From her essay, 'Loving Blackness as Political Resistance' to her treatises on love known as the love trilogy - *All About Love: New Visions* (2000); *Salvation: Black People and Love* (2001); and *Communion: The Female Search for Love* (2002) – hooks has been engaged with constructing a concept of love that can tackle the ravages of 'lovelessness' in American society. One example of lovelessness critiqued within hooks's work is the system of patriarchy. In *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity and Love* (2004) hooks argues that a system of patriarchy keeps men both from loving themselves and from loving others. As a consequence she writes,

As our culture prepares males to embrace war, they must be all the more indoctrinated into patriarchal thinking that tells them that it is their nature to kill and to enjoy killing. Bombarded by news about male violence, we hear no news about men and love (hooks 2004, p.11).

For hooks, love is both an ethical and indeed political response to a culture of domination and violence that is damaging in different and uneven ways to all of us as, but in particular for marginalised groups of Black people:

A culture of domination demands of all its citizens self-negation. The more marginalized, the more intense the demand. Since Black people, especially the underclass, are bombarded by messages that we have no value, are worthless, it is no wonder that we fall prey to nihilistic despair or forms of addiction that provide momentary escape, illusions of grandeur, and temporary freedom from the pain of facing reality. (hooks 1992, p.19).

hooks' theoretical construction of love is thus multifaceted in its response to the social ills that create and sustain what she often calls 'white supremacist capitalist patriarchy.' Love becomes the foundation at the heart of our political struggles to defeat all interlocking systems and forms of domination, including racism, sexism and patriarchy.

hooks's writing on the subject of 'love' as a force for social transformation is extensive as she believes that love is profoundly political (hooks 2001). Her essay 'Loving Blackness as Political Resistance,' draws our attention to discourses on blackness that 'choose to value, indeed to love, blackness' (hooks 1992, p11). These discourses are often at the

margins of dominant racist thinking, meaning they are not normally sanctioned by wider cultures of white supremacy. Unorthodox discourses on blackness are discourses that publicly validate and place value on blackness and Black life in a white supremacist context where blackness is more often essentialised as a site of denigration or pathologised as a human condition from which Black subjects ultimately wish to escape. In her essay 'Loving Blackness', hooks speaks of her frustration when trying to establish a discourse on blackness with students in her class beyond narratives of Black self-hate;

I asked the class to consider the possibility that to love blackness is dangerous in white supremacist culture – so threatening, so serious a breach in the fabric of the social order that death is the punishment. It became painfully obvious by the lack of response that this group of diverse students (many of them Black people) were more interested in discussing the desire of Black folks to be white, indeed were fixated on this issue. So much so, that they could not even take seriously a critical discussion about loving blackness (hooks 1992, p.9).

hooks is arguing that within a social context that overvalues 'whiteness' and a culture that devalues 'blackness', not only do white subjects learn to undervalue blackness, Black people and other non-white subjects are also susceptible to denigrating Black life (hooks 1992). Black self-hatred becomes a consequence of internalised racism. In her essay, 'Revolutionary attitude' she writes,

I can still see the images of young Black men brutally murdering one another that were part of the fictional narrative of John Singleton's film *Boyz 'N The Hood*. These

images were painful to watch. That is how it should be. It should hurt our eyes to see racial genocide perpetuated in Black communities, whether fictional or real. Yet in the theatre where I saw this film, the largely Black audience appeared to find pleasure in these images. This response was powerful testimony, revealing that those forms of representation in a white supremacist society that teach Black folks to internalize racism are so ingrained in our collective consciousness, that we can find pleasure in images of our death and destruction. What can the future hold if our present entertainment is the spectacle of contemporary colonization, dehumanization, and disempowerment where the image serves as a murder weapon. Unless we transform images of blackness, of Black people, our ways of looking and our ways of being seen, we cannot make radical interventions that will fundamentally alter our situation (hooks 1992, p.7).

Anti-Black socialisation becomes part of a process of psychological colonisation. It becomes a normative social practice in an environment where as hooks argues blackness as sign primarily evokes hatred and fear in the public imagination of whites ‘and all the other groups who learn that one of the quickest ways to demonstrate one’s kinship within a white supremacist order is by sharing racist assumptions’ (hooks 1992, p.10). Anti-Black socialisation can be defeated by decolonising the mind of white supremacist ways of thinking (hooks 1992, p.11). hooks suggests that discourses on Black self-hatred are the norm. Indeed she argues that Black people are both complacent about and complicit in society’s obsession with the notion of Black self-hate, so much so that when this hegemonic view is challenged by discourses such as loving blackness, the challenge is seen as ‘suspect’ or ‘threatening’ to the prevailing dominant social order. Loving blackness becomes an act of psychological

decolonisation within the social and historical context of racialised hierarchies, where the 'natural' or normative assumed superiority of whiteness and white supremacy are intimately tied to the faulty binary logic of 'inferior' racialised others.

Within this context, loving blackness becomes an insurgent radical act that goes beyond simply demonising whiteness and white people. On the contrary, loving blackness 'disrupts', 'unsettles' and 'subverts' the logic of 'racist narratives [and structures] that are constructed for the purposes of racial domination' (Farr 2009, p.159). Clive Headley (2009) highlights the connection hooks makes between the politics of decolonisation and her formulation of postmodern blackness. He writes,

A decolonisation of blackness is needed precisely because blackness, in its modern variation, was constructed in a context where only whites were viewed as the appropriate individuals worthy of being considered subjects. The construction of modern white subjectivity was concurrent with the project of European colonization, which, among other things, involved not only the project of political control but also a control of thinking about the very meaning of existence. Colonization also included a control of thought and imagination. Hooks believes that decolonization is needed in order to realize the potential of postmodern blackness (Headley 2009, p.149).

In her essay 'Postmodern Blackness,' hooks deconstructs blackness as an ethical project to denounce racism and to critique essentialist or monolithic interpretations of blackness. Indeed, she embraces a politics of difference by developing the notion of 'postmodern blackness', to 'affirm multiple Black identities, varied Black experience [that challenge] colonial imperialist



paradigms of Black identity which represent blackness one dimensionally in ways that reinforce and sustain white supremacy' (hooks 1991, p.28).

Headley argues that we should not be surprised by the fact that hooks considers postmodernism to be an effective tool for combating racism because 'racism is among other things, premised upon certain conceptions of blackness, [thus] eradicating racism entails interrogating oppressive notions of blackness' (Headley 2009, p.146). Indeed, racism as a system of thought and as a structure of domination is one 'grand narrative' that needs to be continuously deconstructed to eradicate the false 'truths' that underpin its logic. Arnold Farr (2009) argues that hooks' essay 'Postmodern Blackness,' is also crucial for understanding the Black identity politics. He writes:

It presents a problem that I think is central to hooks's contribution to race theory. That is, how is racial identity possible without some support for racial essentialism? Is racial identity necessary if we are to overcome racism? (Farr 2009, pp.159-160)

Farr (2009) argues that postmodernism has presented an important critical challenge to essentialist identities by challenging the notion that identity is static, fixed and universal. Thus postmodernism helps us all to realise that there are no fixed Black or white universal identities (Farr 2009). However, postmodernism is also awkward and problematic. In support of hooks's position, Farr highlights how postmodernism attempts to rid Black people of subjectivity and identity before we are even recognised as subjects:

Simply put, Black identity, although not universal or fixed, is shaped by its social/historical context. To be Black in America situates one within a social/historical

narrative that includes the slave trade, slavery and Jim Crow segregation. What binds together blacks in America is not some Black essence that is imparted to us by nature, but rather, a history, a history that included the attempt by white supremacists to deny our humanity, as well as a history of resistance and affirmation of ourselves as human beings. There are many ways to respond to this history, many forms of resistance, and therefore, many different ways of being Black (Farr 2009, p.161).

### *Loving Native Indianess*

Outside of the US, Emerance Baker (2005) utilises hooks's theoretical model of loving blackness in defence of native cultures and specifically native women storytelling cultures in Canada through constructing a notion of 'loving Indianess.' Baker argues that it is strategically necessary to develop a theory of 'loving Indianess' in the face of ongoing racism and oppression faced by native communities in Canada. She explains,

For me, a loving perception means loving Indianess in the face of our ongoing cultural genocide. It means that even while I'm walking in cities across Canada where our people are living on the streets and being ravaged by histories of cultural trauma, I need to be proud of the strength, courage, and optimism that being a Native woman has given me. All the while I still need to acknowledge that all this negative and hurtful history is a part of being Indian today, and is surely killing us. I also know that we need to continue to speak it, to address it in order for our cultural survival to continue (Baker 2005 p.6).

Baker is concerned with the ways in which Native women in Canada produce ‘loving spaces’ in their writing, spaces that affirm their lives and their bodies. She writes, ‘we don’t need to look far to see how Native women’s bodies are not loved.’ In conversation with other Native women on what it means to have a loving perception, Baker shares with her readers that ‘loving Indianess’ is complex. It entails establishing ‘intimacy and responsibility whilst simultaneously acknowledging the problems in our Native communities’ (Baker 2005, p.7). She also highlights the necessity of a ‘loving gaze’ by communities that face continuing forms of oppression and domination. By replacing ‘blackness’ with ‘Indianess’, Baker employs a strategy of ethical and political solidarity, moving beyond biological conceptions of Indianess or blackness as purely ‘racial’ identities whilst seeking to affirm such identities in the face of cultural genocide (Baker 2005). Hence ‘blackness’ or ‘Native Indianess’ can be seen as tropes against systems of domination that mark as ‘other’ those who are seen as outside a ‘white male heterosexual norm.’

Loving blackness seeks to ‘critically interrogate’ the logic of whiteness and white supremacy as an epistemological standpoint by which we come to know and understand the world (hooks 1992). It is radical in that loving blackness, ‘creates the conditions necessary for us to move against the forces of domination and death and reclaim Black life’ (hooks 1992, p.20).

### **Love and philosophy**

The necessary ‘politicisation of love’ is central to hooks’s construction of love as an active force. Here, psychoanalytical theories become a major thread in hooks’s writing on love. The work of psychoanalysts Erich Fromm and M. Scott Peck have heavily influenced hook’s notion of love as action and consciousness working together. Love is not merely a feeling or

something one requires or consumes, it is in of itself an action, requiring ‘a willingness to unite the way we think with the way we act.’ Love is something we choose to do rather than something that simply happens to us. In *The Art of Loving* (1995), Erich Fromm describes love as an *activity* that requires a constant state of awareness and alertness to become capable of loving (Fromm 1995, p.100). Our capacity to love should not be separated between personal and social commitments. He writes,

If to love means to have a loving attitude towards everybody, if love is a character trait, it must necessarily exist in one’s relationship not only with one’s family and friends, but towards those with whom one is in contact through one’s work, business, profession. There is no division of labour between love for one’s own and love for strangers (Fromm 1995, p.101).

Fromm is describing what hooks has referred to as ‘loving community.’ In her essay ‘Community: Loving Communion’, hooks writes: ‘enjoying the benefits of living and loving in community empowers us to meet strangers without fear and extend to them the gift of openness and recognition’ (hooks 2000, p.143). In order to understand and to take seriously how the love of self and a love of strangers are part of the same process, Fromm argues that we would need ‘a rather drastic change in one’s social relations’ from the ones we have become accustomed to under the system of capitalism (Fromm 1995, p.101). Fromm is concerned with the disintegration of love in contemporary western society and the incompatibility of loving principles with the principles of capitalism (Fromm 2009). One principle of capitalism is domination, another is the system of exchange. For hooks ‘A culture

of domination is anti-love' (hooks 1994, p.246). She argues that our contemporary culture advocates a system of exchange around desire that mirrors the economics of capitalism:

Though many folks recognize and critique the commercialization of love, they see no alternative. Not knowing how to love or even what love is, many people feel emotionally lost; others search for definitions, for ways to sustain a love ethic in a culture that negates human value and valorises materialism (hooks 1994, p.246).

Whilst arguing that capitalism is a complex and changing structure, Fromm nevertheless sees the values of the market economy as creating the conditions that prevent human beings from developing loving principles to transform society:

People capable of love, under the present system, are necessarily the exceptions; love is by necessity a marginal phenomenon in present day Western society. Not so much because many occupations would not permit of a loving attitude, but because the spirit of a production-centred, commodity-greedy society is such that only the non-conformist can defend himself successfully against it. Those who are seriously concerned with love as the only rational answer to the problem of human existence must, then, arrive at the conclusion that important and radical changes in our social structure are necessary, if love is to become a social and not a highly individualistic, marginal phenomenon (Fromm 1995, p.103).

In a similar vein, M. Scott Peck (1990) makes the claim that a workable and practical definition of love would consist of a unitary understanding that embraces self love with a love

of others (Peck 1990, p.70). He defines love as: 'The will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth' (Peck 1990, p.69). In Peck's definition of love, the extension of ourselves beyond our limits is labour intensive, requiring effort and a will to act. In this sense love is 'demonstrable or real only through our exertion.' Indeed, 'love is not effortless. To the contrary, love is effortful' (Peck 1990, p.71). This definition of love also requires that we make choices and decisions. Rather than seeing love purely as an inexplicable involuntary emotion that renders us powerless, love is something we can choose to opt in and out of. Hence Peck's use of the term 'will.' Peck makes a distinction between desire and action. Desire he argues, is intention without action. On the other hand, 'will, is desire of efficient intensity that it *is* translated into action.' Thus in Peck's view, our desire to love is not itself love, for love is an act of will: 'Love is as love does' (Peck 1990, p71). hooks shares Peck's vision on love in the hope and possibility that a love ethic could be at the core of all human interaction (hooks 1999, p.246).

hooks, and the authors who have influenced her conceptual understanding of love are attempting to unmask the common assumption that we, particularly those of us who reside in the western world, know how to love by virtue of belonging to 'advanced' capitalist societies. Indeed it is the derailment of this myth that uncovers a prevailing culture of lovelessness that functions within the material structures of western societies and seems to deepen social divisions of racism, sexism, xenophobia, classism, homophobia and the neglect of children and young people. An entrenched culture of lovelessness, and the belief that love is politically unimportant, prevents the development of politicised, practical and ethical model of love that can transform society (hooks 1994). It is our consumption of mythical forms of love through popular misconceptions of romantic love that engenders our alienation from knowing meaningful definitions of love beyond the individuated private realm. We are in love with the

mythology of love, specifically romantic love (*eros*), and are reluctant to face up to the hard realities of risk, danger and vulnerability that are a requirement of other forms of loving. And yet still, I support Fromm's observation that 'society must be organised in such a way that man's (sic) social, loving nature is not separated from his social existence' (Fromm 1995, p.104). In many ways, love is one of the few remaining 'big' myths or 'grand narratives' in society that we have been reluctant to dismantle. However, 'to analyse the nature of love is to discover its general absence today and to criticise the social conditions which are responsible for its absence' (Fromm 1995, p.104). hooks believes that we must choose to love to begin to move against the prevailing forces of domination and oppression;

The moment we choose to love we begin to move towards freedom, to act in ways that liberate ourselves and others. That action is the testimony of love as the practice of freedom (hooks 1994, p.250).

### **Spirituality and politics**

A further critical component in hooks's formulation of love is the relationship between spirituality and politics. hooks explains how the work of the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh has influenced her own understanding of spirituality by forging a bridge between theories of political recovery and spiritual recovery (hooks circa 2000). hooks's spiritual resources are vast and varied ranging from Buddhism, Christianity to self-help literature. Alongside the work of Tich Nhat Hanh and Erich Fromm, she also utilises the writings and sermons of Martin Luther King and the social activist and monk, Thomas Merton to make explicit the politicisation of love and spirituality. She writes,

The teachings about love offered by Fromm, King and Merton differ from much of today's writing. There is always an emphasis in their work on love as an active force that should lead us into greater communion with the world. In their work, loving practice is not aimed at simply giving an individual greater life satisfaction; it is extolled as the primary way we end domination and oppression. This important politicisation of love is often absent from today's writings (hooks 2000, p.76).

In *Sisters of the Yam* (1993) hooks's specifically addresses the spiritual needs of Black women by speaking openly about her personal spiritual outlook. She writes, 'lately, when I am asked to talk about what has sustained me in my struggle for self-recovery, I have been more willing to talk openly about a life lived in the spirit than in the past (hooks 1993, p.183). Whilst acknowledging the role of spirituality as a source of well-being in her life and in the lives of many Black women, hooks is careful to avoid promoting dogmatic and narrow religious systems informed by 'intense participation in patriarchal religious institutions' (hooks 1993, p.184). She is highly critical in her analysis of the 'blatant misuses of spirituality and religion' and the ways in which they can 'uphold the values of a production-centred economy' (hooks 2000). As she reminds us,

It is no accident that so many famous New Age spiritual teachers link their teachings to a metaphysics of daily life that extols the virtues of wealth, privilege, and power. For example, consider New Age Logic, which suggests that the poor have chosen to be poor, have chosen their suffering. Such thinking removes from all of us who are privileged the burden of accountability (hooks 2000, p.73).



hooks's spiritual outlook is not prescriptive. In other words she is not interested in outlining a particular religious perspective or spiritual belief in order to convert 'non-believers' to her spiritual practice. Instead, hooks is intent on sharing her insight into the ways in which cultivating a spiritual life can help to enhance self-recovery which in turn can inform our chosen political practice (hooks 1993, p.184). Again, hooks seeks to dismantle perceptual barriers between spirituality and politics by insisting that the two are intimately woven together,

I have seen that we cannot fully create effective movements for social change if individuals struggling for that change are not also self-actualised or working towards that end ... Toni Cade Bambara reminded us that 'revolution begins in the self.' She urged us to see self-actualization as part of our political effort to resist white supremacy and sexist oppression (hooks 1993, p.5)

It can be argued that like love, spirituality must have an ethical and political dimension to enable and facilitate social transformation. In 'Loving Blackness' hooks utilises James Cone's Black liberation theology by suggesting its critical intervention was significant due to Cone's insistence that the logic of white supremacy would be radically undermined if everyone would learn to ethically identify with and love blackness *as a site of difference*. Cone was not suggesting that we all must simply love blackness for the sake of someone having Black skin. He was as hooks argues, engaged in the critical awakening and education of readers 'to break through denial and acknowledge the evils of white supremacy, the grave injustices of racist domination' and to be moved to such an extent 'that they would

righteously and militantly engage in ant-racist struggle' (hooks 1992, p.11). She highlights that Cone's 'shock' tactics were used to stress the seriousness of the issue:

In his early work, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, Cone urges folks to understand blackness as an 'ontological symbol' that is the quintessential signifier of what oppression means in the United States. Cone calls upon whites, blacks and all other non-Black groups to stand against white supremacy by choosing to value indeed love, blackness (hooks 1992, p.11).

Cone was thus engaged with the process of unlearning white supremacist attitudes and values (hooks 1992, p.12). As hooks goes on to explain, Cone was not evoking the notion of racial erasure or 'colour-blind' humanism where racism would simply cease to exist if everyone could forget about race and see all of humanity as the same (hooks 1992, p.12). Despite the binary logic of Cone's argument and its essentialist veneer, according to hooks, Cone was making a radical intervention during the 1960s for two reasons. Firstly, he called for an ongoing interrogation of conventional thinking about race and strategies to eradicate racism that would radically undermine the logic of white supremacy. And secondly he hoped that whites could learn how to identify with blackness as a site of difference in order to scrutinise how society has learnt to over-value whiteness and to devalue blackness. Thus by scrutinising the regime of racism, valuing blackness would undermine racist logic. Seeing blackness as different rather than dangerous and threatening could then form the basis of political solidarity (hooks 1992, p.12).

The notion that difference can act as the basis for solidarity and that we can practice ethical love across difference has been critiqued elsewhere by Sara Ahmed (2004). In chapter

three, I used Ahmed's work on 'multicultural love' to illustrate her concerns about how a discourse on love can be used to serve the interests of western states at the expense of 'others' or outsiders who reside within but who do not necessarily belong to the 'nation.' Here, love demarcates belonging and bonding to the nation based on how the nation imagines itself, in this case as tolerant to others and outsiders, specifically those of us from ethnic minority and working class communities in Britain. This tolerant multicultural love is believed to be given or bequeathed to 'others' by the nation but the nation may feel this love has not been reciprocated back by 'others.' Ahmed wants us to question the pitfalls of this 'loving' narrative of collective belonging to show how love serves to both exclude and include particular groups to form the national ideal, in this case, the ideal of Britain as a benevolent multicultural nation to 'foreigners' and 'others' (Ahmed 2004). Indeed the national ideal can only work through the practice of exclusion. The failure of 'others' outside of the collective to return love to the nation leads to further exclusion:

I have suggested that the idea of a world where we all love each other is a humanist fantasy that informs much of the multicultural discourse of love (*If only we got closer we would be as one*). Such an ideal requires that some others fail to approximate its form: those who don't love, who don't get closer, become the source of injury and disturbance (Ahmed 2004, p.140).

The love ethic that hooks is proposing, I would argue works in a very different way to the notion of collective belonging outlined by Ahmed. Rather than asking that those that are excluded can be loved by becoming closer in proximity to the collective ideal (an integrationist model of love), hooks's intention is to dismantle the 'ideal' altogether as it is the

ideal that is indeed the source of a culture of lovelessness. Ahmed is concerned with the way loving difference can be easily confused with benevolence and charity which rather than transforming the status quo, inevitably leaves process of inequality and domination intact (Ahmed 2004). As Ahmed argues,

In fact, 'to love the object' is close to the liberal politics of charity, one that usually makes the loving subject feel better for having loved and given love to someone presumed to be unloved, but which sustains the relations of power that compel the charitable love to be shown in this way (Ahmed 2004, p.141).

Whilst very few of us would discourage the act of charitable giving to alleviate suffering and cruelty, Ahmed is correct to question the logic of 'loving the object' if this loving does not change or transform the conditions that are the source of suffering and cruelty. It is hooks's intention to turn our attention to those very structures and practices that create the foundation for domination to exist, which contribute to systems of inequality and a culture of lovelessness. Whilst hooks' politicised spiritual outlook may seek to bring us closer in proximity to each other, she too realizes that this would be 'humanist fantasy' if structures of domination remain intact.

The model of racial justice at play in US debates on loving blackness focus on the possible rapprochement between Black people to end racialised self-hatred and between blacks and whites in America to end racism. However, this thesis argues that blackness has a transnational incarnation that is more immediately felt by communities that understand themselves as migrants. Therefore, this thesis moves away from nationalised discourses on loving blackness in response to national forms of nihilism by stating the claim that there is a

need to approach blackness from a transnational framework. The transnational networks of love and care amongst diasporic Caribbean families offer one example of loving blackness within a global context.

### **Caribbean transnational bonds of kinship and loving blackness**

The politicised love ethic within the work of hooks and West makes specific local references to the racialised conditions faced by African Americans. As highlighted in the introduction to this chapter, hooks' and West's constructions of political love are more often skewed towards the 'racial healing' of America as a political project with social implications for the transformation of the nation. Whilst post-colonial politics have clearly influenced hooks' writing, there is no sustained engagement with the politics of loving blackness beyond America within her work, for example, specifically within transnational diasporic populations such as that of the Caribbean. I am interested in the ways that the politics of 'loving blackness' as a social/cultural practice works within transnational diasporic populations, particularly, for the purpose of this study, within the English-speaking Caribbean diaspora.

Many Caribbean citizens in the UK continue to sustain cultural and kinship connections 'back home.' Whereas politically centred forms of transnational blackness such as pan-Africanism were being performed in the public sphere, ties of kinship were also forming alternative personal spaces for connection predicated on forms of transnational blackness. These spaces facilitated a sense of connection and community where the affirmation of Black family life articulated through transnational Caribbean kinship networks sustained and nourished a sense of loving blackness in the racially hostile environment of Britain. These ties were crucial for maintaining cultural and economic links as well as networks of transnational emotional bonds.

Mary Chamberlain's study, *Family Love in the Caribbean Diaspora*, highlights that transnationalism has been a central feature in formation of the British 'West Indies' from its inception (Chamberlain 2006). She argues that as a region, the Caribbean has been at the centre of a global experiment whose colonial formation 'was within the framework of global capitalism.' Indeed, so far in this chapter we have discussed the politics of loving blackness in symbolic terms as a political theory to elucidate conditions of racial domination. However within transnational networks outlined by Chamberlain, we can apply the theory of loving blackness to understand how 'acts' of loving through Black transnational networks become practical models for caring for and validating Black life.

In her chapter entitled, 'Transnational Narratives and National Belonging', Chamberlain explains that the Caribbean's 'West Indian' formation, and its 'strength and livelihood was intimately bound up with the commercial, military and material ambitions of Europe' (Chamberlain 2006, p.94). Caribbean culture and society has thus emerged as inherently transnational as 'successive waves of migrants (free, forced, or indentured) creolized the Caribbean.' In turn as they migrated out of the Caribbean region to, for example, Canada, the US and the UK, they also 'creolized their new environments' (Chamberlain 2006 p.94). Chamberlain argues that whilst the growing literature on transnationalism relates to economic and political transnational transactions, very little attention has been given to the transnational practices of the 'family' as a social unit (Chamberlain 2006, p.91). Similarly, Saskia Sassen (2002) argues that the 'dominant account' of globalization in today's media, policy and economic analyses emphasizes 'the hypermobility, international communication, and the neutralization of distance and place' without considering how women emerge as economic actors in our global cities (Sassen cited in Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002). As both Chamberlain and Sassen have demonstrated, the dominant narrative of globalization

obscures alternative views of transnationalism, particularly from migrant families and migrant women (Sassen in Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002).

Citing the work of Susan Craig James, Chamberlain argues that the Caribbean is as much a state of mind as a geographic entity with ‘intertwining roots and overlapping diasporas’ (Chamberlain 2006, p.94). Chamberlain observes that the borders of the Caribbean are also shaped by emotional networks that stretch beyond nation and region. Here, political borders of belonging are shaped by transnational kin, where citizenship is contingent on what Chamberlain calls a ‘diasporic imperative’ (Chamberlain 2006).

Migration between the English speaking Caribbean and the UK (and other territories, particularly Canada and the United States), provided Caribbean families with a globalised perspective on family life. As Chamberlain (2006) highlights, the ability to travel was one way to better the prospects of the Caribbean family by their own utilization of global resources and networks. A ‘transnational imagination’ helped to build and facilitate close family ties across geographical borders, created employment and career opportunities, broadened the experience base of family members and strengthened family resources (Chamberlain 2006, p.111). In her study of 45 families from the British Caribbean, Chamberlain noted that with the Caribbean transnational family,

Links and networks are both multinational as well as transnational. Indeed the spreading or dispersal of material and emotional resources throughout the diasporic trajectory of each family provides diversity and security, strength and opportunity. Family members provide important points of contact, facilitating migration, re-migration and, of course, return. When the family is both the source of belonging and

the resource of survival, then identity is both portable and secure (Chamberlain 2006, p.112).

Chamberlain's account of transnational Caribbean families demonstrates that having a transnational sensibility is important for the 'dispersal' of emotional bonds of kinship across geographic borders. Rather than creating barriers to family closeness and connectedness, her study shows Caribbean families are utilizing transnational networks of communication and transfer to sustain kinship bonds of care and love that dissolve distance and sustain contact. These bonds are necessary for the wellbeing of Caribbean migrants in Britain, providing 'powerful directives for survival' in the often hostile environment of Britain (Chamberlain 2006, p.213). Within Chamberlain's account of Caribbean families in the diaspora, families are infused by a transnational sensibility built on narratives of closeness and values for 'loyalty, love and living good' (Chamberlain 2006 p.110).

It can be argued that Chamberlain's understanding of transnational Caribbean families is 'a celebratory narrative' of the politics of loving blackness within a transnational context. This celebratory discourse serves as a political counter-narrative to the history of pathological myths that stigmatise Caribbean families as dysfunctional, as lacking morals, structure and men folk, myths that have been in circulation from colonial times to the present day (Chamberlain 2006). Caribbean families also continue to be stereotyped as deviant, deficient and in a state of a perpetual state of meltdown (Chamberlain 2006). As Chamberlain shows, the families consulted within her research had also spoken about the bonds within their respective families in celebratory terms. As one respondent said, 'I strongly believe that you should never forget your roots', whilst another British born Caribbean woman stated, 'The sense of family, the sense of unity, was much stronger (than in English families) ... I'm



actually really proud of Caribbean families, that was something that we will always retain' (Chamberlain 2006 p.110). Here, cultural memory and bonds of kinship are important resources for Caribbean families in Britain to defend against social alienation and social stigma. Loving blackness within a transnational context of kinship becomes entwined with a 'diasporic imperative' and a 'transnational imagination' that provide avenues and ways in which Black family life can be 'reclaimed' and 'validated' across space, years and generations (Chamberlain 2006, p.221). In this sense, Chamberlain highlights how a transnational sensibility facilitates loving blackness through kinship networks and globalised family bonds. In this celebratory sense, Caribbean families are shown as complex and human, living through a uniquely transnational inheritance and across and beyond contemporary global borders.

However, in the malaise of everyday transnational Caribbean life, the dynamics of care and love are also mobilised through the politics of *pain* and emotional despair. In this sense a transnational sensibility of care and love is not only facilitated by the economic and communication networks of global capitalism, such a sensibility can also be crippled by them. The effect of migration for some Caribbean family members left behind whilst relatives migrate abroad has left some with very little to celebrate. Caribbean academic Audrey Pottinger (2008) argues that whilst migration had benefited Caribbean economies and had allowed parents to provide the necessary material and financial support for families and children 'back home', migration had also produced devastating psychological and social consequences, particularly for Caribbean children left behind (Pottinger 2008). Here, the forces of globalisation that give rise to a transnational sensibility – the movement of populations, the circulation of currency, and networks of communication - fuel the conditions that actually make loving blackness difficult. Claudette Crawford-Brown (1999) argues that

structural adjustment policies in Jamaica at the beginning of the 1980s ‘had the effect of biting hard into the pockets of low income families’ (Crawford-Brown 1999, p53). During this period government funding to support Jamaican families on low incomes was unavailable, thus leaving many with no option but to seek better opportunities abroad (Crawford-Brown 1999). This social crisis produced a generation of children and young people that were labelled ‘barrel children.’ Crawford-Brown notes that ‘barrel children’ are defined as ‘children waiting to rejoin parents [abroad]’ who in the meantime ‘receive material gifts in barrels from parents who reside in metropolitan capitals, but receive little emotional nurturing from these parents’ (Crawford-Brown 1999). The term was coined by Jamaican social practitioners to describe a specific category of children waiting to rejoin parents who have migrated. Whilst children had received material goods packed inside barrels sent by parents abroad, they were emotionally deprived as a result of absent parents (Crawford-Brown 1999, pp.53-54). ‘Barrel Children’ were often affected by painful feelings of rejection, abandonment and loss compounded by issues of separation and grief (Crawford-Brown 1999, pp.53-54). Remittances provided by migrant mothers, through the transference of currency or ‘barrels’, are one of the few ways migrant families can demonstrate care for their loved ones back home when working abroad.

Remittances can necessarily help to provide food or shelter or funds for education and small businesses. However, as Sassen points out the same global infrastructure that facilitate remittances allow governments, smugglers and traffickers to make money off the backs of migrant women (Sassen cited in Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002 p273). Sassen writes,

Through their work and remittances, women infuse cash into the economies of deeply indebted countries, and into the pockets of ‘entrepreneurs’ who have seen other

opportunities vanish. These survival circuits are often complex, involving multiple locations and sets of actors, which altogether constitute increasingly global chains of traders and 'workers' (Sassen cited in Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002 p273).

These global economies of love and care show how the practice of loving can be fraught with complex and uneven consequences producing a kind of 'tough love' for migrant women and their children. This 'tough love' demonstrates that how we love and care can be compromised and damaged by economic, cultural, political and social forces beyond our control.

Very often migrant mothers are not always in the position to take their children with them when they move abroad in search of work, particularly if they enter into global cities as undocumented workers (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002). Article 9 of the United Nations declaration on the Rights of the Child states that a child 'should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding' and 'not be separated from his or her parents against their will' (cited in Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002, p.15). As Hochschild (2002) reminds us, 'these words stand now as a fairy-tale ideal, the promise of a shield between children and the costs of globalization' (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002). Barrel Children are indeed suffering the costs of the 'feminization of migration,' the globalization of care or, what Hochschild has called the global 'care drain' (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002, p.17). As Hochschild highlights, many female workers from the 'global south' migrate to fill domestic jobs abroad in 'overdeveloped' countries. They are employed by First World middle-class families to provide love and care for their children, to fill the emotional gap created when both parents, particularly women professionals, go out to work to build their careers (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002). Because of the increasing demand for

domestic services in overdeveloped countries, love and care are being extracted from the third world to the first (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002). Global capitalism has not only intensified the growing gap between rich and poor, it has also created a care and 'love deficit' where 'Third World' mothers and third world children experience diminished forms of love as a result of capitalist globalization (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002). Hochschild explains that this deficit should be seen within the historical context of European imperialism, by which material resources were extracted from the Third World by force. The extraction of emotional resources by today's north is a form of coercion that is much more benign she argues, with scenes of 'Third World women pushing baby carriages, elder care workers patiently walking, arms linked, with elderly clients on streets or sitting beside them in First World Parks' (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002, p.27). She further adds that,

While the sex trade and some domestic service is brutally enforced, in the main the new emotional imperialism does not issue from the barrel of a gun. Women choose to migrate for domestic work. But they choose it because economic conditions all but coerce them to. That yawning gap between rich and poor countries is itself a form of coercion, pushing Third World mothers to seek work in the First for lack of options closer to home. But given the prevailing free market ideology, migration is viewed as a 'personal choice.' Its consequences are seen as 'personal problems.' In this sense, migration creates not a white man's burden but, through a series of invisible links, a dark child's burden (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002, p.27).

Of course, the conditions of globalised labour exploitation and chains of care have an impact on many different poor migrant communities. Globalisation has increased inequality and

exploitation and enabled greater exploitation of desperate migrants. A transnational discourse of blackness - as a response to racism over centuries - represents a particular and culturally rich example of an alternative conception of human beings and their worth. The insights of loving blackness can thus illuminate the challenges facing other communities - particularly those facing a similar fragmentation of the family and sense of self in the face of economic desperation.

### **Conclusion**

In this respect, loving blackness becomes a flexible tool to tackle the stereotypical racial image of excluded groups. It is to use blackness as a lens or a starting point by which we begin to ask questions about how our world has remained so attached to beliefs and systems that encourage local and global disparities. It is to continue to question the salient notion of white 'racial' superiority over all others and about why and how we have become used to living with devastating levels of racialised inequality. It is not the only lens by which we can begin to ask these questions. But it is the lens I have chosen for the purposes of this thesis through which to view issues of racialised forms of discrimination, domination and oppression:

Therefore, it is clear that to be Black is not merely a color nor simply to use the language of Black people, but to use it to express the most progressive political, cultural and ethical interests that, in a racist society, must always be for human liberation and, thus, against all form of oppression. Thus, it has become over the decade a trope of strong ethical dimensions with implications for a post-Western construction of reality (Asante 2007, p.154).

In the next chapter I will examine ‘Lovers’ rock’ music and its emergence in London during the nineteen seventies through Caribbean clubs and ‘pirate radio’ stations. Lovers’ rock was an integral part of the roots or ‘conscious’ reggae scene of the same period. I am suggesting that Caribbean communities in Britain also used the erotic and political intersection of both genres to reconfigure the ‘loveless’ and nihilistic representations of their identities found in popular British media discourses. As such, Caribbean communities had created a radical political praxis that asserted an ethic of ‘loving blackness’ as a way of restoring and validating their experiences.

## Chapter 7

### ***'LADIES A YOUR TIME NOW!'***

#### **Erotic Politics, Lovers' Rock and Resistance in Britain**

I felt I needed to be taken seriously as a 'conscious sister' in my teenage years, and so I developed a haughty snobbish disdain for all sorts of music that sounded remotely 'smoochy' or 'romantic,' things I considered highly damaging to my 'conscious credentials.' However, most of my female friends and cousins disagreed with my antipathy towards love songs. A reggae blues dance was 'lame' if the right selection of lovers' rock music was not played. The dance was a complete disappointment if my cousin did not 'get a dance' with the right boy, to the right lovers' rock tune, in her case, preferably Peter Huningale's, *Won't You be My Lady* or even better, *Hopelessly in Love* by Carol Thompson. My cousins' dad had the most meticulous and extensive collection of lovers' rock LPs and 45s which were lovingly and routinely polished with a special alcoholic fluid and a velveteen cloth. The fluid, the cloth and the treasured collection were all completely out of bounds to us as children. Any evidence of a previously unnoticed scratch or smudge would automatically be traced back to us with some serious consequences. Rather than face the consequences, we decided not to 'farce' with the treasured lovers' rock records, and left them well alone.

#### **Introduction**

This chapter is concerned with the politics of erotic love as expressed through the genre of lovers' rock music and its emergence inside a highly gendered, erotic and political reggae scene that developed within the social context of Britain during the 1970s and 1980s. I am

arguing that lovers' rock was an integral component of the reggae music landscape of that period. Nevertheless, in historical and cultural interpretations of reggae cultures, lovers' rock has a fleeting if not invisible presence and has often been obscured by the focus on its more 'raucous' relatives, namely 'conscious' roots reggae and ragga 'slackness' (Noble 2000, Stolzoff 2000, Cooper 2004, Henry 2006). On the occasions when lovers' rock has been inscribed into the historical and cultural narrative of the reggae music scene in Britain, it is frequently staged as an antithetical movement against the predominance and popularity of 'conscious roots' reggae (Barrow and Dalton 2004, Hebdidge 1987, Koningh and Griffiths 2003).

The positioning of 'lovers' rock against the hypothesis of 'conscious roots,' is theoretically and culturally organised along the lines of gender. Here, the genres are allotted to categories of femininity and masculinity. Lovers' rock is rendered as strictly Black female territory, whilst the oppositional politics of 'conscious reggae' is assigned to the interests and concerns of Black men. Although lovers' rock is by no means exclusively performed, consumed or enjoyed by Black women, the genre has commonly been designated as some sort of female sanctuary both within the dancehall space and within reggae culture at large (Barrow and Dalton 2004, Hebdidge 1987).

This chapter will cover new territory, in academic terms, by exploring the cultural politics of the lovers' rock genre. It will also explicate lovers' rock as a distinctly transnational cultural project that serves the creative, political and erotic impulses of Caribbean communities in Britain. The transnational spirit of lovers' rock has been briefly highlighted elsewhere by Paul Gilroy (1993). I wish to support Gilroy's claim that lover's rock has a distinctive transnational sensibility. However, this chapter will challenge the gendering of lovers' rock as a feminised space. Its aims are to retrieve a complex and



sometimes contradictory interpretation of the way lovers' rock both affirms and disavows its discourse on love whilst interrogating how these contradictions work through the politics of gender.

In the course of this chapter, I will examine (1) the cultural and political context of lovers' rock's emergence in Britain's urban cities, (2) the complex outcomes of gendering lovers' rock as a feminised space and (3) the implications of erotic love's intersection with oppositional politics through a 'subgenre' of lovers' rock called 'conscious lovers'. Through these key points of departure, this chapter seeks to rehabilitate lovers' rock by taking seriously its erotic political import into the reggae dancehall scene. I wish to counteract the critical and intellectual tendency to routinely undermine and thus devalue lovers' rock's significance within academic studies on the emergence of dancehall reggae cultures in Britain and the wider diaspora. Although I have used bell hooks' theory of loving blackness to defend the radical potentialities of political love throughout this thesis, I do not wish to claim that lovers' rock in itself is a radical vehicle for revolutionary politics. Instead I am interested in its discursive relationship with the dancehall space as a whole. It is at this discursive point of lovers' rock's intersection with other reggae genres that its more radical possibilities can be revealed.

This chapter is also concerned with how lovers' rock has been rendered and interpreted as a 'special' form of reggae for Black women (Hebdidge 1987; Barrow and Dalton 2004). Whilst there is nothing fundamentally wrong with the popularity of lovers' rock amongst Black women in the reggae dancehall scene, indeed many Caribbean women openly embrace the genre, I am suggesting that its designation as a 'special' female space is problematic. In this sense, the division of lovers' rock from the politics of 'conscious roots' and culture follows a pattern of thinking that reinforces rigid categories of gendered

participation within the dancehall space. This process of rigid gendering also works to downgrade and marginalise discourses on love, care and the erotic in such a way that erotic, loving and caring identities are perceived as being at best unimportant and at worst irrelevant to radical oppositional politics. I wish to demonstrate that such divisions obscure the discursive interplay of erotic love with radical politics and thus reduce the complexity of Black identities.

From the outset this chapter seeks to engage with the politics of lovers' rock through the political lens of 'loving blackness' as outlined by the African American feminist bell hooks (1992). 'Loving blackness' allows us to centre the humanity within blackness without essentialising blackness within humanity. It can help us to dismantle the notion of blackness as a human limitation and instead focuses our attention on the limits superimposed onto blackness by racism and other systems of domination. 'Loving blackness' enables us to highlight and reinterpret cultural practices amongst distinct and different Black communities that illuminate the ways diverse groups of Black people have expressed love beyond the perceived limits, myths and narratives mapped onto our existence. As cited in the previous chapter, bell hooks writes 'Loving Blackness as political resistance transforms our ways of looking and being, and thus creates the conditions necessary for us to move against the forces of domination and death and reclaim Black life' (hooks 1992, p.20).

I am suggesting that Caribbean communities in Britain have used the erotic and political intersection of lovers' rock and conscious roots reggae to reconfigure the stereotypical, loveless and nihilistic representations of their identities found within popular British media discourses on 'race' and 'immigration' (Gilroy 2006). Through this erotic/political connection, Caribbean communities created complex discourses that asserted a love ethic as a way of expressing and validating the complexity of their existence within

Britain's hostile metropolitan centres. However, this love ethic was complicated and sometimes compromised by gendered conceptualisations of love and rebellion that reinforced patriarchal discourses on what counts as being serious and valuable to the politics of Black liberation. Before turning to a detailed discussion of lovers' rock, I will use Black feminist theories to provide an historical context in which the corruption of Black erotic identities can be situated within racialised and sexualised discourses.

### **Black sexuality and erotic corruptions**

In Audre Lorde's ground breaking and often cited essay entitled 'Uses of the Erotic,' she writes,

The Erotic has often been misnamed by men and used against women. It has been made into the confused, the trivial, the psychotic, the plasticized sensation. For this reason, we have often turned away from the exploration and consideration of the erotic as a source of power and information, confusing it with its opposite, the pornographic. But pornography is a direct denial of the power of the erotic, for it represents the suppression of true feeling. Pornography emphasizes sensation without feeling (Lorde 2007, p.54).

Lorde's statement is a powerful critique of patriarchal thinking, where notions of femaleness as a state of emotional chaos and psychotic irrationality have denied the humanity of women by reducing our erotic identities to a monolithic pornographic state of objectification and our varied range of emotions to an inferior intellectual preoccupation. In the context of 'racialised' identities, constructing erotic feelings as chaotic, pornographic, irrational, sordid,

indecent or improper have significant ramifications for the production of 'acceptable' and 'respectable' modes of blackness and love. This is especially true when we consider how myths and fantasies concerning Black sexuality and race have stigmatised and corrupted notions of Black erotic identities as pathologically perverted and debased. Patricia Hill Collins argues that dehumanising images of Black sexuality are deeply rooted in chattel slavery where Black bodies were both commodified and objectified as property in the development of US capitalism (Collins 2005, pp.55-56). Collins further argues that 'the institutionalised rape of enslaved Black women spawned the controlling images of the jezebel and the sexually wanton Black woman' (Collins 2005, p.56). Whilst for men, the gendering of Black sexual oppression during chattel slavery not only produced the notion that Black men were 'big, strong and stupid' but that they are also prone to wild sexualised violence because of their 'racial' being (Collins 2005, p.56). Such myths have been a staple product of western culture perpetuating harmful, dehumanising and enduring beliefs surrounding the presumed deviant 'nature' and 'essence' of Black male and female sexuality.

Notions of Black female promiscuity also feed into other familiar stereotypes, namely, the irresponsible single Black working class mother dependent on welfare cheques to support herself and her illegitimate children. Cathy J Cohen (1999) states that,

We must remember that sexuality, or what has been defined by the dominant society as the abnormal sexuality of both Black men and women (e.g., images such as oversexed Black men in search of white women, promiscuous Black woman, and illegitimate baby producers), has been used to justify the implantation of marginalizing systems ranging from slavery to, most recently work fare. Throughout the history of the United States, images and ideas of reckless Black sexuality have

been used to sustain the exploited position of Black people, especially Black women (Cohen, 1999 p.35).

The enduring myths surrounding Black sexuality have indeed created much anxiety around policing the erotic sexual identities of Black people both from inside and outside Black communities. From 'within' the group, concerns that Black people should perform a role of 'respectability', particularly to figures of public authority and to white audiences, has led some writers to comment on the 'the politics of respectability' often employed by some middle-class and working-class Black folk as a way to regulate the behaviour of the so-called 'under-class' (Hibbingbottom in Cohen, 1999 p.72).

Policing the Black female body within reggae dancehall culture has also become a site of contention with regards to 'acceptable' and 'respectable' standards of behaviour imposed upon Black women. Carolyn Cooper (2004) defends the right of women in the reggae dancehall scene to openly express their sexuality and erotic identities, seeing this as a sign of sexual liberation. Cooper argues that when females in the dancehall display their bodies erotically many view their behaviour negatively. However she contends that the transgressive behaviour of women who intentionally go outside the boundaries of moral convention, allows Black women to assert the beauty of their bodies in a culture where Black female bodies are not valued (Cooper 2004). Lady Saw, one of Jamaica's leading female dancehall deejays has received heavy criticism for the sexually explicit content of her lyrics. Cooper highlights the criticism Lady Saw received from the American anthropologist Obiagele Lake who wrote,

Given Jamaica's patriarchal climate, one would expect sexist lyrics emanating from men. Unfortunately, women who have internalised sexist norms add to these negative

images. Lady Saw is one such songstress who plays herself and by association, all other women (Cooper 2004, p.100).

However Cooper defends Lady Saw, and other Black women, who choose to abandon the notion that women alone are responsible for the social codes of morality. She writes,

The flamboyantly exhibitionist DJ Lady Saw epitomizes the sexual liberation of many African Jamaican working-class women from airy-fairy Judaeo-Christian definitions of appropriate female behaviour. In a decisive act of feminist emancipation, Lady Saw cuts loose from the burdens of moral guardianship. She embodies the erotic. But one viewer's erotica is another's pornography. So Lady Saw is usually censured for being far too loose-or 'slack,' in the Jamaican vernacular. Or worse, is dismissed as a mere victim of patriarchy (Cooper 2004, p.99).

Following on from Cooper's analysis, Denise Noble's study on sexuality and the Black female body in the UK reggae dancehall scene, makes the point that sex and sexuality 'are celebrated as a source of power – for both men and women in dance-hall culture' (Noble 2000, p.153). Here, Black women transcend the politics of respectability to invest in the politics of reputation. As she explains,

Ragga shows how Black women also are invested in the values of reputation; how they utilize it to advance their social power and influence over men, and to contest dominant middle-class and Eurocentric notions of femininity, marriage and kinship (Noble 2000, p153).

Indeed, the politics of respectability can lead to devastating consequences particularly when notions of respectability and social acceptance silence critical issues such as the impact of HIV and AIDS in Black communities throughout the diaspora (Cohen 1999, pp.70-77) or the concealment of sexually abusive behaviour, or indeed the social rejection of transgressive sexualities or queer identities. In her study on the social, political and cultural impact of HIV and AIDS in Black America, Cathy Cohen highlights how middle-class sensibilities have fractured the Black community's response to the epidemic of AIDS as issues such as class, gender and sexuality illuminate fault lines in the notion of a cohesive Black community. Cohen also suggests that from within the Black community, attempts to reconstruct a public image of blackness suitable for the white gaze has formulated indigenous definitions of who *is* or *is not* Black. Such notions of belonging and exclusion are based not merely on physical characteristics but on 'moralistic and character evaluation' used to appraise community membership (Cohen 1999, p.74). Such 'public policing', as she outlines, demarcate the boundaries of the group identity, in other words the boundaries of 'acceptable blackness.' As Cohen argues, policing the visible boundaries of group identity can threaten the status of those most vulnerable in marginal communities (Cohen 1999). Whilst fully acknowledging the negation and marginalisation of Black communities by dominant white groups in racialised hierarchies, Cohen is equally concerned with the '*secondary process of marginalisation*' imposed by more affluent and influential members of the Black community. A sense of a shared identity within blackness can easily be mitigated and fractured by other identities that are seen as 'letting us down' and 'bringing shame and disgrace' to Black communities, identities such as 'underclass, homosexual, drug addict, or single mother' have become useful scapegoats in the 'secondary processes of marginalisation' (Cohen, 1999 p.75).

### **Historical legacies**

Histories of slavery and imperialism have impacted upon the sexual identities of Black men and women also. Under the system of slavery, strategies of terror such as the systematic rape and sexual abuse of Black men and women were essential to dehumanising Black people for the purpose of physical and psychological exploitation and domination as well as for the reproduction of future slaves (Collins 2005). Black people were seen as one monolithic group, believed to be intellectually inferior and cognitively docile. We were also considered emotionally shallow, psychologically immature and of an infantile disposition, thus lacking the true human qualities of empathy and love which characterised the experience of being human (hooks 2001). William Les Henry (2006) reminds us that African people were the only people in history to be reduced to three fifths of a human being 'as articles of commerce. No other members of the human family have ever been reduced to a mathematical equation (Henry 2009, conference paper).

Our status as chattel under transatlantic slavery meant African people were not considered human. Brenda Richardson (1999) notes our classification as chattel meant that rather than being human we were considered as 'moveable property' (Richardson and Wade 1999, p.11). The belief that Africans transported to the so called 'New World' were inferior was almost universally accepted. This legacy of inferiority still remains with us despite developments in the biological and social sciences which discredit the intrinsic concept of race as a false pseudo scientific doctrine (see Chapter 1 of this thesis). Such thinking is clearly evident if we consider popular notions of genetic and biological determinism as espoused by the Bell Curve theory (Herrnstein and Murray 1996). Or indeed if we consider Patricia Hill Collins's description of western social thought's continuous association of blackness with an imagined uncivilized wild sexuality which serves as a lynchpin of racial difference (Collins 2005).



In the context of racialised and sexualised oppressions, Black erotic identities in dominant western thought have thus been debased and separated from notions of love, care, emotion and human connection ( hooks 2001). Some of our most common representations of eroticised blackness have been reduced and shaped by the historical legacy of racial and sexual objectification. The feared and fabricated notion of wild erotic power supposedly innate within blackness has meant the Black body has throughout history been systematically punished and abused to curtail its dangerous and abnormal animalistic instincts. African male and female sexual identities have been historically tied in to the belief that Black men and women are sexually deviant and promiscuous and that such promiscuity stands up as evidence that we are deficient of deep human feelings and emotion and are consequently inferior humans ill-equipped for the 'higher' workings of love ( hooks 2001).

On the underside of this narrative, the amalgam of blackness and erotic feeling has also been considered as a mark of Black authenticity. Stereotypical and archaic notions that suggest Black people have more 'rhythm' and 'soul', that we can dance better, sing better and run better, shroud commonly held myths surrounding Black authenticity as an untamed eroticised bodily state. Such thinking presumes blackness to be more organic and earthly, bound to the rhythm of 'nature.' However, one of the underlying implications of such stereotypes is that such earthly and organic connections are again evidence of the false separation of the Black body from the mind and intellect. Within this dichotomy the mind in a white western context is rendered 'naturally' superior, holding the door ajar to civility and reason. Thus in a white supremacist context intellect becomes a prerequisite and innate composite of whiteness. The body on the other hand is rendered as a secondary, more 'primitive' source of power. Here blackness becomes defined for its usefulness as labour and as a site of physical spectacle. In such faulty logic, whiteness becomes the symbolic

quintessence of the highest intellectual agility whilst the agility of blackness is lived 'merely' through the body. When erotic feeling is conceptualised purely as an expression of bodily excesses we indeed are given a limited understanding of its capacity. A false dichotomy between our physical, emotional and cognitive selves begins the process of fracturing our humanness. A phoney separation of the self by compartmentalising the various elements of our very existence disallows more complex interpretations of erotic feeling.

Black vernacular cultures are important critical sites for locating the overlapping intersectional workings of the self, where the mind, eros and the body remain closely engaged as relational entities. Although the erotic remains a highly contested site in constructing notions of blackness, its emotive power has been the source for an expansive and abundant catalogue of love songs and stories within Black transcultural vernacular and performative cultures (Neal 2003). As I have discussed, the notion of the 'erotic' has also been a theoretical wellspring for Black feminist such as Audre Lorde and bell hooks, to be explored as an essential source of knowledge and power in discourses that construct radical politics that are deeply concerned with concepts of love and blackness. Lovers' rock is one example where Black people have created an arena to reclaim and express in public spaces the erotic dimensions of themselves in ways that transcended corrupted notions of Black sexuality. However, as I will now show the process of transcendence, whilst validating Black bodies, was also compromised by sexist notions of love and the gendering of the lovers' rock/roots reggae scene.

### **Lovers' rock and its transnational emergence in Britain**

The 'lovers' rock' nomenclature was coined in Britain by music producer Dennis Bovell and his co-producer and guitarist John Kapiaye, alongside husband and wife music producers Dennis and Eve Harris. Bovell, Kapiaye and the Harris team were all credited as the original architects of the lovers' rock sound in Britain (Garret 1985; Hebdidge 1987; Barrow and Dalton 2004). During the mid 1970s in the early stages of lovers' rocks development, producers such as Bovell were in search of a distinctive reggae sound that did not merely imitate the music being produced within Jamaica (*Independent* 2006). As far as Caribbean audiences in London and Birmingham were concerned, during this period, the best and most popular reggae was still being imported from Jamaica to England (Hebdidge 1987). Since the 1960s love songs have been an important part of the Jamaican reggae music scene. Singers such as Dennis Brown, Owen Gray, Alton Ellis, Kem Boothe, Sugar Minot and Gregory Isaacs are considered as some of the most important lovers' rock reggae artists of their generation (Hebdidge 1987). However, although Jamaican singers were clearly not averse to performing love songs, lovers' rock as a defined and identifiable genre was only given its name and greater definition in London during the 1970s, particularly after the emergence of British based lovers' rock musicians (Hebdidge 1987). When Bovell began putting the 'lovers' rock name onto his own record labels, the tag gradually caught on (Hebdidge 1987). Indeed, it was after the genre emerged in the UK that the lovers' rock name became attached to romantic reggae singers throughout the Jamaican diaspora. Bovell had previously co-founded the British roots band Matumbi in 1971. He went on to successfully produce Janet Kay's lovers' rock album, *Silly Games*, as well as writing and producing the soundtrack to Franco Rossos 1980 film *Babylon*. Many young female musicians including the late Louisa Marks, Marie Pierre and others had entered the lovers' rock scene through auditions and talent

competitions organised by Bovell and John Kapiaye at various venues across south London (Hebdidge 1987). Lloyd Coxson, a huge influential and important figure within the development of sound system culture in the UK, was instrumental in the recording Mark's '*Caught You in a Lie*' (Garrett 1985). Mark who is reported to have introduced herself to Bovell one night at a dance where his sound system, Jah Sufferer HI FI, were playing, was subsequently chosen by Bovell and Coxson to be the 'natural choice' to record a cover of the Donnie Elbert original version of the track. As Garrett explains,

Coxson produced, Euton Jones was the drummer, Webster Johnson played keyboards and Dennis did the rest. The sweet, yearning vocal – wherein Louisa discovers that the girl her boyfriend has been seeing is not, after all, his cousin – were recorded in just one take, and made the record an instant hit (Garrett, 1985 p.69).

Mark's brilliantly produced version of '*Caught you in a Lie*' remains a classic lovers' rock recording, belying any dismissal of the track as a foray into 'teeny popping' drivel and dross. The popular face of lovers' rock in the UK was frequently characterised by young Black women, like Mark, who were supposedly eager to cover African American soul songs on top of the deep and heavy baselines of roots reggae (Garrett 1985; Hebdidge 1997).

Lovers' rock with its distinctive 'tender' take on reggae, was also characterised by utopian and erotic narratives of romantic love. Its popularity was established through the 'free' (pirate) radio stations and underground local 'blues' party networks and venues across the UK during the 1970s and 1980s (Barrow and Dalton 2004, p.383). Despite the recent demise of vital reggae music venues in cities such as London and Birmingham, these local clubs had previously served as both porous and hidden locations for engaging with lovers'

rock as well as other transatlantic musical styles and cultures. In these intimate subaltern spaces, Black people come together for leisure, celebrations and entertainment. Sound system nights, engagement parties, weddings, christenings and Rastafari gatherings all provided 'safe' spaces of sanctuary where music was central to easing the tensions of urban inner city life. Lovers' rock musicians had carved out their own dynamic vernacular and rhetorical spaces within reggae. Young Caribbean musicians and audiences utilised other Black diasporic musical dialects and sounds by blending and interweaving the heavy Jamaican reggae baseline with the 'soft-soul' vocal harmonies emanating out from Chicago and Philadelphia, thus creating a unique diasporic lovers' rock style and aesthetic (Barrow and Dalton 2004). Dick Hebdidge (1987) argues that lovers' rock brought soul and reggae so close together that it really was a fusion of the two styles of music. This new genre had its own transnational sensibility. Lovers' rock signalled the emergence of an early '*Blak*' *British* transnational soundscape that would later give rise to UK soul acts such as *Soul II Soul* whose leading vocalist Caron Wheeler, had previously emerged as one of the early forerunners of the first generation of lovers' rock artists (Gilroy 1993; Henry 2006; Barrow and Dalton). At just fifteen years old, Wheeler formed one member of the trio *Brown Sugar* alongside fellow band mate and lovers' rock veteran Kofi. Wheeler's group were amongst that first crop of young women that attended Bovels and Kapiaye auditions in South London (Barrow and Dalton 2004; Hebdidge 1987). The group achieved success with tracks such as *I'm In Love With A Dreadlocks* and *Black Pride*, which signalled the arrival of 'conscious lovers', a politically inspired 'sub-genre' of lovers' rock which I will discuss further on in this chapter. In later years, Wheeler's 1990 debut solo album entitled *UK Blak*, would be instrumental in the formation of an 'outernational' understanding of '*Blakness*' in Britain. Her use of the term '*Blak*' (as opposed to Black spelt with a 'c') was introduced into to the

public domain on the release of her first solo project after leaving the group *Soul II Soul*. The cultural and political significance of the term Blak has subsequently been integrated into the cultural theories of both Paul Gilroy (1993) and William 'Lez' Henry (2006). Blak is mobilised within the critical theories of Gilroy and Henry to underscore their intellectual debates on the formation of a transnational, 'outernational' and countercultural 'blak' consciousness in the UK. Whilst Gilroy does not provide a precise definition or explanation to the term 'Blak', he locates the transnational logic of its meaning within the formation of musical subcultures that emerged out of Britain's urban inner cities. He argues that these subcultures drew heavily from a range of 'raw materials' supplied by transnational currents from the Caribbean and Black America (Gilroy 1993, p.81). Henry however provides us with a more explicit historical context for the emergence of the term. He writes,

The usage of 'blak' emerged in urban London during the late 1980's and when Caron Wheeler of 'Soul to Soul' fame released an album entitled 'UK Blak' for EMI records, the word became known in mainstream British society. By omitting the letter 'c', Wheeler was making a profound Africentric political statement that reflected a conscious move by certain members of the Black community to distance themselves from the negative connotations of Black as the colour of doom, oppression, bad luck etc. This meant that the term blak, which was created within the counter cultures of the Afrikan Diaspora, had much currency and signified an alternative way of thinking about the Black presence in Britain (Henry 2006, p.27).

Henry introduces the concept of an 'outernational consciousness' to demonstrate how 'Blak' British born Caribbean communities have used diasporic resources from Jamaican dancehall

and sound system culture to critique the effects of racism on the everyday lives of Black people in Britain. He also suggests that Black communities in the UK have continuously looked to resources outside of Britain to facilitate its cultural and psychological survival (Henry 2006). Henry develops the notion of an outernational consciousness by using biographical and ethnographic sources based on his life as a former deejay in the dancehall scene in the UK. He argues that UK dancehall culture, and in particular the role of the dancehall deejay in providing a 'critique from the street', has helped to create cultural interconnections across the African Diaspora. Henry also suggests that what he terms as 'self-generated concepts', such as 'Blak', were created from African centred outernational resources to allow the 'downpressed' Caribbean community in Britain to remove themselves from their peripheral placement in Europe's new world. He also suggests that the cultural templates of dancehall culture from the 45 inch single, 'sound tapes'<sup>1</sup> to the dancehall itself, furnished alternative public arenas for Blak youth in Britain. These cultural templates enabled them to link 'disparate elements of our history, making it outernational and whole' (Henry 2006). Henry argues further that the counter-cultural critiques developed by Black deejays in the UK dancehall context were an essential intellectual discourse for *blak* youth that highlighted the day to day problems of surviving within a racist environment (Henry 2006). Thus the development of an outernational notion of *Blakness* provided fertile ground for a discursive political engagement with the diaspora and with an oppositional critique of the nation state. By espousing an 'outernational consciousness', *blak* youths born in Britain developed critical perceptions and intellectual frameworks that deliberately transcended the racialised geography of Britain (Henry 2006, p.129). However, whilst I support Henry's thesis, he proceeds to overlook the historical and political context of lovers' rock in the

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<sup>1</sup> Sounds tapes were in common circulation during the 80's and 90's with live recordings of dancehall invents taking place through out the Caribbean/dancehall diaspora.

formation and intellectual conception of an outernational consciousness. Whilst acknowledging and mobilising the political and intellectual significance of Wheeler's use of the term 'Blak', Henry does not situate this critical moment within the historical and cultural emergence of lovers' rock music nor within the genres cultural contribution to the dancehall scene in Britain. After all, it was a Black female singer and former exponent of lovers' rock who had conceptualised the term *Blak* and mobilised it to demarcate the very specific historical journey of *Blak* Britain's cultural formation (Wheeler, 1990). The cultural context of lovers' rock was indeed critical to Wheeler's emergence as a politically 'conscious' lovers' rock artist, and too, as a soulful musician who successfully and significantly utilised a *Blak* diasporic political sensibility throughout her *UK Blak*' album. Her political affirmation of blackness in earlier lovers' rock tracks such as 'Black Pride' to her later albums as the leading vocalist in Soul II Soul also expressed politicised countercultural narratives that retell important stories about diasporic Black identities and histories in Britain. By overlooking the political significance of these historical and cultural continuities that emerge through a history of lovers' rock, critical interpretations of reggae dancehall cultures obscure the significance of complex discourses by Black women that affirm the intersection of our erotic and political identities. It further undermines the ways in which the intersections of these identities are indeed relevant to the development of oppositional politics and social movements in Britain. This oversight can be explained by a number of factors. One obvious factor is that within dancehall culture both in Jamaica and throughout the diaspora the position of the male deejay reins supreme (Henry 2006). Male singers, and to a lesser extent female singers, remain highly valued but in general terms occupy a less elevated status in contemporary dancehall culture (Cooper 2004). I am also suggesting that the skills of deejaying and singing are deeply connected to notions of gender that demarcate 'chatting' and 'toasting' (rap) as a discursive



space that privileges talk between males, whilst singing and harmonising within the dancehall becomes a designated space first and foremost for women. This is particularly evident through the overt and covert *gendering* of lovers' rock as a feminised reggae genre against the gendering of roots reggae and deejaying as the domain of militant or oppositional Black masculinity. Of course men and women could be deejays and singers. However it is the gendering and social construction of these musical forms that is under scrutiny. This chapter situates lovers' rock at the heart of the reggae music scene in order to demonstrate that such divisions are not always so clearly defined and are in fact more discursive than is often imagined.

Lovers' rock affirmed the importance of the 'erotic as an essential source of power' (Lorde 2007) in the formation and transformation of loving identities amongst the making of Black expressive cultures in Britain. Loving identities in lovers' rock are not solely concerned with the 'trials and tribulations' of interpersonal relationships although the trials of romantic love are without question the genre's dominant focus. Lovers' rock, however, suggests that the 'personal' erotic domain also shares much emotional and political investment in the 'conscious' politics associated exclusively with roots reggae culture. I am suggesting that within the social context of the dancehall setting the music of lovers' rock and conscious roots reggae both interflow and interplay between each other creating a discursively flexible space where public and private boundaries are at once established and at the same time agitated. By registering the erotic interruptive role of lovers' rock, the dancehall space moves beyond the binary juncture of 'culture' vs. 'lovers'' or 'male' vs 'female' space. Whilst these categories suggest that women and men have very different expectations from the reggae music scene, I would like to acknowledge the erotic interplay of Black female and male bodies engaged in rhythmic courtship and flirtation known as 'rubbin' and 'winnin.' These dance forms exercise

openly erotic and public displays of intimacy and erotic play that were equally anticipated by men and women alike. In this moment, the coupling of male and female dance loosen the rigid gendered boundaries of the dancehall space. These open public displays of sexualised intimacy between Black bodies were uncommon outside of the dancehall in the UK. Amorous and arousing dance movements, where bodies intertwine and press against each other, not only act as a metaphor for disrupting the rigidly demarcated boundaries of gender they also challenge wider public perceptions of Black sexuality. In this view lovers' rock music sits in tandem to roots reggae as opposed to in opposition to it. For 'love' as expressed in the genre of lovers' rock furnished notions of hot spaces, sensual sanctuary and intimate communion where sexual desire and closeness soothed and eased the tensions that surrounded the conditions of being Black in Britain. Lovers' rock generated its own heat which was juxtaposed with the politically combustible space of the dancehall as a countercultural revolutionary location for critiquing Britain (Henry 2006). The political and erotic concerns of Black males and females were articulated in the dancehall via the turntable and decks of predominantly male selectors who skilfully controlled the mood and pace of the dance by their informed 'selection' of records. Indeed, within the dancehall space, lovers' rock became gendered by male selectors and DJs as specifically 'female time' - '*Ladies a your time now!*' This rallying call could be heard during the blues party after a 'serious' conscious roots session had finished to be followed by the 'softer' intimate vibes of lovers' rock. For the most part, 'ladies' replied with agreement to this clarion call to take centre stage. The introduction of lovers' rock into the audio soundscape of the dancehall, signalled the interjection of a presumed 'feminised space,' something marked as 'extra special' for the 'ladies.' This designated 'extra special' temporal moment presumably for female participants obscured the fact that this moment was highly engineered, determined and eagerly anticipated by males.

Whereas Black male and female sexualities are often fetishised and objectified in the wider dominant culture, lovers' rock provided a countercultural space for the erotic expression of Black sexual subjectivity.

### **A feminised sanctuary**

Lovers' rock has a distinctive male tradition where artists and crooners such as Vivian Jones, Winston Reedy, Victor Romeo Evans, Peter Spence and Peter Hunningale have enjoyed popular success in the UK reggae charts on a par with if not more so than their female counterparts (Barrow and Dalton 2004). Frequent musical collaborations between male and female artists were also very popular. However it is the voice of Black females within the genre that I wish to focus on to explore notions of the erotic, love and blackness. As I have already suggested, lovers' rock was not exclusively performed, consumed or enjoyed by women even though the genre was commonly designated as a feminised sanctuary within the reggae dance hall culture (Barrow and Dalton). Dick Hebdidge argues that 'lovers' rock is important because it gave British Black women a chance to make themselves heard in reggae music' (Hebdidge 1987, p.131). This view is also reinforced within the dancehall space itself, where the genres preoccupation with love and romance is often deemed to be the primary and sole concern of women. In particular, Black women alone were presumed to be waiting in anticipation for a well needed break in tempo from the serious 'chanting' and 'chatting' performed by male deejays during a blues session. Within the critical commentary that exists on lover rock most commentators have been quite right to stress the popularity of lovers' rock amongst many Black female audiences (Garrett 1985, Hebdidge 1997, Barrow and Dalton 2004). Without doubt this is a correct observation. However, the literature on lovers' rock has not attempted to deconstruct the popularity of the music with Black women within the broader

contextualisation and socialisation of love as 'women's work.' What I am suggesting is that gendered notions of love combined with historical patterns of sexism and patriarchy have positioned women to be the 'natural' providers of care, nurturance, compassion and service. bell hooks argues that it is common for women to see themselves as intrinsically knowing more about love than men in her book, *Communion: The Female Search for Love*. She writes,

Women are not inherently more interested in or more able to love than are men. From girlhood on, we learn to be more enchanted by love. Since the business of loving came to be identified as woman's work, females have risen to the occasion and claimed love as our topic ... Our obsession with love is sanctioned and sustained by the culture we live in ( hooks, 2003 p.75).

In Dick Hebdidge's account of the lovers' rock scene he states,

What Lovers' rock did was to give young women a voice inside reggae without forcing them to deliver sermons when they didn't want to. It didn't ask them to lay down the law for the 'righteous .' In some cases, in records like *Indestructible Women*, it implied that all laws were made by men anyway and that women didn't have to bow down to any man-made law unless they wanted to. Most importantly, Lovers' rock made it possible for women to sing about real things close to home – things that affected *them* (Hebdidge 1987, p.135, emphasis in the original).

Indeed, there are spaces for women to claim some sort of female autonomy within lovers' rock, in spite of the fact that lovers' rock can be dismissed as putting women back into a

position of patriarchal dependency (Hebdidge 1987, p.131). However, it is also necessary to recognise that autonomy is never clear cut. It is always negotiated within relationships of power. It can be consciously fought for and gained, whilst also appearing to be real when in fact it is assumed, imagined or frequently lost. What I am really scrutinising here are claims that suggest that Black females simply found their voice, agency and autonomy in lovers' rock music, enabling them to articulate those 'things that affected them' within the broader 'masculinised' culture of reggae (Hebdidge 1987, p.135). With good intention, Hebdidge's assertion sets out to champion the cause for young Black women, both as active participants in the cultural production of lovers' rock and as active critical agents giving voice to 'their' own reality. Whilst this observation seeks to underline Black female autonomy, I believe it can also dangerously essentialize the Black female experience as it suggests that what actually affected 'them,' Black women (as opposed to Black men), was a specifically gendered female preoccupation with everyday love and romance. Thus love and romance are positioned by Hebdidge as being antithetical to those 'sermons' and chants of 'righteousness,' voiced by male contemporaries in the 'conscious roots' reggae tradition. Although Hebdidge acknowledges that some common yearning may exist between our 'yearning for a lover and deliverance from Babylon' (Hebdidge 1987, p.134) the assertion rests on a false dichotomy between female erotic desire and male political aspiration. Quite often the so-called 'sermons' were, as Henry (2006) as demonstrated, part of the everyday social realities that impacted upon the experiences of Black men and women. Within the UK reggae dancehall scene, racialised forms of oppression became entangled with complex gender politics and class marginalisation which were also interwoven into our loving and erotic relationships. Films such as *Burning an Illusion* (1981) and *Babylon* (1980) represented the intersection of these structural and social factors that affected both Black men and women in very specific ways.

The soundtrack to both films utilise a mixture of conscious roots reggae and lovers' rock as the cultural back drop to Caribbean life in Thatcher's Britain during the early 1980's. Within *Illusion*, the erotic is an important space for suggesting that loving relationships between Black men and women (romantic or otherwise) served as critical sources of affirmative and transgressive power that sustained marginalised communities. However these relationships were also under frequent pressure from social factors such as unemployment, social marginalisation, domestic violence and racism. Directed by Menelik Shabazz in 1981, *Illusion* tells the story of Pat (Cassie MacFarlane), a young Black woman and social aspirant who through her desire for a serious loving relationship with her boyfriend Del (Victor Romeo Evans) embarks upon an unexpected journey of personal and political transformation. When Del is arrested and imprisoned, Pat embarks upon a journey of transformation in what can be described as a process of physical and psychological decolonisation. In the film's most iconic scene Pat strips herself of her gold jewellery and wipes away her lipstick whilst staring back at herself in the mirror. She tears up her Barbara Cartland romance novels and starts to wear her hair 'natural' as opposed to her former straightened 'Europeanised' hair style. Del's court case comes up for appeal, but the appeal fails and Pat is devastated by the injustice metered out by the court. Pat is attacked in the street in a drive-by shooting by a group of racists on her way home and is subsequently hospitalised. Whilst making a recovery in hospital Pat is filled with rage and anger over her violent racist attack. She becomes politicised once and for all and returns to being an activist for Black liberation. Within *Illusion* lovers' rock is acknowledged as integral to how blackness in London and other Black urban centres was being formed at the period through the politics of race, gender and class conflict. *Illusion* demonstrated that Black consciousness as a counter-cultural critique of racism and imperialism was as 'close to home' for as many Black women for Black men. Furthermore,

these political factors were intimately connected to the trials and tribulations of erotic loving relationships.

It is important to remember that many female lovers' rock singers started out as teenagers during the early development of the lovers' rock scene (Barrow and Dalton; Garrett; Hebdidge). One group by the name of '15, 16 and 17' were exactly fifteen, sixteen and seventeen when they recorded their track, *Black Skin Boy*. It is commonly reported that Louisa Marks, one of the first pioneers of lovers' rock, was possibly as young as fourteen when she recorded her cover version of *Caught you in a lie* (Barrow and Dalton 394). In an interview conducted in 1985, Janet Kay lamented, '... I'm sick of the term 'Lovers' Rock.' It's got so that every time a woman opens her mouth to sing, she's stuck with that label' (Garrett 1985). Leading lovers' rock vocalist Caroll Thompson elaborates on how as a young Black woman growing up in England, the struggle to be taken seriously informed the direction her career would take as a lovers' rock artist. This was equally determined by her deep love and enjoyment of both reggae and soul music,

I grew up hearing the Supremes, Stevie Wonder, The Jacksons ... Then there was Minnie Ripperton, Aretha, so many. But *Catch A Fire* came out when I was still at school, and it really got to me – Bob Marley and the I-Threes. I really started listening and becoming aware of my roots, my culture, where I'm coming from, and how I should be. That's still there – I love reggae music, and that is my first, natural kind of music ... In Jamaica, its always been roots and the men singing about their culture and Rasta ... And because of that, women always had a low profile. At first it was the same in England, because you only had Louisa Mark, Janet Kay, 15, 16, & 17 and Brown Sugar who had any real success, and I don't think the producers really took

women seriously. They thought, 'Oh, they'll just get pregnant and give up, or a man will give them a whole heap of trouble, and there's no point putting money into it.' So they didn't really concentrate on them and give them the credit that was due. Then after a while it changed as they realised that women weren't stupid, that they *did* want to make a career out of singing (cited in Garrett 1985, pp.69-70).

Carol Thompson's commentary suggests that female lovers' rock artists had an uphill struggle to be taken seriously to achieve any level of autonomy or agency within the music scene. Indeed, as we will see, Thompson became emphatic about establishing the parameters of respect which determined how women were both perceived and treated as credible musicians. Having the will to sing was not enough. Thompson suggests that young Black women had to employ a high level of self-determination to navigate sexist obstacles and prejudices that faced many Black females within the reggae scene:

It depends on your mentality and what you want to project – if you're the kind of woman who wants to go through all that shit, then you go through it. If you show them that this is your profession and tell them that if they want a woman to mess around with, then they should go to a club and find one, then they'll treat you with respect. And in this business you have to have respect if you're a woman, otherwise you won't get far (Garrett 1985, p.70).

As Garrett notes, Thompson became so frustrated with waiting for attitudes and prejudices to change, that she formed her own company C&B, where she wrote, sang and produced her own records (Garrett 1985). In an industry where young women often felt pigeon holed by



male peers into being merely 'lovers' rock singers,' female agency for young women in lovers' rock could not be so easily claimed by notions of 'giving voice.' It is important to take seriously how such agency was negotiated and compromised by age, a lack of female ownership of recording studios, the rarity of finding female musicians to form female bands and the fact that some male bands were reluctant to be seen in public playing love songs for girls (Garrett 1985).

Thomson's account of her experience as a lovers' rock artist also challenges the presumption that Black women who were engaged with lovers' rock as both artists and as listeners had very little interest in a Black conscious political sensibility (Barrow and Dalton 2004; Hebdidge 1987). Subsequently, Black women were thus assumed to be generally disengaged cognitively, emotionally and socially with the political discourses and aspirations that had 'exclusively' troubled Black men. Hence, Black conscious music is presumed to offer very limited expressive opportunities for Black women in Britain in comparison to African American soul music:

And to most Black British girls living in places like Tottenham and Handsworth, Africa didn't look much like home. For behind the success and popularity of Lovers' rock among the female audience there was another message. The message was that the soul of the big American cities, of Aretha Franklin and Dianna Ross and new singers like Gwen Guthrie, was there to teach women about a different set of options (Hebdidge 1987, p.135).

As Thompson's discussion above suggests, rather than being an alternative option to conscious roots music, African American soul music was one option amongst the many

discursive transnational sound cultures that contributed to the syncretic noise of lovers' rock. I would also add that whilst Africa may or may not have looked much like home, Handsworth and Tottenham did not always *feel* much like home either, particularly as it was these locations that exploded with successive urban uprisings 'riots' during the 1970s and 1980s. These urban areas were centres of intensified racial tensions and social resistance in the UK where Black women were very much a part of, and in specific cases, the impetus for community struggles against police harassment and brutality. Take for example the shooting of Dorothy Cherry Groce by police officers in Brixton that sparked the Brixton uprisings of 1985, and the death of Cynthia Jarrett, who died a week later during a police raid of her home in Tottenham, an incident which became the main driver for the Broadwater Farm 'riots' (Gilroy 2006).

What is underestimated when lovers' rock is constructed as a sanctuary for 'female concerns' are the complex relationships that Black women have formed with the politics of Black consciousness alongside our own sexual politics. It is possible that Black women could be thinking and feeling through our political and erotic positionalities concurrently, without these identities necessarily being at odds with each other. The feminisation of lovers' rock does not allow for the intersectionality and multidimensional engagement of Black female experiences. These experiences can pull together the complexities of location, sexuality, race and gender alongside an engagement with love and decolonising politics that permits lovers' rock not to be simply antithetical to roots and culture but engaged in a much more dialogic relationship with notions of freedom and Black liberation within the social contexts of Black people in Britain and beyond.

### **Blocking Jah vibes**

As we have seen, the historical and cultural development of lovers' rock came during a period in the 70s and 80s where reggae music was characterised by the predominance of male lead bands and artists from the UK and the Caribbean such as Aswad, Matumbi, Steel Pulse, The Wailers, Burning Spear and Third World amongst many others (Barrow and Dalton 2004). Indeed, roots and culture became synonymous with blackness as a political category in reggae music. Conscious roots music incorporated an African centred narrative of Rastari repatriation back to Africa, resistance to and liberation from 'Babylon' oppression, whilst affirming and validating Black humanity (Campbell 1987). In 'conscious' radical discourses, love as a political category took a 'universalist' stance. Love was conceptualised beyond the domestic sphere and used to service broader political concepts of freedom and emancipation. Love as a form of psychological political insurrection demanded decolonisation of our minds from destructive and harmful notions of Black humanity. For example, Bob Marley charged us to, 'Emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds.' However Black humanity and redemption in reggae music was framed predominantly through male vocal chords. Black female participation was certainly evident in conscious reggae music. *The I Threes* from *Bob Marley and The Wailers* and Sandra 'Puma' Jones from *Black Uhuru* are just a few obvious examples. Indeed, Black female audiences also actively chose to occupy their own positions of solidarity within narratives of 'livication' and liberation, whilst seeking, feeling and believing in the liberative potential that arose from such verses of redemption. However, our loving roles also remain tied to the domestic sphere as the backbone that supported the 'worldly' work of Natty Dread in the quest for righteous freedom and redemption. This is evident in Jamaican lovers' rock tracks such as Horace Andy and Tappa Zukie's '*Natty Dread a Weh She Want*', where Rasta love is depicted as a superior if

not a more righteous form of loving. Andy and Zuki inform the girl that what she needs is the loving of a Natty Dread above all other men, so she can keep him and care for him without the need to share him. Thus, the girl is enlisted to serve and facilitate the needs of erotic righteous loving.

Indeed, female or feminised loving could also be seen to be standing in the way of 'righteous' men. In examining Bob Marley's love song '*Waiting In Vain*' Carolyn Cooper argues in 'Virginity Revamped' that Marley's lyrics express an ambivalent representation of women and male sexual desire (Cooper 2000). Cooper suggests that from a male point of view, the transgressive woman in the song becomes synonymous with Babylon as whore, becoming an 'alluring entrapper, seducing the Rastaman from the path of righteousness' (Cooper 2000, p.350). Similarly, in the UK, it was said that many male musicians frowned upon playing lovers' rock music and felt that any female presence on stage could actually be 'blocking the vibes coming from Jah' (Garrett 1985). Lovers' rock was not only characterised as the softer, sensitive side of reggae it was also seen as less serious with minimal political or spiritual value. It was commonly seen as a musical interlude where male and female artists and audiences could turn away from the serious conscious politics so common to roots reggae and focus on the frivolous and trifling matter of love. As one critic writes,

For teenage Black girls, whose dreams of escape were more likely to involve marriage to a caring man than repatriation to Africa, lovers' rock 45s presented a welcome alternative to the diet of militant roots being presented by many UK sound systems (Barrow and Dalton 2004, p.396).

The division of 'lovers' from the labour of radical 'conscious roots and culture' follows a pattern of thinking that engenders what counts as 'serious' and 'trivial' to the transformative political concerns of Black people. This creates a false and gendered dichotomy between erotic love and rebel politics, which in turn become gendered as female and male respectively. As Audre Lorde points out this pattern of thinking is a problem that falsely separates the spiritual (psychic and emotional) from the political (Lorde 2007, p.56). Reinforcing this dichotomy between rebel politics and erotic love, 'Poko' Walford Tyson, lead vocalist of the 1970s roots reggae band Misty Roots from Southall, London puts it like this, '[we] no longer wanted to sing about love and women. We wanted to do progressive protest music' (Simpson 2007). It appears that for Poko 'progressive' music was defined by the expulsion of both women and love from their repertoire of political songs. Indeed, for Poko, the frontline of serious struggle was shared with white punk bands of that era at gigs such as 'Rock Against Racism.' The guitarist, Peter Harris, described the bond formed between roots reggae bands and punk bands as 'very simple.' He explains, 'The punks were the same ... They were seen as dregs of society. We were all anti-establishment, so there was a natural synergy between us' (Simpson 2007). Harris's comments suggest that much more rebellious camaraderie and bonding appeared along the lines of a 'natural' masculinity between Black and white male dissidents than across the lines of gender between Black males and Black females. For 'Poko' and Harris, women could be seen as a monolithic obstacle, 'blocking' or 'getting in the way' of serious political and spiritual concerns. However, solidarity between Black roots reggae bands and white punk bands could be conceived in their view as being much more dangerous and subversive. Nevertheless, musical collaborations between lovers' rock singers and conscious roots artists from Jamaica and the UK were extremely popular, particularly amongst 'conscious lovers' aficionados.

**'Conscious lovers'**

'Conscious lovers' is described as a 'sub genre' of lovers' rock that combines the melodic style of the lovers' rock genre mixed with the politics of Black consciousness (Barrow and Dalton 2004). The group *Brown Sugar*, one of the first generations of lovers' rock recording artists in the UK to perform 'conscious lovers' had recorded a track penned by John Kipaye about a Black girl falling in love with a Rastafari boy. On the sleeve notes that accompany the music CD, *The Lovers' Rock Story* (2004), Kipaye recalls that *I'm in love with a Dreadlocks* was written as a response to the Junior Byles song *Curly Locks*, released previously by lovers' rock producer Dennis Harris. In Byles's track the girl falls in love with a Rasta much to the disapproval of her parents. *Brown Sugar's* rhetorical response to the Byles record echoes a similar sentiment found in Horace Andy and Papa Zuki's track *Natty Dread a Weh She Want*, as highlighted above, where the object of female desire is no ordinary 'balhead bwoy',<sup>2</sup> but a 'conscious Dread.' *I'm in Love* was remixed and re-released again by former *Brown Sugar* member Kofi in the late 1980s under the title of *Dread A Who She Love*. Only on this occasion, Wolverhampton's veteran deejay/dub poet, Macka B was enlisted onto the track to 'chat' a verse, providing a dialogical space for Rastafari toasting and lovers' rock singing:

(Kofi)

*I'm in love with a Dreadlocks'  
And I never felt this way before,  
I'm in love with a Dreadlocks'  
And everyday I love him more and more  
We live righteously, in love and harmony  
And I just want the world to know  
I'm so in love*

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<sup>2</sup> Ball head in Jamaican culture was the antithesis to a conscious Rastafari male. In Bob Marley's song 'Crazy Ballhead' he threatens to chase them out of town. Here ballhead becomes synonymous with an intermediary social class of Black males with middle class sensibilities. In another context, it can also suggest a lack of political and spiritual awareness presumed to be an inherent aspect of Rastafari culture.

(Macka B)

*Dread a weh she love*  
*Dread a weh she love*  
*Natty Dread a weh she love*

The track suggest that Rastafari loving supplies 'honourable' feelings of love through a form of virtuous 'righteous patriarchy.' It further suggests that Rastafari 'conscious' love sees the concept of 'honourable' coupling as integral to the reproduction of harmonious community and 'decent' living. The track thus combines a number of different loves, erotic love (eros), love of community (philia) and righteous godly love (agape). However, erotic love is somewhat diluted by its 'cleaner' siblings, 'philia' and 'agape.' Any trace of Black female sexual agency, of the erotic body, or Black sexual subjectivity is contained within the safe and sanitary boundaries of exalted Rastafarian values. Denise Noble (2000) cites the work of bell hooks to make a salient point about representations of Black female sexuality by Black men within Black popular culture. hooks argues that, 'In telling us what they think about [Black women] they are telling us what they think about themselves, their values, their desires. She is the object that stimulates the discourse. They are its subjects' (in Hesse 2000 p.164). Noble uses this critique to deconstruct the 'slack' lyrics of Jamaican dancehall deejays suggesting that their lyrics are perhaps a celebration of particular types of masculinity rather than a celebration of Black women's sexual liberation (Hesse 2000, p.164). Carolyn Cooper (2000) has also questioned the ambivalent representation of women in Bob Marley's love songs and in Rastafari culture in general, arguing some Rastafari values are 'an extreme manifestation of the duplicitous gender ideology that pervades Jamaican society [which] is ultimately derived, via Victorian England, from Judaeo-Christian theology' (Cooper 2000 p.351). Cooper is critical of conservative values within Rastafari culture, preferring instead to champion the

rights of women as free active agents who hold a proper claim to the control of their own bodies (Cooper 2000). Thus although *Dread A Who She Love* converges the multiple facets of love by taking into account romantic desire (eros), beloved community and (phillia) and Jah love (agape), this takes place at the expense of a free and autonomous sense of Black female sexuality. Within conscious lovers' the dichotomies of erotic and conscious oppositional politics appear to be reinforced even further. In this context female lovers' rock singers can bring some aspects of their political identities to the table as conscious artists whilst other aspects, namely their sexuality, are constrained by the demands of righteous living.

### **Love as a discourse for liberation**

As suggested above, lovers' rock and conscious roots are much more dialogic and discursive than is frequently imagined. Lovers' rock has since its inception remained an integral and consistent component of 'Black expressive cultures', where, in Gilroy's analysis, a preoccupation with erotic concerns have long existed in tandem with pragmatic and utopian notions of Black liberation (Gilroy 2006). I am suggesting that the marginalisation of lovers' rock as an erotic soundscape is due to the following factors: the feminisation of erotic love, the masculinisation of Black public politics, and the false separation of erotic discourses about love from the radical politics of liberation found in roots reggae.

I wish to argue that lovers' rock stands as a forerunner for a distinctly Black erotic music tradition in Britain, where sexual politics and public politics converge upon the discursive acoustic environment of the blues party and dancehall. Lovers' rock emerged against the back drop of successive urban uprisings as mentioned above up to and during Margret Thatcher's rein as Prime Minister of Britain. Deep-seated feelings of injustice, disaffection and social alienation were not uncommon to Black people growing up in during



this period (Gilroy 2006). Eruptions of anger and rebellion against police authorities were not rooted in mindless violence but within a malaise of rage over repeated violations against Black humanity (Gilroy 2006). Black communities in Britain on a social level were facing a crisis of deepening levels of marginalisation born out of institutional forms of racism. The rage which permeated the inner city streets of Handsworth, Brixton, Toxteth and Chapletown, repeatedly and periodically during the 70s and 80s, were triggered by a cauldron of social factors including unemployment, police brutality and harassment and racialised social alienation (Gilroy 2006). I am arguing that this period in British history was filled with deep and abiding levels of social neglect, lovelessness and carelessness ingrained within a vile disregard for Black life amongst the British press and wider society. The event that seemed to epitomise these sentiments came in 1981, where The New Cross Massacre fire killed 13 young Black teenagers whilst they were out attending a house party in South London. The fire is believed to have been racially motivated and remains a tragic yet powerful reminder of the British media's attitude and public disregard for Black life which was commonplace during that period (Gilroy 2006). As Gilroy observes,

The 'Black party' had become such an entrenched sign of disorder and criminality, of a hedonistic and vicious Black culture which was not recognisably British, that it had become fundamentally incompatible with the representation of Black life and experience in any other form (Gilroy 2006, p.130).

The possibility of engaging human empathy or securing political justice from the guardians of British public opinion was as utopian a concept as to be unimaginable after this tragic event.

## **Conclusion**

Critically, within the context of racist marginalisation, lover's rock amplified and affirmed that blackness, through a complex and contradictory gendering process, was nonetheless, worthy of being loved with all of love's imperfections. Lover's rock articulated a discursive narrative that said Black males and females were deserving of a space to express an erotic interlocking politics of desire, pleasure, love and justice. bell hooks argues that, 'Erotic pleasure requires of us engagement with the realm of the senses, a willingness to pause in our daily life transactions and enjoy the world around (hooks, 1993, p.116). The public display of the erotic, in the form of song lyrics as well as by the intimate 'slow wine' dance to lovers' rock music, can be interpreted as an open expression and validation of Black male and female vulnerability and humanity through the public display of erotic pleasure. Indeed, it could be argued that love expressed through lovers' rock was, in and of itself, an act of radicalism and rebellion. As Patricia Hill Collins (2005) notes, oppression works by not only forcing people to submit, it also works by rendering its victims unlovable. She states, 'In this context, resistance consists of loving the unlovable and affirming their humanity. Loving Black people (as distinguished from dating and or/having sex with Black people) in a society that is so dependent on hating Blackness constitutes a highly rebellious act' (Hill Collins 2005, p.250). Erotic desire expressed through lovers' rock formed part of a wider discourse on rebellion and revolution that helped to revitalise Black life in Britain. Lovers' rock became a highly syncretic political and erotic element in the vernacular traditions and transnational networks of Caribbean communities as both producers and audiences of the genre. I have attempted to challenge the way lovers' rock is frequently disavowed and overlooked both within reggae music culture and within scholarly and journalistic accounts that exist on lovers' rock (Hebdidge 1987; Barrow and Dalton 2004).

The gendered fissures of blackness fashioned around sexuality, gender conflict and eroticism (Gilroy 2006) exist in a much more complex and ambiguous relationship to Black liberation and resistance struggles than is often imagined. Such complexities do not furnish uncomplicated readings of lovers' rock as a genre that simply expresses 'feminised' or 'female' concerns for female audiences. As Gilroy has suggested both reggae and soul place issues of sexuality, eroticism and gender conflict as a prominent thematic concern alongside discourses that were previously aligned with notions of freedom (Gilroy 2006, p.268). He further states,

... the celebration of desire is articulated by both male and female performers on an equal basis and provides the primary context for statements about love and gender based antagonisms (Gilroy 2000, p.273).

Carolyn Cooper also asks us to rethink the oversimplification of reggae categories specifically in the case of *reggae* 'culture' and *ragga* 'slackness.'

But even that politically conscious reggae tradition is much more textured than is often acknowledged. The erotic was contained in the protest and often disrupted the simple logic of ascetic cultural warfare. This seductive tension between the erotic and the political continues to energize the dancehall, rub-a-dub style. Acknowledgement of this carnal element in 'conscious reggae' makes it possible to hear the continuities in the work of the contemporary 'slackness' DJs and that of their forebears (Cooper 2004, p.76).

A closer 'textured' reading of lovers' rock that takes into account the politics of Black consciousness and sexuality reveal the tensions between the erotic and political energies that Cooper highlights. These intertwined energies reconfigure the dancehall not only as a countercultural revolutionary space but one that existed at once as a dialogic space for engaging in the erotic politics of rebellion, pleasure, and love.

## CONCLUSION

*“Blackness” acquires its full revolutionary potential as a social site for resistance only within transnational and Pan-African contexts.*

(Marble and Agard-Jones 2008, p.3).

This thesis has examined the politics of loving blackness within the transnational context of ‘Black Britain.’ It has shown how blackness has been denigrated, for the most part, in contemporary western culture and constructed in opposition to notions of love in light of the continuing power of racism and white supremacy.

One major aim of this project has been to expand the concept of ‘loving blackness’ as outlined by bell hooks (1992) into a wider transnational discourse on racism and anti-racist strategies. bell hooks’s thesis on loving blackness alongside Cornell West’s theory of nihilism in Black America suggest that political discourses on love are both necessary and important critical interventions in the reclamation and recovery of Black life, specifically as responses to centuries of racialised brutality. However the theoretical orientations of hooks’s (1992) and West’s (1992) debates emerge from the specificity of race and responses to racism within the African American experience. As such, they do not take on an explicit transnational engagement. This thesis has argued that blackness has a transnational inscription that transcends nations and nationalities. In this sense, loving blackness has political relevance beyond the US as an approach to anti-racism within a global context. I have shown that an ethic of loving blackness in practice can be seen historically within pan-Africanism, as well as through contemporary transnational Caribbean kinship networks, and through the influence of

the transnational space on the emergence of lovers' rock music in Britain. Through the emergence of lovers' rock and its political intersection with conscious roots reggae, Caribbean communities formed eroticised countercultural spaces of resistance in response to their racialised alienation. For Black communities in the UK diasporic lineages to transnational forms of blackness provide important political and emotional resources for healing and transcending the ruptured wounds of broken and uneven forms of Western citizenship, belonging and alienation.

Through 'the racial ordering of states' (Goldberg 2009, p.372), the transnational space has become an important location to contextualise discourses on old and new forms of racism – xeno-racism, post-racial-racism and postmodern racism - which themselves are rooted within longer western histories of systematic brutalisation such as slavery, imperialism and colonialism. Racism in these new forms, like older forms, determines human worth. It is intimately tied to rights of access and belonging within Western nations. The configuration of Western neoliberal states as post-racial, tolerant and diverse social enterprises precludes any meaningful discussion on continuing forms of racism as a dehumanising practice. As David Theo Goldberg (2009) argues, instead of antiracism, we have 'born again racism' which appears 'whenever called upon to do the dirty work of racist politics but purged of its categorical stiffness. Indeed, shed of its stiff categoricity, raceless racism operates in denial, anywhere and anytime' (Goldberg 2009, p.25).

The transnational space in Britain has earlier roots in the emerging postcolonial conversations and anti-imperialist struggles that had taken place in the first half of the twentieth century. The historical underpinning of diasporic and transnational blackness in Britain beyond a 'Black *and* British' paradigm can be contextualised within the Manchester Pan African Congress of 1945. Here Pan-Africanist males and females connected and

conceived global struggles against imperialism, colonialism, domestic racism and gender inequalities in such ways as to develop interconnected globalised strategies to defeat racialised and gendered forms of oppression.

In our contemporary postcolonial context however, in many ways the 'Black British' identity has been fragmenting through the seemingly unrelenting impulse to conceive whiteness and Britishness as synonymous interchangeable categories, excluding histories, narratives and populations deemed racially and culturally different or 'alien'. The 'optimistic moment' in Black Britain which sought to redefine what it means to be Black *and* British (Hall 1992) has not only been troubled by the continuing problem of racism, it is also being re-imagined and reframed by our contemporary transnational situation where blackness in Britain is being routed much more through Western, Eastern and Southern African populations from Somalia, Nigeria and South Africa. Migration and the emergence of new communities of refugees and asylum seekers destabilize the postcolonial configuration of 'Black Britishness' even further. This thesis has sought to highlight these important demographic shifts in order to reconsider Stuart Hall's and Paul Gilroy's influential work on the formation of Black Britain and to further re-evaluate how Black Britain has changed beyond an identity that was primarily routed through Caribbean and postcolonial ties to the British Empire. Blackness in Britain is still being shaped by the postcolonial as my discussions on grime music and lover's rock suggest. However, blackness is also determined by the impact of neoliberal globalisation which has not only provided commodified, homogenised and hegemonic forms of African Americanised blackness, it is also been the route cause of cheap and exploited migrant labour from the African continent and the global South to overdeveloped countries like Britain in the global North.

Another important debate within this thesis is the demise of anti-racist politics specifically within the UK. Arun Kundnani (2007) provides a clear explanation of how this problem emerged and the wider ramifications for Black and Brown communities in Britain,

The worsening racial climate of Britain has only been encouraged by the absence of a coherent anti-racist politics. The anti-racist movement that emerged in the late 1960's, influenced by the politics of Black Power in the US and anti-imperialist movements in the Third World, had been the major factor in making it possible for Asian, African and African-Caribbean communities to gain a foothold in British society. But its original notion of a Black identity had fragmented, by the 1980s, into the politics of ethnic difference. By the end of the decade, there was clearly no easy return to an earlier sense of collective struggle. The idea of uniting ethnically diverse communities into a singular 'Black' struggle came to be seen as an artificially imposed commonality. What was less obvious at the time was that, in discarding this 'Black' political identity, the ideal that it embodied, of anti-racist political solidarity combined with cultural diversity, was also lost. Indeed, any notion of solidarity was henceforth regarded as inherently dangerous (Kundnani 2007, p.180).

What Kundnani is registering here is the incomplete and politically arrested development of anti-racism in Britain which in turn was tied to the unfinished business of anti-racist, anti-imperialist, post-colonial struggles of the Third World and Black liberation struggles in the US from the mid twentieth century onwards (Winant 2008). David Theo Goldberg has quite rightly brought to our attention, the fact that 'Anticolonialism and civil rights struggles were global movements' (Goldberg 2009, p.17). As Howard Winant observes, 'There is also a



widespread recognition that the reforms [for racial justice] undertaken in the 1950s and 60s have ossified and been derailed far short of their goals' (Winant 2008, p.43). Thus the demise of collective movements against racism has repercussions far beyond localised anti-racist politics here in the UK. Indeed, this issue is fundamentally a global problem.

This project has sought to revisit the possibilities of a 'Black' political identity unhindered by difference, in order to envisage a theoretical framework for anti-racist political solidarity combined with the ideal of diversity. As Kundnani quite rightly reminds us above, this ideal was lost and indeed frowned upon in favour of the battle to construct complex human identities and subjectivities. Whilst recognising complexity in racialised identities is both necessary and important to counter claims of monolithic pathological blackness, the need for a robust anti-racist politics has never gone away. Indeed, the struggle over racialised identities seems set to continue in Britain and elsewhere, specifically in light of Europe's emerging Black populations of African descent (Hine et al. 2009). Equally the need for complex anti-racist discourses, movements and coalitions will become evermore apparent.

Theoretically and politically, transnationalism extends our analysis and knowledge of Black Britain to include more complex regional configurations of blackness in cities such as Liverpool. Here blackness is constituted specifically on regional as opposed to national connections to the wider world where, as Mark Christian (2000) and Jacqueline Nassy Brown (2005) have demonstrated, travel, movement, migration and emigration became both racialised and gendered. As this thesis illustrates, transnationalism also serves to extend our configuration of blackness in Britain beyond narratives of settled postcolonial diasporic communities to include new communities of refugees, asylum seekers and migrant workers. I have already stated that these communities of 'new communities' are changing the future of Black and Brown humanity in Britain. However, for undocumented workers and migrants,

asylum seekers and refugees, the transnational space can be unpredictable, highly contradictory and not to mention, risky. Outcomes can lead to stronger kinship ties, new opportunities of access to essential material resources in the form of work and remittances. Conversely, they are also often tied to systems of illicit and legal forms of exploitation, death, demonization, imprisonment and new forms of ‘xeno-racism’ (Fekete 2009). Again, Kundnani argues that whilst new communities of refugees, asylum seekers and migrant workers have been at the sharp end of state racism they have also been ‘excluded from existing structures of community representation and are effectively denied the means to construct their own’ (Kundnani 2007, p.183). This new future will force us to re-examine how varied forms of blackness and racialised marginalisation can fight racist forms of discrimination and oppression. It also requires that we find alternative ways to nurture human relationships that can clean away the debris of psychological and social dehumanisation in order to create a new human condition as Fanon suggests (Fanon 1963). Indeed, our racialised, gendered and unequal transnational situation requires us to build a new politics of solidarity and compassion where loving blackness addresses the specificity and complexity of Black life whilst developing a collective understanding of what Howard Winant calls ‘The Modern World Racial System’ (Winant 2008, pp.41-53).

### **Future research – ‘Black Europe’**

The transnational space that I define and explore within this thesis is constructed predominantly through an English speaking ‘transatlantic’ lens. Thus, a closer critical engagement with loving blackness in relation to other regions such as Europe, Africa, Asia and the Pacific, is beyond the scope of this thesis but presents an important opportunity for future research. Further research and investigation into loving blackness for regions such as

South Asia and China, have implications for their global positions as economic powerhouses on the transnational stage with complex ethnic populations. Here the dynamics of racially-stratified societies can 'arise from within national configurations of the region – even if perhaps influenced by the articulation of racially fuelled derogations from without' (Goldberg 2009, p.372). This poses questions for the salience of discourses on racialised supremacy beyond its 'Black' and 'white' configuration in the West. Indeed what are the implications for discourses on loving blackness as a way of ending racism and racialised forms of domination in societies that were once emerging but which have now arrived on the global stage. The implications of anti-racist movements and strategies in an era of what some are calling the post-American world are yet to be unearthed.

With the emergence of 'Afro Europe' (Blakely 2009), countries within the European Union have seen significant increases in Black African immigration over the past few decades (Blakely 2009). This poses fundamental challenges to the premise of a collective Black politics which this thesis advocates and supports. For example Blakely (2009), highlights that the notion of a group identity has largely been forced upon Europe's Black populations by their shared experiences of discrimination and racism (Blakely 2009, p.3). However, this group identity is complicated further by countries such as France, that discourage the 'formal stipulation of racial or ethnic categories by law or tradition', preferring instead to be 'colour-blind' (Blakely 2009, pp.3 -12). It has also been highlighted by Kwame Nimako and Stephen Small (2009) that Black politics in one EU member state can be constituted quite differently elsewhere with different meanings. They note that in the UK, Black politics requires a clearly identifiable constituency, whereas in the Netherlands, it may only be constituted by a mainstream political party placing one 'Black' candidate on their members list. They cite the example of Somali-born former Netherland parliamentarian Ayaan Hirsi Ali who entered

public life through her ‘Muslim bashing,’ as one example of how Black politics are formulated differently between different EU member states (Nimako and Small 2009 p.221). Other factors at play and deserving of further research include Nimako and Small’s (2009) observation that,

Changing definitions of who is Black in Europe, who is a bona fide member of the African diaspora, including suggestions that would expand the idea of who is the diaspora, are currently taking place in Europe and Africa (Nimako and Small, 2009 p.212).

Indeed, the authors highlight that although ‘Black Europeans’ have been pre-occupied with struggles against racism and for social mobility and social justice, the African Union has been preoccupied with economic and political development of Africa through a renewed institutionalised form of pan-Africanism. In the context of Africa’s economic decline and global marginalization, the African diaspora for the African Union is defined and formulated in terms of those diasporans with skills and capital who can help to stem the tide of Africa’s brain drain (Nimako and Small 2009). This seems to be a reasonable and logical conclusion to make. However Nimako and Small suggest that this formulation of the African diaspora in Europe fails to take account of the hardships African diasporas face across the EU:

The assumption is that the diaspora is better off than residents of the home countries, whereas in reality, many people of the African diaspora are leading marginal existences in European states ... On this score African economic and political

problems affect the identity formation of the African diaspora (Nimako and Small 2009, p.231).

How Black populations are negotiating their relationship with Europe will be a critical area of research for the configuration of blackness within a transnational context, particularly as Europe tries to implement Article 13 Race Directive and Employment Directive, ‘which will radically transform discourse and policy regarding racism and equality across much of Europe’ (Lusane 2008, p.215). As Clarence Lusane observes, more than fifteen million Europeans have voted for far-right parties in the last ten years (Lusane 2008, p.219). Indeed, Lusane suggests that the danger of Europe’s swing to the far-right is not that these parties will dominate electoral politics. The danger lies in the fact that these ‘parties are determining political and policy agendas across the region. It is their spin on immigration, jobs, crime, education, and culture that is shaping events and social intercourse’ (Lusane 2008, p.219).

The engulfing phenomena of racism can no longer be exclusively conceptualised within the borders of nations. Racism is intimately woven and indeed buttressed by the process of globalisation. As such, the interpretation of loving blackness in this thesis is one that addresses racism and the politics of solidarity against all systems of domination within a global framework. In feminist discourses, love forms an essential element of liberation work to alleviate suffering, shaping and informing the process of collective Black self-recovery where, ‘the suffering many Black people experience today is linked to the suffering of the past, to historical memory’ (hooks 1991, p.209). Thus an engagement with the politics of love as praxis is a crucial factor to redrawing the contours of modern Black liberation politics. It is critical for a socially engaged public discourse on love as a transformative power formulating

alternative conceptions of what it means to be human, creating new conditions that validate and value Black life.

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