Black British Culture & Society

A Text Reader
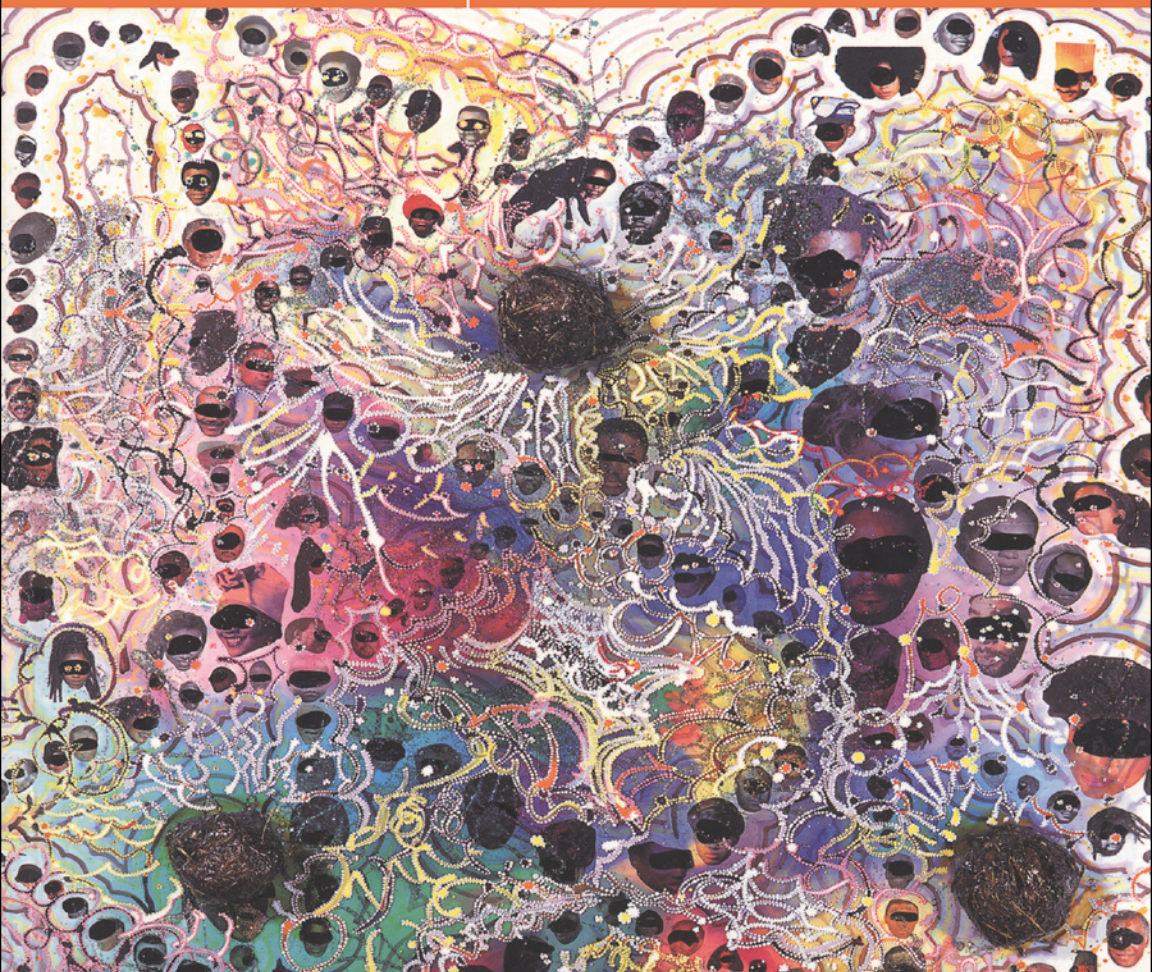
Edited by **Kwesi Owusu**

BLACK BRITISH CULTURE AND SOCIETY

Black British Culture and Society brings together in one indispensable volume key writings on the Black community in Britain, from the 'Windrush' immigrations of the late 1940s and 1950s to contemporary multicultural Britain. Combining classic writings on Black British life with new, specially commissioned articles, *Black British Culture and Society* records the history of the post-war African and Caribbean diaspora, tracing the transformations of Black culture in British society.

B*lack British Culture and Society* explores key facets of the Black experience, charting Black Britons' struggles to carve out their own identity and place in an often hostile society. The articles reflect the rich diversity of the Black British experience, addressing economic and social issues such as health, religion, education, feminism, old age, community and race relations, as well as Black culture and the arts, with discussions of performance, carnival, sport, style, literature, theatre, art and film-making. The contributors examine the often tense relationship between successful Black public figures and the media, and address the role of the Black intellectual in public life. Featuring interviews with noted Black artists and writers such as Aubrey Williams, Mustapha Matura and Caryl Phillips, and including articles from key contemporary thinkers, such as Stuart Hall, A.Sivanandan, Paul Gilroy and Henry Louis Gates, *Black British Culture and Society* provides a rich resource of analysis, critique and comment on the Black community's distinctive contribution to cultural life in Britain today.

Contributors: Faisal Abdu' Allah, Claire Alexander, Rasheed Araeen, Imruh Bakari, Kamau Brathwaite, Hazel V.Carby, Ben Carrington, Bob Carter, Eddie Chambers, Kuan-Hsing Chen, Laura Chrisman, Carolyn Cooper, Fred D'Aguiar, Ferdinand Dennis, Obi Egbuna, Aminatta Forna, Henry Louis Gates Jr, Beryl Gilroy, Paul Gilroy, Bill Gulam, Cecil Gutzmore, Stuart Hall, Clive Harris, Roxy Harris, Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe, Maya Jaggi, Gavin Jantjes, Claudia Jones, Shirley Joshi, George Lamming, Michael McMillan, Richard Majors, Amina Mama, Mustapha Matura, Kobena Mercer, Heidi Safia Mirza, James Nazroo, Olu Oguibe, Sir Herman Ouseley, Kwesi Owusu, Caryl Phillips, Hugh Quarshie, Ato Quayson, Karen St-Jean Kufour, Mark Sealy, A.Sivanandan, Carol Tulloch, Vince Wilkinson, Aubrey Williams, Beth-Sarah Wright.

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BLACK BRITISH CULTURE AND SOCIETY

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The old is dying and the new cannot be born.

Gramsci

There are many different kinds of metaphors in which our thinking about cultural change takes place. These metaphors themselves change. Those which grip our imagination, and for a time, govern our thinking about scenarios and possibilities of cultural transformation, give way to new metaphors, which make

us think about these difficult questions in new terms.

Stuart Hall

The time is past when, in an effort to perpetuate the domination of people, culture was considered an attribute of privileged peoples or nations, or when out of either ignorance or malice, culture was confused with technological power, if not with skin colour or the shape of one's eyes.

Amilcar Cabral

The functionaries found commitment, if not profit, in ethnicity and culture, the intellectuals found struggle in discourse. That way they would not be leaving the struggles of the community behind but taking them to a higher level, interpreting them, deconstructing them, changing the focus of struggle on the sites of another practice, theoreticist this time.

A.Sivanandan

If the real lives of real blacks unfold outside the view of many whites, the fantasy of black life as a theatrical enterprise is an almost obsessive indulgence.

Patricia Williams

After three generations, being black has finally become a way of being British.

Henry Louis Gates Jr

The focus of this book is the African and Caribbean communities in Britain. The variable presentation of the terms 'Black' and 'black' is in keeping with the preferred use of the individual authors.

INTRODUCTION

Charting the genealogy of Black British cultural studies

This book features representative essays and new scholarship in Black British cultural studies as an introduction to this emergent and increasingly popular field of study. The impetus to this intellectual project, contemporary in its immediate concerns, yet passionately historical with its engagement of the past, lies primarily in an eclectic variety of factors associated with recent ontological and paradigmatic shifts in many academic disciplines. These factors partly reflect the impact of cultural studies, which on some traditional fields like sociology, literature and political science has been significant.

In many ways, cultural studies, the discursive ambit from which 'Black British "cultural" studies' has emerged, has itself been incredibly adept in reinventing critical traditions within its constantly expanding field—that is, constituting and reconstituting its objects of study and methodologies through borrowings from other sources and fields of study. Consequently, Black British cultural studies shares the legacy of its philosophical and theoretical borrowings.

These borrowings have ranged over a wide variety of intellectual sources, including; Althusser's structuralism imported into Marxism (Althusser 1968, 1969); Saussure's semiotics (Saussure 1974); Freudian psychoanalysis (Freud 1954); the range of feminist discourses on social theory and sexual politics including Weeks (1981), De Beauvoir, Firestone (1970), Rich (1977); Gramsci's reformulation of orthodox Marxian understandings of the state and civil society (Gramsci 1971); and the postmodernists— Foucault (1978, 1980, 1989), Baudrillard (1977, 1983), Derrida (1982, 1992), Lyotard (1984) and Fukuyama (1992). Add to these sources the rich tradition of critical writings on British postwar society as a result of cultural studies itself being a British invention: writings by Richard Hoggart (1957), Raymond Williams (1958, 1961), E.P.Thompson (1968), Stuart Hall (1958, 1964, 1967, 1976), Paul Willis (1977), David Morley (1980), Phil Cohen (1972), Dick Hebdige (1979) and Angela McRobbie (1978), to name but a few of the key contributors.[1]

This impressive legacy has been useful in mapping out the broad theoretical and ideological terrain within which Black British cultural studies has functioned as a critical discourse. Paradoxically, it has also proved to be its point of departure as the new discourse has engaged questions raised by the Black experience in postwar Britain, and indeed new configurations of racial politics from around the world. Significantly, the problematization of the Eurocentrism of much of the work in the field through new dialogues on 'race', nation, identity, post-coloniality, transnationalism, globalization etc., mostly initiated by a variety of new writers, many of whom are represented in this book, has opened up new and lively conversations around contemporary culture.

The critical 'tensions' leading to the 'epistemological break' with British cultural studies, however, have deeper roots, lying as they are in the very origins of the discipline in the 1950s. In retrospect, the decade of the birth of cultural studies—significant also for the massive expansion of the postwar economy and state, extension of educational opportunities and the advent of American-influenced mass culture—to name a few of the concerns of the discipline's founding fathers—was also the decade of the historic disintegration of the British Empire and the arrival of large numbers of Caribbean and Asian workers in Britain.[2] Considering that all these factors were crucial to the postwar transformations of British working-class culture and politics (particular interests of the founding fathers), the marginalization of, if not virtual silence on, 'race' in the foundational texts of the discipline (Hoggart 1957; Williams 1958, 1961) is notable.

New metaphors of 'race'

The systematic engagement of 'race' and the Black presence within British cultural studies occurred in the 1970s and early 1980s, initially through the pioneering work of Stuart Hall (1970, 1972, 1978, 1980, 1981) and his colleagues and students at the Centre for Contemporary Studies (CCCS) in Birmingham. Other academics and scholars who played equally notable roles in this crucial enterprise, sometimes from outside the discursive terrain of cultural studies, included Homi Bhabha (1983, 1986), C.L.R James (1984), John La Rose, Clive Harris (1988), Winston James (1986), Colin Prescod, Gail Lewis (1978, 1985), Cecil Gutzmore (1975, 1983), A.X Campbell (1974–5), Amon Sakana (aka Sebastian Clarke), Amina Mama (1989) and Roxy Harris (see his essay, 'Opening Absences and Omissions: Aspects of the Treatment of "Race", Culture and Ethnicity in British Cultural Studies', Chapter 33).

The discourse of Black political struggle

Outside academia but having a significant impact on its debates was the work of A.Sivanandan. His alternative sequence of critical enquiries into racism and its impact on the British class system played a key role in *naming* the British 'race relations industry', that is identifying the politics that influenced its formation, as well as the organic structures that maintained it (Sivanandan 1976). His influential essay 'From Immigration Control to "Induced Repatriation"' (1978) also introduced a radical structuralism that attempted to transcend many of the methodological and ideological pitfalls of the liberal school of 'race' studies. Combining his experience of political campaigning and astute readings of the dynamics of racial politics within the state, he was one of the first to conceptualize the political position of Black people within the shifting strategies of the state. Stuart Hall distinguishes him as a scholar with the 'capacity to go directly for the seminal issue, and to give that issue an original formulation'.[3] His essay, 'From Resistance to Rebellion' (1990a) formalized within the sociology of race relations the radical critique of an all party consensus on 'race' and immigration: 'What Powell says

today, the Tories say tomorrow and Labour legislates the day after' (1982).

Sivanandan is editor of *Race & Class,* a key journal for Black and radical scholarship since the 1970s, and director of the Institute of Race Relations, which has led the field in race relations research in Britain for many years. In the interview published here, 'The Struggle for a Radical Black Political Culture', he recollects the transformation of the Institute from a conservative, neo-colonial think tank on race relations into a 'Vanguard' resource of the anti-racist struggle, and discusses his views on the British postwar record on 'race'.

In the 1980s, Sivanandan led the devastating critique of institutional attempts to combat racism through 'race awareness training' (see 'Challenging Racism' 1990b) and 'RAT and the Degradation of Black Struggle' 1990c). In the early 1990s, he followed this with his analysis of the impact of new technology on the global division of labour (see *New Circuits of Imperialism* 1989) and contributions to the political debates of the New Left—how to develop an effective broad left opposition to Margaret Thatcher, in the face of her seemingly unstoppable advance. Sivanandan's essay 'All that Melts into Air is Solid: The Hokum of New Times' (1990) dissented strongly from the positions of Stuart Hall, Martin Jacques, Beatrice Campbell and other intellectuals then associated with the journal *Marxism Today.*

Stuart Hall and the new trajectory of Black Britishness

The important work initiated by Stuart Hall at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Birmingham opened up new dialogues on Black cultural identity, effectively challenging the notion that British culture was quintessentially 'white'. (Hall was head of the CCCS from 1969 to 1979.) The pioneering scholarship was given further intellectual currency by his colleagues and students. The general richness of the research promoted by CCCS in the 1970s has been noted by During (1993). What I also find particularly worthy if not exciting—and this is perhaps only relevant within the context of the proverbial 'ivory towerism' of academia—is the extent to which the scholarship came to reflect key debates within the domain of national politics.

Many of the 'race' issues tackled in the published texts of the CCCS had become topical news in the print and electronic media and the foci of heated and often bad-tempered debate in Parliament—issues about 'blacks and crime', 'black youth and policing', 'rise of the fascist National Front', 'Mrs Thatcher's fear of being swamped by foreigners', 'Enoch Powell's legacy' and so on. The volatile racial politics of the late 1970s and 1980s made this scholarship compelling, its radical advocacy and 'interventionist' tone derived from a new intellectual confidence, also reflective of cultural studies' original commitment to radical political change. This commitment was in turn indicative of the discipline's intellectual roots in the British New Left movement.[4]

In 1982, the CCCS published *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain,* produced by a student group on 'race and politics', signalling what Hall has referred to as one of two 'interruptions' in the work of the centre (Morley and Chen 1996). The collection brought a critical Black perspective to the reading of a wide range

of cultural texts, effectively extending the intellectual boundaries of a new discursive terrain for a Black British culture or what I at the time preferred to signify as 'Black culture in Britain'.[5] In cultural studies terms, it represented a paradigmatic shift away from the sociology of race relations that had hitherto dominated academic thinking on 'race' to new and radical perspectives, including Hall's influential analysis of the 'interplay between moral panics over mugging, the drift into a law-and-order society and the advent of Thatcherism' (Mercer 1994).[6]

> Blacks become the bearers, the signifiers of the crisis of British society in the 1970s… This is not a crisis of race. But race punctuates and periodizes the crisis. Race is the lens through which people come to perceive that a crisis is developing. It is the framework through which the crisis is experienced. It is the means by which the crisis is to be resolved—'send it away'.
>
> (Hall 1978)

Paul Gilroy, one of the collaborators in *The Empire Strikes Back,* further explored many of the theoretical and political premises of the collection in various articles (Gilroy 1981, 1983, 1985) and in his book, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (1987). Some of the other collaborators also made commendable interventions in their own right—Errol Lawrence (1981), Hazel Carby (1980), John Solomos (1989) and Prathiba Parmar (1981, 1984, 1989, 1990).

The new Black British avant-garde

Out of the discursive and paradigmatic engagements within cultural studies and related disciplines, a new academic scholarship on 'race' emerged, epitomized in its most popular form by the work of the aforementioned scholars. Within cultural studies itself, the body of new reflections on Black Britishness, took on a definitive signature in Stuart Hall's theoretical innovations on the British state and transformations within civil society, analyses not entirely divorced from the political project of the New Left.[7] The impact on the national media, particularly on alternative cultural networks-exhibition venues such as the Institute of Contemporary Arts, Ikon Gallery, Whitechapel Art Gallery and Cornerhouse, magazines such as *City Limits, Time Out, Camerawork* and Channel 4 Television—was impressive. Throughout the 1980s, Hall's writings came to have quite a pervasive influence on a group of young and mainly London-based artists and critics who came into national prominence as part of the Black British cultural renaissance of the 1980s—most notably, film-makers Isaac Julien, John Akomfrah and Martina Attille, photographers David A.Bailey, Mark Sealy, Ingrid Pollard, Sunil Gupta and Rotimi Fani-Kayode, visual artists Keith Piper and Sonia Boyce, and critic Kobena Mercer.

Hall's intellectual patronage of the predominantly experimental work in the visual arts and film was singularly focused and creatively rewarding—director Isaac Julien has told of Hall's support for and involvement in most of his films—*Passion of Remembrance, Looking For Langston, Young Soul Rebel, Black and White in Colour, The Attendant* and

his docu-drama on Frantz Fanon (Julien and Nash 1996). Kobina Mercer also acknowledged the ideological debt to Hall in his collection *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (Mercer 1994).

Hall's critical signature can also be 'decoded' in films such as *Testament* and *Handsworth Songs,* by the Black Audio Collective and directed by John Akomfrah, and *Dreaming Rivers* by Martina Attille, then of the Sankofa Film Collective. He was also influential in organizations such as the photographers' groups D Max and Autograph. It is worth noting, however, that this influence was not one-sided. Eventually, the creative partnerships that emerged came to be symbolized by a common ideological quest—the search for what Hall termed the 'new metaphors of cultural change'—a critical riposte to a 'reductionist' cultural practice.

> Those [metaphors] which grip our imagination, and for a time, govern our thinking about scenarios and possibilities of cultural transformation, give way to new metaphors, which make us think about these difficult questions in new terms… Metaphors of transformation…allow us to imagine what it would be like when prevailing cultural values are challenged and transformed… They must [also] provide ways of thinking about the relation between the social and symbolic domains in this process of transformation.
>
> (Hall 1993)

If Hall made an impression on the artists, the reverse was also true. Looking back at the intellectual production of the 1980s, there are clearly qualitative shifts in emphases in Hall's writings on 'race' as a result of his involvement with the young artistic avantgarde. It may even be possible to read his reworking of the political theories of Gramsci— 'Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity' (1986), and 'New Ethnicities' (1989), two of his best-known forays into the debate on 'race' and Black Britishness, as *discursive reportage*—attempts at addressing the theoretical and political contestations arising from his involvement with the new artistic wave. 'New Ethnicities', was originally delivered at the ICA conference *Black Film, British Cinema* and then published in ICA documents 7, edited by Kobina Mercer. Amongst other issues, Hall discusses the debate between himself and Salman Rushdie as a result of Rushdie's criticism of *Handsworth Songs* in the *Guardian* newspaper (12 January 1987). Mercer contributes to the controversy in his essay 'Black Art and the Burden of Representation' (Mercer 1994),[8] and in his joint intervention with Julien in *De Margin and De Centre* (Julien and Mercer 1988).

Such engagements, symbolic pronouncements in the critical domain of the national media, were very much in the spirit of the Gramscian concept of 'theoretical practice', predicated on the role of the 'organic intellectual'—one who functioned in the forefront of intellectual, theoretical work and at the same time was involved in politics. Curiously, Hall assigns this politically *engaged* function also to 'the project of Cultural Studies',[9] which, in spite of its radical credentials, is still essentially an academic enterprise: 'unless those two fronts are operating at the same time, or at least unless those two ambitions are part of the project of Cultural Studies, you can get enormous theoretical advance without any engagement at the level of the political project' (Hall 1992).

Hall's take on Gramscian praxis,[10] forging a link between academic scholarship and public debate, intellectual property and its wider social circulation, provided his collaborators with a new vocabulary of political engagement and a corresponding disposition to creative experimentation—all in the service of a new revisionism that foregrounded the experiences of Black people in Britain as a distinctly 'British' or 'English' experience. This revisionism had two possible targets: the racist New Right represented by conservative figures such as Enoch Powell and Margaret Thatcher, who excluded Blacks from the notion of 'Britishness' by portraying them as an 'outside force, an alien malaise afflicting British society' (Gilroy 1982) and a Black political authodoxy that presented 'the black experience' as a singular and unifying framework (Hall 1989). A recurrent theme in this revisionism centred on the notion of the 'non-essentialist black subject', which, according to Hall and Bailey,

> opposes the notion that a person is born with a fixed identity—that all black people, for example, have an essential underlying black identity which is the same and unchanging. It suggests instead that identities are floating, that meaning is not fixed and universally true at all times for all people, and that the subject is constructed through the unconscious in desire, fantasy and memory.
>
> (Hall and Bailey 1992)

By the end of the 1980s, the Hallian movement in cultural studies and the impact of the political challenge posed by the work of A.Sivanandan, Homi Bhabha and others had shifted the foci of many of the debates within academia and the general cultural media at large. The transformatory decade also saw the creation of a wave of 'black' interest coverage, particularly in the press and on radio and television, and the institution of various reforms aimed at combating racism in public life. These developments had their own histories and dynamics, but they were given added impetus by the political drama caused by the Black-led inner-city civil disturbances of 1981 and 1985. One of the consequences of these unexpected explosions, both triggered off by racist police action,[11] was the emergence of a broad, radical movement of scholars, cultural practitioners, media personalities and politicians as the new intellectual voice of Black Britain.

This movement was complex and diverse in its political and ideological allegiances, but it was united in its commitment to challenging the postwar political consensus on 'race', and popular understandings of what it meant to be 'Black' in British society. Intellectually, it was tired of the old, patronizing narratives that had characterized official thinking on race relations and Black culture—from the early postwar debates on immigration (see the essay by Clive Harris, Bob Carter and Shirley Joshi, 'The 1951–1955 Conservative Government and the Racialization of Black Immigration', Chapter 4) to the arm-twisting policing of Black culture (see Cecil Gutzmore's essay 'Carnival, the State and the Black Masses in the United Kingdom', Chapter 28). It also addressed the shortcomings of liberal and radical discourses (see Hazel V.Carby's essay 'White Woman Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood', Chapter 7). The movement's considerable creative and political energies, symbolized by the political unity of Africans, Caribbeans and Asians, led to the formation of many professional and political groupings—Black Media Workers Association, Organization of Women of

African and Asian Descent (OWAAD), Brixton Defence Committee, Southall Black Sisters, Creation For Liberation, African Liberation Committee, Black Action for the Liberation of South Africa (BALSA), Black, Radical & Third World Book Fair, Campaign Against Racism and Fascism (CARF) and many others.

At the universities, the movement's intellectuals were for the most part bright students frustrated by restrictive study options and Eurocentric bias, or crusading lecturers, straddling the often deceptively liberal corridors of academia or chiselling away at the structures of consolidated disciplines and legendary departments. In spite of institutional inflexibility in many cases, and especially because they persevered, several hybrid fields of study were created at many universities and colleges in a constant positioning and repositioning of discursive spaces—'Third World Studies', 'Black Studies', 'Ethnic Studies', 'Black Women's Studies', 'Black History', 'Multicultural Studies', 'Race and Polities', 'Race and Law', 'Black Literature', and so on. The movement included Carter and Joshi (1984), Fryer (1984), Dyer (1988), Carter (1986), Garrison (1983), Gordon (1983), Gutzmore (1975–6, 1983), Ramdin (1986), Wilson (1978), Brah and Minhas (1984), Mirza (1986), Phoenix (1988), Mama (1989), Berry (1984), Johnson (1974, 1975, 1980), Rushdie (1983), White (1983), Burford (1986), Dhondy (1976), Dabydeen (1985, 1988), Araeen (1984, 1989), Jegede and Chester (1986), Owusu (1986, 1988), Sutcliffe (1982), Sutcliffe and Wong (1986), Sidran (1971), Rugg, Phillips, Dilip, Riley, D'Aguiar, Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe (1985).

Space does not permit us to explore the full range of intellectual registers underpinning this movement, but this book contains texts written by some of the key contributors: Amina Mama, Bob Carter and Shirley Joshi, Ferdinand Dennis, Gavin Jantes, Fred D'Aguiar, H.Mirza, Imruh Bakari, Cecil Gutzmore, Rasheed Araeen and others already mentioned. Suffice here to acknowledge the historical significance of this 'second wave' of predominantly Black intellectuals, emerging after the radicalization of Black politics and culture in the late 1960s and 1970s.[12] It is also worth noting the significantly increased volume of critical comment on the Black British experience generally, and by a majority of Black intellectuals.

The 1980s movement was singularly successful in the cultural domain, launching the second Black cultural renaissance in Britain in the postwar period.[13] In my book *The Struggle for Black Arts in Britain* (1986), I attempted a schematic sketch of its political imperatives, foregrounding some of the main historiographie absences in the dominant narratives, while *Storms of the Heart: An Anthology of Black Arts and Culture* (1988) explored the work of the participant artists and their collective impact. Apart from the multiplicity of creative ideas and artistic innovations at play, the volume of work produced by the movement in a range of media was impressive. It brought into sharp focus the work of the avant-garde film directors already discussed, as well as others like Imruh Bakari, Menelik Shabazz, Glen Ujebe and Sister Dennis (see Imruh Bakari's contribution here, 'A Journey from the Cold: Rethinking Black Film-Making in Britain', Chapter 19). It engages some of the thematic and political challenges of the 1980s by raising issues around contemporary developments. Rasheed Araeen's interview with visual artist Eddie Chambers revisits the ideological excitement of the period by probing the various political and creative tendencies. The interview introduces the striking

polemics that became the hallmark of the small but engaging group of young artists initially mobilized around the Blk Art Group. This radical group included the late Donald Rodney, Keith Piper and Marlene Smith. They were later joined on the alternative gallery circuit—venues such as Black Art Gallery, the Institute of Contemporary Arts, Cornerhouse and Ikon—by Lubaina Himid, Sonya Boyce, Claudette Johnson, Tam Joseph, John Ohene, Gavin Janjtes and others. Janjtes's essay 'The Long March from "Ethnic Arts" to the "New Internationalism"', Chapter 22, explores the ideological challenge presented by Black visual artists and argues for a more inclusive national arts and cultural policy.

The 1980s also saw the emergence of an extensive network for Black performance poetry, with poets like Linton Kwesi Johnson, the African Dawn,[14] Jean Binta Breeze, Benjamin Zephaniah, Lemm Sessay, Anum Iyapo and others leading the field. (For a discussion of the significant dialogues opened up by this movement, see Beth-Sarah Wright's essay 'Dub Poet Lekka Mi: An Exploration of Performance Poetry and Identity Politics in Black Britain', Chapter 23.) The Africa Centre, which hosted the launch of Soul II Soul, the remarkable Black British musical phenomena of the late 1980s, became a prime venue for performances, mostly organized by the African Dawn. Other consistent organizers of this poetry, precursor to the international explosion of rap and ragga in the late 1980s and early 1990s, were Apples and Snakes, Creation for Liberation, and, most important of all, organizers of the Black, Radical and Third World Bookfair, which featured international poets such as Kamau Brathwaite, Michael Smith, Imiri Baraka and Ntozake Shange.

The Africa Centre also became a popular locale for another significant development within the Black British renaissance—the transformation of the aesthetic profile of African literature, music and poetry by a prolific group of diasporan, African or exiled artists and intellectuals—Ben Okri, Dambudzo Macherera, Sheikh Gueye, Ngugi Wa' Thiongo, Micere Mugo, Nii Noi Nortey, Pitika Ntuli, Merle Collins, Mervyn Afrika, Julian Bahula, Wanjiru Kihoro, Emmanuel Jegede, Tunde Jegede, Nana Tsiboe, Lewis Nkosi, George Shire, Eugene Skeef, Nana Danso Abiam, Dada Lamptey and others. Through my work with African Dawn and advisory roles at Greater London Arts and the Arts Council of England, I became a creative facilitator and critical voice within this movement.

The impact of the writers on African literature was particularly fascinating; with Ngugi Wa' Thiongo, one of Africa's foremost novelists, leading the debate on the replacement of English as the main linguistic vehicle for creative writing and his collaboration with African Dawn, Dan Cohen and others on the British production of his classic play, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. The late Zimbabwean writer Dambudzo Macherera also made a brilliant excursion into magical realism with his debut novel, *House of Hunger,* and the sequel, *Black Sunlight*. Ben Okri became the most coveted novelist in this genre by winning the Booker Prize in 1991 with *The Famished Road*. The radical reinterpretation within African literature of the magical realism which until then was more readily associated with García Marquez and other Latin American novelists was essentially a *diasporan* achievement facilitated by the creative environment of the Black British renaissance. Ato Quayson's essay 'Harvesting the Folkloric Intuition: Ben Okri's *The*

Famished Road' acknowledges the significance of this diasporan conjuncture, but situates the genre's broader folkloric precedents within African literature.

Transformations within Black popular culture

Another significant development within the Black British renaissance was the consolidation of the annual Netting Hill Carnival into Europe's biggest street event, attracting well over two million revellers, at the end of the decade (see Cecil Gutzmore's chapter for a critical reading of its politically volatile relationship with the state). Carnival's dynamic fusion of apparently disparate artistic, social and political elements distinguishes it as an event of *high aesthetics*—a culturally *pronounced* ritual in celebration of urban life within the new British cosmopolitanism—achieved in large measure by the impact of Black cultures over the postwar period. With the disappearance of most local English festivals and recreations, many 'legislated out of existence' during the Industrial Revolution and its aftermath, carnival is the *most powerful* contemporary symbol of the right to mass assembly and celebration. Its survival and growth therefore have a special place in British cultural history.[15]

Other significant developments occurred in popular music, with the invention of the uniquely British 'Lovers Rock', a reggae and soul hybrid, invented by producers Dennis Bovill of Matumbi, Mad Professor (Neil Fraser) and singers such as Kofi, Karen Wheeler, Sandra Cross, John Mclean, Carol Thompson, Winston Reedy, Janet Kay and others. 'Black British jazz' was also invented by a group of young musicians, including Courtney Pine, Gail Thompson, Julien Joseph and Steve Williamson. In reggae, the appropriation of ska by Mods and other disaffected white youths in the 1960s and early 1970s was superseded from the late 1970s by a new Black radicalism led by a new generation of Black youth. Inspired by Jamaican musicians such as Burning Spear, Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Bunny Livingstone, U.Roy and the Twinkle Brothers, the rhythms of home-grown reggae became denser ('beating down Babylon'), the lyrics about Black redemption and emancipation.

Groups like Aswad, innovators of the 1970s, continued their studio experiments in 'dub', still heavily influenced by sound systems such as Saxon, Jah Shaka, Coxsone and King Sounds. These sound systems—mobile units of sound engineers, 'selectors' and 'dee jays', well known for their high decibel output at 'blues dances', created new innovations in sound technology and music production. The popularity of mobile discos in the late 1970s and 1980s followed in their stead, while they influenced (without acknowledgement none the less) how the pop industry marketed and sold records. The art of producing 'Versions' of particular songs, each with its own creative signature, came to be adopted as the 'remix', currently the standard issue in the marketing and sale of pop records. In creative terms, the articulation of bass-driven sounds, both freestyle and patterned around reggae's call and response idioms, proved to be influential precursors to contemporary musics such as drum'n' bass, Euro rave and trip hop, and the Bristolian sound associated with Massive Attack and Tricky.

The sound systems also influenced a wide range of musicians, including Misty in

Roots, Black Roots, Abashanti and Steel Pulse, whose ideological purchase of radical Garveyism and Rastafari provided the musical 'soundtrack' to the Black youth rebellions of the 1980s. Ferdinand Dennis, whose essay 'Birmingham: The Blades of Frustration', Chapter 15, documents the conditions in the inner cities in the immediate aftermath of the civil disturbances, draws our attention to a crucial contributory factor -transformations within Black youth culture: 'By the late 1970s, the message in the blues dance had changed, from nostalgia for the Caribbean islands, which represented the immediate displacement of Africans to the more profound nostalgia for Africa. By adopting Rastafari, the youth made the experience of exile a religion.'[16]

Unlike their parents, the second generation of Black youth did not see themselves as 'temporary guests' of Her Majesty's government. They were not here to work and eventually return 'home' to the Caribbean or Africa. Britain was their home, and according to one of the symbolic political slogans of the time, they were 'Here to Stay!'. Consequently, they had little choice but to engage the class- and race-laden structures of British society. Most became frustrated by racism and impatient for change: 'We were born here and we should have been receiving all the benefits our white schoolmates were receiving, but this wasn't so. There were no jobs, bad housing and pure pressure on the streets' (Brinsley Forde, Aswad).[17]

Aswad's self-titled debut album, including protest songs, such as 'Can't Walk the Streets', and 'Not Guilty', gave wide currency to popular youth discontent and mobilized social consciousness around the need for change. Their powerful dub, 'Warrior Charge', became a rallying anthem at blues dances. David Hines of the reggae group Steel Pulse testifies: 'Things were brewing for trouble—big time. The police was harassing us on the streets and putting many of the brothers behind bars on trumped-up charges. I left school with several O and A levels but couldn't get a job. Our album *Handsworth Revolution* came out in 1978, predicting explosion. In 1981, it happened' (David Hines, Steel Pulse).[18]

Steel Pulse followed *Handsworth Revolution* with *Tribute to the Martyrs* in 1979, and broadened their national appeal by performing at *Rock Against Racism* concerts, organized by a coalition of anti-racist organizations to mobilize public opinion against the National Front and other far-right parties. Despite opposition from the police and large sections of the white population, as well as from the first generation of Black postwar settlers, the Black youth redefined the character of Black British music, transforming reggae and its ideological bastion, the sound systems, into popular vehicles of protest and radical dissent. The symbols of Rasta culture—the colours, red, gold and green, the lion, Africa and reggae stars such as Bob Marley and Burning Spear—became the new icons of an anti-establishment movement with strong Utopian tendencies. The blues party also became a significant focus for confrontations with the police, in effect contested zones in a prolonged urban 'war of positions': 'The blues parties were recreations of the "tea parties", which Claude McKay describes in his last novel, *The Banana Bottom*—people in the Jamaican hills brought out the drums and white rum and expressed themselves in a very African way till dawn. In the inner cities, the sound system replaced the drum. The music was very bluesy and nostalgic' (Ferdinand Dennis). [19]

Many of these 'blues parties', mostly unlicensed reggae clubs which stayed open all

night, were raided:

> A Black youth being pursued by the police ran into a Jah Sufferer's dance in Cricklewood. Dennis Bovill was the dee jay and he so happened to be playing Junior Byles' song, 'Beat Down Babylon', when the Police forced their way in. In the ensuing confrontation, he was arrested with eleven others and later charged with inciting the crowd to riot. He was jailed for eighteen months but released after six months on appeal.
>
> (Linton Kwesi Johnson)[20]

Linton Kwesi Johnson himself emerged as the most articulate poet of this restless generation, releasing his *Dread Beat and Blood* album, a collaboration with Dennis Bovill, in 1977 and *Forces of Victory* in 1978. He was also one of the key organizers of the Black Radical and Third World Bookfair, Creation For Liberation and the New Cross Massacre Committee, formed to campaign for justice after the death of thirteen Black youngsters in a mysterious fire in south London.

The impact of the Black youth rebellion, portrayed aptly in films such as *Blacks Britannica* and *Handsworth Songs* but hysterically in the tabloid press, led to the collapse of the postwar consensus on 'race' and race relations.[21] This dramatic development, noted by Lord Scarman in his report into the Brixton riots of 1981, led to changes in the welfare and social provision for the Black urban poor. If this was an achievement, it must be qualified by the fact that a new Black petty bourgeoisie, nurtured by the race relations industry, local government and Thatcherite economics became the real beneficiaries. As the cities went up in flames and the state responded with various reform initiatives, a new Black career stratum, some 'spokespersons' of the community, others sponsored by race and equal opportunity programmes climbed through the ranks of the city halls, the Labour Party, the media and corporate establishments, intensifying the class divisions within the Black communities. With this small but 'Visible' class at the top and functioning within the media as the 'voice' of the 'Black community', the vast majority occupied the constantly shifting boundaries between work and the dole, while a highly volatile underclass (largely the product of the 1980s recession), creatively vibrant but with little stake in the system, explored every opportunity to make the system unworkable or yield to its lumpen tendencies.

The 1990s

The beginning of the 1990s marked a general downturn in the political fortunes of the Black communities. Culturally one of the most exciting achievements of the 1980s, the Black British renaissance came to an end. Ironically, it was at a time when the Thatcherite project which had brought it to its financial knees by abolishing the Greater London Council, its main funder in London, closed down its support establishments and networks and transformed the whole ethos of arts production in the country, was showing serious signs of buckling under its own political contradictions. As public funds dried up

for arts projects and groups, the exciting artistic collaborations which characterized the 1980s became unsustainable. Gradually, the movement's critical mass disintegrated. In the event, the complex constellation of creative and ideological forces, mobilized (with some effort), at the level of politics, to challenge the dominant Anglocentric cultural narratives and arts policies, splintered in all directions.

New agendas, mostly accommodatory to the brash ethos of Thatcherite individualism, emerged, the emphasis now on commercialism and its pedantic application to all things artistic. In artistic practice, subjectivity became a fashionable creative ploy. The best works of the period, not necessarily conforming to the political objectives of Thatcherism, introduced new conceptual spaces and open-ended methodologies into artistic and cultural practice. Within Black arts, these produced some exciting results, especially in photography and computer-generated montage. These have however been celebrated, rather hastily, as somewhat superior to the 'prescriptive practice' of the 1980s.[22]

The transition to the political doldrums of the early 1990s also saw a noticeable shift away from the grand globalizing themes of the previous decade: 'Black Britishness', 'Black art', 'the struggle', 'anti racism' etc.—indicators of a certain readiness to embrace political alliances across nationality and ethnicity. Significantly, the political unity between Africans, Caribbeans and Asians broke down. Why this development was so decisive is only now being debated. In my interview with Sir Herman Ouseley, Chairman of the CRE, he suggests that the demise of the Black parliamentary caucus at the close of the 1980s, partly a consequence of this split, was, among other factors, due to the 'scaling down of Black political aspiration', following the re-alignment of the centre and left field of British politics after the 1987 elections.

The debate on the African, Caribbean and Asian split is intricately bound to our understanding of the nature and dynamics of contemporary Black Britain. In this book, the two most formidable veterans of Black intellectual debate, Stuart Hall and A.Sivanandan, set the main ideological bench marks. In 'Frontlines and Backyards: The Terms of Change' (Chapter 11), Stuart Hall argues that it is no longer possible to mobilize 'Afro-Caribbeans and Asians' under 'a single political category' (Black). It is imperative that we should recognize 'the complex internal cultural segmentation, the internal frontlines which cut through so-called Black British identity'. A.Sivanandan disagrees. In spite of the fact that 'the objective conditions are no longer there for Afro-Caribbean and Asian unity—and therefore a Black politics…recognizing cultural segmentation is not to accept it. Cultural segmentation, like class segmentation, was always there—except that, yes, it is deeper and more complex today. But that is the more reason to fight it, before it becomes inward-looking and reactionary' (Chapter 35).

The ensuing debate also raises other questions about contemporary British culture, many of which are taken up in this book. Compared to earlier periods of immigration and settlement, there now appears to be a greater sense of a 'normalization' of race within many echelons of British society. This phenomenon is however characterized by an essential contradiction—high visibility of Black people, for example, in sports, the media, the entertainment industry, coupled with persistent racism. In celebrated cases such as those of Stephen Lawrence and Way ne Douglas, racism has a tendency to lash

out as spurious violence on the streets. Ben Carrington's essay 'Double Consciousness and the Black British Athlete' (Chapter 12), takes up the dilemma of famous athletes such as sprinter Linford Christie and boxer Frank Bruno—'called upon to represent both "the nation" and the "race" at a time when such a subject formation, and the conditions under which this is possible, is constantly being challenged and fought over from both sides'. Hugh Quarshie's essay 'Conventional Folly' (Chapter 24) tackles similar dynamics in the world of English theatre, probing how a Black actor can achieve an authentic voice working within questionable conventions. Issues around identity and self representation loom large within contemporary British culture, but they are not new. In 'Home is Always Elsewhere: Individual and Communal Regenerative Capacities' (Chapter 16) Fred D'Aguiar explores his personal sense of belonging to England as a boy growing up in the East End of London. Carol Tulloch's essay 'That Little Magic Touch: The Headtie and Issues around Black British Women's Identity' (Chapter 17) discusses similar themes, this time as an autobiographical engagement with the heady years of Black pride in the 1970s.

New discursive trends in cultural studies

Within cultural studies, trends emanating from postmodernist discourses (partly the result of the demise of the grand narratives of history—modernism, communism etc.) were taken over and politicized by a new 'post-coloniality' school, in the works of subaltern studies—Kwame Appiah (1993), Rey Chow (1993), Paul Gilroy (1993a, 1993b) Kobena Mercer (1994), Edward Said (1993) and Gayatri Spivak (1990). The new school, largely sidestepping Kwame Nkrumah's original thesis on 'neo-colonialism'—ephasizing *continuity* rather than *transition* from colonialism—represented, amongst other revisionisms, a critique of the efficacy of the nation state as a unit of cultural analyses, and the recognition of 'globalization' as a significant historical and contemporary force.

Conclusion

From the early days of postwar immigration and settlement, when Black people in Britain saw themselves predominantly as 'guests' of British society, to current trends stressing citizenship, at the same time as 'diasporan' links are made with North America, Africa, the Caribbean and Asia, it often seems that we have come full circle—a fast-moving circle, with its complex patterns of junctions, crossroads and critical thresholds, all intricately bound to stories waiting to be told. It is my hope that this collection goes some way to illustrate how potentially rich these stories are, as we recognize their place alongside others, within a national tradition that has over just fifty years changed from what George Orwell in *The English People* (1948) mistakenly described as exclusively 'Celtic and Anglo-Saxon' to a new and vibrant cosmopolitanism.

Notes

1 For further reading on British cultural studies, see S.Laing, *Representations of Working-Class Life, 1959–64* (London: Macmillan); L.Grossberg, N.Gary and P.Treichler (eds) *Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1992); B. Schwarz, 'Where is Cultural Studies?', *Cultural Studies* 8, 3 (1994), 377–93; G.Turner, *British Cultural Studies: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1996).

2 The Second World War precipitated the processes of decolonialization in Africa and Asia, culminating in the collapse of the British Empire. India became independent in 1947, setting a trend across the colonial world. By 1960, countries in Asia and Africa still under colonial administrations were exceptions rather than the rule. Caribbean countries followed suit in the 1960s. The steamers *Ormond* and *Empire Windrush* arrived in Britain in 1947 and 1948 respectively, bringing in a total of 592 immigrant workers from the Caribbean. Many more were to follow. Thirty-six per cent of the first generation of Caribbean immigrants had arrived by the late 1950s: see T.Jones (1996). For a discussion of the impact of Black workers on the British labour market, the Trade Unions and the workers, see James W. and Harris C. (1993).

3 Stuart Hall Introduction, *A Different Hunger: Writings on Black Resistance* (London: Pluto Press, 1991).

4 The late 1970s was a highly significant conjuncture for 'race' in Britain, with the political backlash to Black immigration and racial attacks reaching their climax under the Conservative right led by Mrs Thatcher. The electoral gains of the National Front and other extreme right parties also raised the political temperature, with the anti-racist movement organizing against them. These developments gave a polemical edge to the 'race' scholarship produced by the CCCS.

5 In the introduction to my book *Storms of the Heart: An Anthology of Black Arts and Culture* (1988), I drew attention to the internationalist nature of the Black arts and cultural movement in Britain, exemplified by the work of practitioners such as Pitika Ntuli, Uzo Egonu, Rasheed Araeen and African Dawn. They created an ideological impetus that facilitated dialogue with centres of creative inspiration in Africa, the Caribbean and Asia. This produced tension with the ideologies of 'ethnic arts', 'minority arts', 'ethnic minority arts' etc., which attempted to ghettoize their work within the confines of the British nation state. This contestation is still valid, but the significant gains made by Black culture in Britain over the last decade validates 'Black British' as a relevant signifier of the arts produced by Black people in Britain today.

6 For influential texts in the sociology of race relations, see A.Richmond, *Colour Prejudice in Britain: A Study of West Indian Workers in Liverpool, 1942–1951* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954); R.Landes, 'Preliminary Statement of a Survey of Negro—White Relationships in Britain', *Man,* 52 (September 1952); S.Patterson, *Dark Strangers* (London: Tavistock, 1963); N.Glazer and K.Young

(eds), *Ethnic Pluralism and Public Policy: Achieving Equality in the United States and Britain* (London: Heinemann, 1983); R.Jenkins, 'Racial Equality in Britain', in A.Lester (ed.), *Essays and Speeches of Roy Jenkins* (London: Collins, 1967); M.Cross, *Ethnic Pluralism and Racial Inequality* (University of Utrecht, 1994); D.Brooks, *Race and Labour in London Transport* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

7 See Morley D. and Chen K. (eds), *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1996), for a comprehensive bibliography of Stuart Hall.

8 See also K.Mercer and I.Julien 'De Margin and De Centre', in D.Morley and K.Chen (eds), *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1996).

9 The prefix 'British' is useful here since Hall has registered critical doubts on the political relevance of, for example American cultural studies. On the postmodern debate, he characterizes a significant volume of the American contribution as 'another version of that historical amnesia, characteristic of American culture' (Hall 1996), and is not particularly charitable to critics such as Fukuyama who believe that 'history' stops with us (see Fukuyama 1992).

10 The concept of the 'organic intellectual' is similar to Homi Bhabha's dialogic interpretation of Frantz Fanon's idea of the interrelationship between theory and practice, expounded in his influential essay 'The Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse', *Screen* 24, 4 (1983). was also a critical influence on this movement, although his concerns for the broader questions of post-coloniality and transnationalism made him less relevant to the immediate concerns of this largely British movement.

11 The Brixton riot of 1981 was sparked off by the shooting and wounding of Cherry Groce in her home. The death of Cynthia Jarrett triggered off the Broadwater Farm riot of 1985.

12 The 'first wave' of postwar Black intellectuals included scholars and activists such as Claudia Jones, Trevor Carter, John La Rose, Sam Selvon, E.R.Braithwaite, Erica Huntley, Eric Huntley and Beryl Gilroy.

13 The first Black cultural renaissance in Britain in the postwar period occurred in the 1960s and early 1970s, with the work of the artists and writers of the Caribbean artists movement—Kamau Brathwaite, George Lamming, John La Rose, Aubrey Williams, Errol Lloyd, Archie Makham, Ronald Moody and many others. See Anne Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement, 1966–1972: A Literary & Cultural History* (London: New Beacon Books, 1992) for a good account of the relevant developments.

14 The African Dawn, of which I was a member, included Wala Danga, Torera Mpiridzisi, from Zimbabwe, Sheikh Gueye from Senegal, Eduardo Pereira from Uruguay, Merle Collins from Grenada and Vico Mensah from Ghana. The group recorded four albums and toured extensively, leading the way in experimentations around art form fusions.

15 There are of course many other significant cultural events such as Glastonbury,

Womad and other pop concerts. However, the wide artistic scope of the Notting Hill Carnival, its location within the urban landscape and the wide range of people who patronize it make it unique.

16 My interview with Ferdinand Dennis, 1998.

17 My interview with Brinsley Forde, Aswad, 1998.

18 My interview with David Hines, Steel Pulse, 1998.

19 My interview with Ferdinand Dennis, 1998.

20 My interview with Linton Kwesi Johnson, 1998.

21 This consensus saw the assimilation of the Black population into English culture and society as one of the cardinal objectives of immigration policy. The Scarman Report published after the civil unrest of 1981 indicated that this had failed. On 'race', the riots, though shocking at the time, made it clear to British society that the second generation Black youth were ready to make the inner cities ungovernable if their grievances were not addressed.

22 See Kobena Mercer, 'Witness at the Crossroads: An Artist's Journey in Post-colonial Space', in *Relocating the Remains: Keith Piper* (London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 1997). Whilst the change in the direction of visual artist Keith Piper's work in the early 1990s led to some innovative engagements, particularly within computer art, I am not as sure as others that this 'open-ended and contradictory puzzle of elements thrown into a heap to tease and irritate the spectator' represents so clear a qualitative leap over his 1980s work.

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Section One
CLASSIC TEXTS FROM POSTWAR NARRATIVES

This section brings together classic texts in the postwar history of Black British culture and society. Each text explores a major theme or themes that highlight significant developments. The chapter by Clive Harris, Bob Carter and Shirley Joshi questions one of the main tenets of immigration literature—that the immediate postwar period was characterized by a policy of *laissez faire* (Rose et al. 1969; Patterson 1969; Deakin 1970) (references are to the bibliography at the end of the Introduction). By critically examining internal government documents, the writers argue that, public presentations notwithstanding, the British government had by as early as 1951 initiated a number of covert and sometimes illegal administrative measures to discourage Black immigration. The contributions by pioneer intellectuals George Lamming, Kamau Brathwaite and Claudia Jones respond to the crisis in Caribbean national identity as a result of the disintegration of the British Empire and the racist backlash to Black immigration to Britain. According to Brathwaite, this crisis intensified what he terms Caribbean 'rootlessness'—a psychological state of dislocation and unbelonging, further deepened by historical memories of slavery and exile. During the 1950s and 1960s, many Caribbean intellectuals and workers responded to it by looking back to the Caribbean as 'home' and 'detaching' themselves from aspects of British society. Claudia Jones takes this up in her chapter, bemoaning the reluctance of many Caribbean immigrants to participate in political activity in Britain.

The chapters by Obi Egbuna and A.Sivanandan argue for the radical alternative—a political struggle with the British state, informed by the campaigning notion, successfully articulated in the late 1970s and 1980s, that Black people as British citizens were 'here to stay!'. The texts, one fiery and written in prison, the other no less fiery but theoretically more reflective, highlight major themes in the literature of Black political struggle—racial pride, self-determination and political change. These reflect the longstanding tradition of radical Black writings, highlighted in the 1960s and 1970s by the Black Power movement and Third World liberation—Frantz Fanon (1965), Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton (1968), Bobby Scale (1970), Kwame Nkrumah (1965), Amilcar Cabrai (1973) and Aimé Césaire (1973).

Hazel Carby and Amina Mama focus on issues around 'race' and gender. The chapter

by Carby articulates various theoretical positions within radical feminist literature. It is also a 'discursive polemic' in the highly charged debate between Black and white feminists about the nature and dynamics of gender oppression across race and ethnicity. Mama's essay gives a shocking insight into the level of gender abuse within London's Black communities, while Beryl Gilroy writes reflectively on the impact of old age on Black women. Kobena Mercer's seminal essay 'Black Hair/Style Polities' challenges some 'sacred cows' within Black cultural politics, foregrounding a radical revisionism. Stuart Hall introduces crucial aspects of the current debate on contemporary Black Britain.

1
THE 1951–1955 CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT AND THE RACIALIZATION OF BLACK IMMIGRATION

Bob Carter, Clive Harris and Shirley Joshi

Introduction

> The problem of colonial immigration has not yet aroused public anxiety, although there was some concern, mainly due to the housing difficulties in a few localities where most of the immigrants were concentrated. On the other hand, if immigration from the colonies, and, for that matter, from India and Pakistan, were allowed to continue unchecked, there was a real danger that over the years there would be a significant change in the racial character of the English people.[1]

In the discussion of postwar racism the role of the state is often ignored or treated as insignificant. Katznelson, Glass, Hiro and Foot for example have all argued that the state played a negligible role in the development of postwar racism until the 1958 'riots' (Katznelson 1976:129–31; Glass 1960:127–46; Foot 1965:233; Hiro 1973). Katznelson's account is one of the most influential. He sees the 1958 'riots' as representing the demise of a 'pre-political' period during which 'race only touched the periphery of political debate'. This chapter will show that, on the contrary, the state took a major role in constructing black immigration as a 'problem' and in so doing reinforced a conception of Britishness grounded in colour and culture (as expressive of colour). Racist policies and practices were an integral part of this construction; the right of black people to enter and settle in the United Kingdom freely was circumscribed by government actions.

Another recurring theme of the literature is the portrayal of the 1940s and 1950s as an era of *laissez faire* immigration when unfettered market forces determined the movement of people from the periphery to the centre 'as and when the need arose' (Sivanandan 1982:106; Freeman 1975; Foot 1965; Hiro 1973). For most writers *laissez faire* came to an end with the introduction of the first Commonwealth Immigrants Bill:

> The period 1961–65 saw the collapse of laissez faire policies regarding coloured immigration and the settlement of coloured immigrants. A laissez faire policy is

very comfortable to follow: it meant doing nothing. And this is exactly what the Tory Government did regarding coloured immigration until popular anxiety forced its hand in 1961.

(Hiro 1973:201)

Against this we will show that the state went to great lengths to restrict and control on racist grounds black immigration to the United Kingdom despite a demand for labour by fractions of private and public capital. This points to a further weakness in the *laissez faire* argument, namely the portrayal of the state as homogeneous, as reflecting in a direct and unmediated way the interests of an equally homogeneous capital.

In short we wish to argue that well before 1955 the state had developed a clear policy towards black immigration.[2] This policy involved direct intervention on some issues and an apparent inactivity on others. For example, while the government was systematically collecting information about black people to support a draft immigration bill prepared in 1954, it was also opposing measures such as Fenner Brockway's bill prohibiting racist discrimination, despite growing evidence that discrimination was widespread. Successive governments not only constructed an ideological framework in which black people were to be seen as threatening, alien and unassimilable but also developed policies to discourage and control black immigration.

For many senior Conservative politicians in the Churchill government, black immigration raised the prospect of a permanent black presence whose allegedly 'deleterious effects' on the 'racial character of the English people' were regarded as a cause for concern.

Similar sentiments were expressed under Attlee's Labour government. Two days after the arrival of the *Empire Windrush* in June 1948 a letter was sent to Clement Attlee by eleven Labour MPs calling for the control of black immigration, since 'An influx of coloured people domiciled here is likely to impair the harmony, strength and cohesion of our public and social life and to cause discord and unhappiness among all concerned'.[3] The Labour government set up a Cabinet Committee in 1950 to review 'the further means which might be adopted to check the immigration into this country of coloured people from the British Colonial Territories'. On grounds of expediency rather than principle, the introduction of legislative control was shelved; it was felt that the administrative measures already in operation were a sufficient safeguard of 'racial character' (see Carter and Joshi 1984; Harris 1987a).

These administrative measures were inherited by the Conservative government elected in 1951. As the failure of such measures to curtail fare-paying black 'Citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies' became apparent, the Conservative government returned to the possibility of legislative control. However the absence of an articulated public anxiety about black immigration, and a continuing demand for labour, made more acute by the petering out of the European Volunteer Worker scheme, required the government to build a 'strong case' for legislation. This 'strong case' was built around a racialized reconstruction of 'Britishness' in which to be 'white' was to 'belong' and to be 'black' was to be excluded. This chapter examines the early stages of this reconstruction in the policies of the 1951–5 Conservative government first to discourage and then to control

black immigration.

'Holding the tide'

It is commonly argued that the 1948 Nationality Act conferred on colonial subjects rights of entry and settlement that did not previously exist. Those who expound the *laissez faire* argument present the Act as a device to facilitate the free movement of labour from the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent to meet Britain's 'labour shortage'. (For a discussion of the concept of 'labour shortage', see Harris 1987b.)

This interpretation needs to be viewed critically. The Act's intention was to restructure in Britain's interests the empire as an economic and political force. The concept of a 'United Kingdom and Colonies' citizenship—as opposed to a separate citizenship for each territory—enshrined in the Act was meant to curb colonial nationalism rather than to concede rights of entry and settlement into Britain. This chapter makes it clear that the principle of free entry was not something over which the Cabinet agonized, and relinquished only with great reluctance. Indeed, when the lone voice of the Student Officer at the Colonial Office, J.Keith, sought unwisely in 1955 to reopen the debate about this principle[4] he was told that '*the time for review of the question of principle has now passed*. There is indeed…no real question of principle involved, or if there is, the principle is that it is open to any country to take steps to control the composition of its own population'.[5]

By 1952 Labour and Conservative governments had instituted a number of covert, and sometimes illegal, administrative measures designed to discourage the one to two thousand black immigrants who came annually. These measures varied from territory to territory. In the case of West Africa, for example, they involved the 'laundering' from 1951 onwards of the British Travel Certificate issued for travel between the French and British colonies along the West African coast. This document by confirming that the holder was a British subject, could be used to enter the United Kingdom legally. 'Most men now realize', despaired one Colonial Office official, 'that a British Travel Certificate is the minimum document on which they can expect to be landed in this country.'[6] Accordingly arrangements were made in the latter half of 1951—with the full agreement of the French government—to omit from the documents any reference to British subject status. A holder arriving in the United Kingdom could then be sent back as an alien, despite the fact that 'all concerned, including the Immigration Officer, know perfectly well that they almost certainly are British subjects'.[7]

In the West Indies, where local politics made the refusal of passports impolitic, other measures were required. Governors were asked to tamper with shipping lists and schedules to place migrant workers at the end of the queue; to cordon off ports to prevent passport-holding stowaways from boarding ships; and to delay the issue of passports to migrants. The last measure was adopted by Indian and Pakistani governments who also refused passports to the United Kingdom if migrants had no firm prospect of a job or accommodation. Police checks were carried out at the request of the Home Office to establish the basis of these prospects. Finally shipping companies were instructed by the

Ministry of Transport to take steps to deal with 'one-trip seamen' who terminated work agreements on arriving in the United Kingdom. Henceforth, contracts would require companies to disengage workers at their 'home' ports.

These ad hoc administrative measures had their limitations; some were of questionable legality. Above all they failed to prevent black British subjects coming to the United Kingdom. By the early 1950s therefore some government departments had come to favour restrictive legislation. The Welfare Department of the Colonial Office, for example, felt that 'it would be far better to have an openly avowed policy of restricted immigration than fall back on rather devious little devices'.[8] Such a move would also go some way to calm ministerial anxieties about dubious methods being exposed in Parliament. Legislation, however, required a convincing case to be made.

Building a strong case from broken reeds

Early in 1953 a confidential meeting of ministers took place at the Colonial Office. The case for legislative control, it was stressed, needed empirical demonstration. This meant gathering information about unemployment and National Assistance, 'numbers', housing, health, criminality, and miscegenation, which it was hoped would confirm that black immigrants posed insoluble problems of social, economic and political assimilation. The already widespread surveillance of black communities by the police was supplemented by surveys undertaken by the Ministry of Labour, the National Assistance Board, the Welfare Department of the Colonial Office, the Home Office, the Commonwealth Relations Office, the Departments of Health, Housing and Transport as well as voluntary organizations. A working party on 'The Employment of Coloured People in the UK',[9] set up by the cabinet in 1953, used the findings to produce a report which assessed the strengths and weaknesses of the 'strong case'. This report formed a central part of cabinet discussion in 1954–5 concerning the need to control black immigration, and was to be regularly updated throughout the 1950s.

Numbers

Early attempts to build a case which would be strong enough to focus public anxiety deployed the issue of *numbers*. Two concerns were prominent: the accelerating rate of black immigration and the size of the black population. Ministers were particularly alarmed that West Indian migration for 1954 was running at the level often thousand compared to two thousand in previous years. However, an examination of these figures by Betty Boothroyd at the Board of Trade revealed that while West Indian migration was 'going up pretty fast, the overall immigration from coloured empire countries has not increased in any dramatic way in the last few years'.[10] Nevertheless, in addition to the reports provided by the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation for arrivals at ports and airports, ministers and civil servants continued assiduously to collect newspaper clippings which suggested that Britain would have to brace itself for an influx of black immigrants who came in 'leaps from the islands and bounds to the UK without let or hindrance'.[11]

Even the judicious *New Statesman* was of the opinion that, 'we must prepare ourselves either to accept no fewer than 200,000 immigrants in the next ten years—and possibly many more—or to face a political explosion in the Caribbean'.[12] The problem for ministers, however, was how to defend their inordinate interest in the 36,000 black immigrants who came between 1950 and 1955 when nothing whatsoever was being done about the 250,000 Southern Irish who arrived in the same period or the thousands of Italian and other European workers who were specifically recruited by the Ministry of Labour.

In 1953 too there was some uncertainty about the size of the black population, with figures of sixty and seventy thousand bandied about. These estimates were contradicted by figures from the police and the Ministry of Labour. 'It is interesting,' noted one civil servant wryly, 'that the police estimate of the number of coloured people now in the United Kingdom gives a total of less than 25,000 colonials, as against our unofficial estimate of 50,000 to 60,000.'[13] Whatever the figure, it had to be admitted in late 1955 that 'Colonial immigration was not an acute problem at the moment'.[14] In conceding that 'the "coloured" problem in the United Kingdom remains a small one, e.g. in Lambeth there are said to be 650 coloured persons among a population of 230,105', Keith significantly went on to add that 'it would be better to stop the influx now to forestall future difficulties'.[15]

Such figures revealed the problems facing the cabinet in building a strong case solely around numbers. They therefore sought to extend the argument for legislative control by looking at employment, housing and crime.

Employment

Even before black workers had had an opportunity to respond to job advertisements in the United Kingdom, a propaganda campaign was launched in 1947 in the Caribbean to persuade them that these were not 'real jobs' but 'paper vacancies' and it was 'not in their interests' to migrate to the United Kingdom. In building its 'strong case' in 1953 the working party sought to show that those black migrants who did come were unemployable and represented a burden on public funds and to this end collected evidence from the Ministry of Labour and National Service and from the Ministry of Pensions and National Assistance.

In undertaking its survey the Ministry of Labour was careful to avoid the 'considerable risk of the enquiry becoming public knowledge and a smaller but still calculable risk of a violent reaction among coloured people against our Offices at certain Exchanges'.[16] Rather than adopt the 'dangerous procedure' of asking registrants questions 'which could arouse their suspicion', box clerks used 'visual methods' to spot the 'racial types'. To aid the Home Office to 'interpret' the findings of the survey a questionnaire was sent to area officers inviting their comments despite misgivings that they could 'only be based on hearsay, isolated incidents, or press reports'.[17] In the questionnaire and the responses one finds all those stereotypes which have since become part of popular commonsense:

Q*uestion:* Is it true that coloured people, or certain classes of coloured people, are work-shy?

Answer: They cannot be said to be more work-shy than white people.

Q*uestion:* Is it true that they are poor workmen?

swer: Dutifully some responses alluded to the 'lack of stamina' of black migrants which made the latter 'unsuited for heavy manual work, particularly outdoor work in winter or in hot conditions underground'. Another allusion was to their 'inability to concentrate for long duration'. In the case of women, these images were particularly sharp. They were reported as being 'mentally slow' and ill-adapted to 'the speed of work in modern factories'. Curiously, if factory work was described as 'quite beyond their capacity', it was considered that such women were capable of giving 'fairly reliable service as domestics in hospitals and private domestic employment'.

Q*uestion :* Is it true that they are unsuited by temperament to the kind of work available?

Answer: Despite the caveat that the evidence was 'not conclusive', reference was occasionally made to their inability to accept discipline, their volatility of temperament, easy provocation to violence, and quarrelsomeness.

Q*uestion:* Can distinctions be drawn in this respect between particular races?

swer: West Indians, particularly those from Trinidad and Guyana, were described as more 'stable' than West Africans. Unlike West Indians and West Africans, Indians and Pakistanis were said to be physically unsuited for medium and heavy work, but were reported to do well in light industry and capable of being trained to at least semi-skilled engineering standards. In contrast to Pakistanis who were said to be well-built, diligent and reliable workers—though with a slower tempo than their white workmates— Bangladeshis were described as 'of poor physique' and not well suited to industrial work.

Such stereotypes were to become the basis on which black workers were to be placed in jobs, denied promotion and kept off training schemes both by employers and labour exchanges. The attempt to portray higher levels of black unemployment as evidence of welfare 'scrounging' was scotched by the National Assistance Board Working Party representative. She pointed out that though some recent Caribbean migrants were, like sixty thousand Irish workers, in receipt of national assistance this was because of their ineligibility for unemployment benefits. In a joint report prepared by the Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Pensions and National Assistance for a major debate on black immigration in the House of Lords in November 1956, it was categorically stated that:

Reference is made from time to time to the abuse of public funds by coloured people. It has no real foundation. West Indians cannot be said to be making undue demands on National Assistance and although an occasional rogue or workshy person is unmasked, this is no more frequent among West Indians than

among other sections of the population.[18]

From the evidence of these surveys it was clear that Caribbean immigrants—the main focus of the survey—were not unemployable; neither were they 'scroungers'. The surveys did indicate however the extent to which racist discrimination channelled blacks into occupational ghettoes and the extent to which labour exchanges colluded in this practice.

Housing

Prospective migrants to the United Kingdom were issued with a document entitled 'Warnings to Intending Migrants' in which the problems of accommodation featured prominently. Undoubtedly there was an acute housing shortage in Britain during the 1950s but it was a product of government policies and market forces, not of levels of immigration. Many local authorities 'on a variety of pretexts but mostly via residence requirements' refused to house black people yet were not penalized by the minister of housing (Smith 1989:53). Rather Macmillan, as housing minister in 1954, announced a reduction in council-house building for the following year from 235,000 to 160,000.

For black people the alternative to council housing was the private sector, and here discrimination, made easier by the relaxation of rent controls in 1954, ensured that only areas designated for slum clearance and/or areas with short-lease properties were generally available. The difficulties of finding accommodation were underscored by the reluctance of local authorities to implement redevelopment programmes which might involve rehousing black tenants for fear of antagonizing white tenants who were on long waiting lists. This was made clear by the Birmingham City Council town clerk who was part of the deputation which met ministers at Westminster in early 1955:

> One of the areas scheduled for redevelopment happened to be where a section of the immigrant population had settled. Although there was very serious overcrowding in this area it was virtually impossible to proceed with redevelopment plans because of the difficulty of finding alternative accommodation. There was the additional risk that if alternative accommodation was found, ill feeling might be engendered among the white population at this apparent preferential treatment of coloured people while there were still 'local' inhabitants waiting for houses.[19]

For the same reasons they were reluctant to discharge their legal responsibilities under the 1954 Housing and Rent Act which obliged them to rehouse tenants living in overcrowded and insanitary conditions. As *The Times* bluntly put it:

> What are likely to be the feelings of more than 50,000 white would-be tenants in Birmingham, who have waited years for a decent house, when they see newcomers, no matter what their colour, taking over whole streets of properties?[20]

The failure of local and national governments to address the problems of housing

reinforced the emerging 'commonsense' correlation between housing shortage, slums and black immigration. This 'commonsense' was luridly depicted by the concept of 'new Harlem' deployed by the Liverpool group of the Conservative Commonwealth Association in their 1954 pamphlet *The Problem of Colonial Immigrants:*

> Liverpool is admittedly one of the chief centres of coloured settlement and a new Harlem is being created in a decayed residential quarter of the city, where rooms in large and dilapidated houses are sub let at high rentals to coloured immigrants who exist in conditions of the utmost squalor. Vice and crime are rampant and social responsibilities are largely ignored. Hundreds of children of negroid or mixed parentage eventually find their way to the various homes to be maintained by the corporation, to be reared to unhappy maturity at great public expense. Large numbers of the adults are in receipt of unemployment benefit or National Assistance and many are engaged in the drug traffic or supplement their incomes by running illicit drinking dens or by prostitution.[21]

This document was circulated widely within the Conservative Party despite the feeling of some officials that the facts were 'overstated and had the worst construction placed upon them'.[22] Landlordism, declining property values, spiralling rents, overcrowding, dilapidation and decay were cited as the inevitable consequences of black settlement. Black people not only created slums, it was argued, but these 'new Harlems' had their provenance in the 'racial character' of the inhabitants. Indeed, their very way of life was deemed to pose a fundamental threat to social order.

This racialized view that housing shortage and urban decay were a product of a black presence encouraged the cabinet to consider making adequate housing accommodation a condition of permanent settlement for black immigrants in its 1954 draft immigration bill. If the cabinet seized on the housing crisis as the 'easiest way' to build a strong case for immigration control, the Birmingham City Council deputation made it clear that control through certificates of accommodation would not be easy for local authorities to police. Within the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, too, there was lukewarm sympathy for assuming the role of social police:

> Clearly local authorities cannot go about looking for stray West Indians who have left their first lodgings, nor can they question them about their identity or the date of their arrival in this country and any other particulars that the Home Secretary thinks relevant.[23]

Despite their lack of enthusiasm, the Ministry of Housing and Local Government decided to invite local authority associations to a meeting in March 1955. At this meeting the latter expressed a willingness to cooperate with the home secretary's plan to control immigration but registered the reservation that the certificate of accommodation embodied in the draft bill could not be considered as a permanent solution.

Criminality

The undesirability of black migrants on grounds of a 'racial' predisposition to criminality had been a longstanding concern of government departments and Parliament (Harris 1988). In the House of Commons in November 1954, secretary of state for the colonies Alex Lennox-Boyd was asked by Sir Jocelyn Lucas 'what machinery exists to ascertain the proportion of Jamaican immigrants who have police or criminal records'.[24] Hansard is studded with questions of this nature. Likewise in the questionnaire sent to Ministry of Labour regional offices area officers were asked: 'Can any distinction be drawn between the coloured workers who come here as fare-paying passengers and those who come as stowaways or deserters?' The general tenor of responses was: Not enough evidence to make a judgment.

Behind this question lies a clear assumption that the manner in which the stowaway came to Britain was a confirmation of a criminal proclivity. No attention was given to the way in which increasingly stringent administrative measures introduced by Labour and Conservative governments criminalized the stowaway.

In an earlier survey of the black population of Stepney, Downing Street was informed thus:

> The police reports which we have had from time to time do not indicate that the incidence of crime amongst coloured people is abnormally high, but *it is known that these people's background renders them specially liable to temptation in these directions*. The police, who are already fully aware of this, are being informed of the contents of the memorandum.[25]

It is the reports of this self-same 'aware' and 'informed' police in London and the provinces on which the working party was to draw heavily for its 1953 report. The police reports dwelt upon the size of the black population, the degree to which it had been assimilated and the extent to which it was involved in criminal activity. In Sheffield, for example, the chief constable had deputed two police officers to 'observe, visit and report on' the black population.[26] A card index was compiled, listing the names, addresses, nationalities and places of employment of the city's 534 black inhabitants.

This concern with criminality emphasized certain types of deviance, pre-eminently drug trafficking and living on immoral earnings, and the ways in which these endangered the social and moral fabric of British society. In its evidence to the working party the police claimed that there had been 'a marked number of convictions of coloured men for living on the immoral earnings of white women'.[27] The working party's own report hinted darkly that 'this practice is far more widespread than the few prosecutions indicate'.[28]

Such alleged criminality merged into a general condemnation of 'the associations formed between coloured men and white women of the lowest type'. Such associations were seen to violate the sanctity of a white British womanhood, the bearer of national culture.

Drug trafficking completed the picture of an alien wedge whose exotic features were

graphically presented by Sheffield's chief constable:

> The West Africans are all out for a good time, spending money on quaint suits and flashy ornaments and visiting dance halls at every opportunity. The Jamaicans are somewhat similar, but they have a more sensible outlook and rarely get into trouble. They take great pains with their appearance and use face cream, perfume etc., to make themselves attractive to the females they meet at dances, cafés etc. One feels, however, that they only attract a certain type of female by reason of the fact that they have more money to spend than the average young Englishman.[29]

These stereotypes were not supported by any evidence that black people were involved in disproportionate amounts of crime. In his report to the working party, the chief constable of Middlesbrough noted that 'on the whole the coloured population are as well behaved as many local citizens'.[30] *The Times* similarly observed: 'Everywhere they have appeared the police and magistrates are ready to say that the West Indians make no trouble, which is more than some are ready to say of Irish workers'.[31] Despite this, such images continued to be used to justify discriminatory policing.

Summary

In struggling to impose some coherence on the information submitted to it, the working party found its report deprecated as 'unnecessarily negative' by the Lord President of the Council, the Marquis of Salisbury. The report, he complained bitterly, did not appear to recognize 'the dangers of the increasing immigration of coloured people into this country'.[32]

These alleged dangers coalesced around the fear that the 'gathering momentum' of black immigration would bring about 'a significant change in the racial character of the English people'. The working party had failed to appreciate that the real issue for the cabinet was not merely unemployment, poor housing or levels of crime but the very presence of black people in Britain. This is the message that the Marquis of Salisbury tried to impress upon the cabinet:

> it is not for me merely a question of whether criminal negroes should be allowed in or not; it is a question of whether great quantities of negroes, criminal or not, should be allowed to come.[33]

On the evidence of the working party report, however, the home secretary was forced to admit to the cabinet that 'a case has not been made out' for legislation.

'The idea, I take it, is to conceal the purpose of legislation'[34]

The failure of the Conservative cabinet to garner empirical support for their 'strong case'

did not deflect them from the conviction that a black presence could not be contained by administrative measures. Legislative action still needed to be pursued. In the absence of any evidence connecting black people with intractable social problems, a different kind of case had to be made which would convey to the public the deep anxieties felt by the cabinet about the threat to the 'racial character of the English'.

To this end home secretary Gwilym Lloyd-George proposed a committee of enquiry in November 1954. The colonial secretary supported the idea. He felt that 'although there are many signs that responsible public opinion is moving in the direction of favouring immigration control', there was still 'a good deal to be done before it is more solidly in favour of it'. A committee would have the double advantage

> of enabling us to postpone an announcement of our policy until nearer the time when the necessary legislation would be put in hand, and of enabling public opinion to develop further and be crystallized.[35]

The nature of the committee was explained to the prime minister by the cabinet secretary, Norman Brook, in a briefing note:

> Its purpose would be, *not to find a solution* (for it is evident what form control must take), *but to enlist a sufficient body of public support* for the legislation that would be needed.[36]

This purpose would be fulfilled only if the committee's terms of reference left no doubt that black immigration was the proper object of enquiry and if its report was unanimous. However, an invitation to consider discriminatory proposals had the disadvantage of leaving the committee open to charges of racism. The colonial secretary, Lennox-Boyd, met this criticism by proposing to widen the committee's terms of reference to include all immigrants. This

> would not by any means prevent the committee from proposing discriminatory measures, if they saw fit to do so; and if they did, *without a virtual invitation,* we should be in a very good position to measure public opinion and parliamentary reactions to such proposals, *without the government having been in any way implicated in them.*[37]

There was no certainty, though, that a committee which would have to include opposition members and trade union representatives would unanimously support legislation. It was also clear that 'some of those who might acquiesce in such action might find it less easy to give public evidence in support of it before a committee'.[38] Consequently the idea of a committee was abandoned, in June 1955.

As 'a better basis for action', the cabinet instructed a working party to produce an 'authoritative statement of the increasing volume of immigration, and of the social and economic problems to which it was likely to give rise'.[39] This was intended for publication but was never released because, in the absence of firm evidence, it 'would not have the effect of guiding public opinion in any definite direction'.[40] Moreover, to issue

such a statement 'with no indication of the government's intentions would be merely embarrassing'. Some ministers also felt that its release should be prefaced by a white paper giving details of controls on British subjects in the dominions and colonies. This would imply that the introduction of controls by Britain was merely a quid pro quo. A Commonwealth Relations official was more honest:

> It was apparently considered that by publicising the restrictions applicable to the entry of British subjects in other countries, public opinion might be influenced in favour of the introduction of restriction here.[41]

A Colonial Office official was even blunter: the white paper was an attempt to '"cook" public opinion'.[42]

The white paper, like the 'statement', was never published. This was partly because it would have shown that India and Pakistan did not have restrictive controls on British subjects, but principally because it would have been embarrassing to reveal that '"old" commonwealth countries are…operating immigration controls which discriminate against British subjects who are not of European race… Some of them might well prefer that the attention of the parliament at Westminster should not be directed in this way'.[43] Though this weakened the cabinet's position, it is doubtful, anyway, whether the growing momentum of the cabinet's case would have overcome in 1955 the political and economic reservations that were brought to the fore in the discussions surrounding Cyril Osborne's attempt in January of that year to introduce a private member's bill to regulate black immigration.

In discussions before the Commonwealth Affairs Committee it was pointed out that the measures proposed in the bill were difficult to reconcile with Britain's position as head of the commonwealth and empire. As the chief whip summarized:

> Why should mainly loyal and hard-working Jamaicans be discriminated against when ten times that quantity of disloyal [sic] Southern Irish (some of them Sinn Feiners) come and go as they please?[44]

The timing, too, created difficulties. With the forthcoming general election, there was a desire to avoid controversial issues which might improve the chances of a Labour victory. The celebration of Jamaica's three hundredth anniversary of British rule in 1955 also made it inopportune to present what would have appeared as an 'anti-Jamaican Bill'.[45] This was underlined by the feeling in some quarters that colonial development and not legislation was the solution to immigration. More importantly, the home secretary had prepared his own draft bill in November 1954 which awaited the outcome of cabinet discussion on the committee of enquiry. Osborne's bill was therefore rejected.

It was not until the beginning of the next parliamentary session in October 1955 that this draft was presented to the cabinet. The objections to Osborne's bill still applied. In the cabinet meeting of 3 November, other difficulties were noted. There was a recognition by the cabinet that despite the fact that the House of Commons showed itself to be increasingly sympathetic to the idea of control public opinion had not 'matured sufficiently'. Public consent could only be assured if the racist intent of the bill were

concealed behind a cloak of universalism which applied restrictions equally to all British subjects.

A further difficulty was that: 'On economic grounds immigration, including colonial immigration, was a welcome means of augmenting our labour resources'.[46] This was the first time that arguments about the economic benefits of colonial immigration had figured in cabinet discussions despite the 'labour shortage' and the labour requirements of specific sectors of public and private capital. Black labour, the cabinet felt, by its 'racial' nature was unsuitable.[47] Some ministers too were of the opinion that full employment would not last and grave problems would be created by the presence of an 'unassimilable', black unemployed and unemployable population. These views provided a sharp contrast with the efforts that were made in the late 1940s to demonstrate the invaluable contribution that European Volunteer Workers could make to the British economy.

These objections compelled the cabinet to postpone the presentation of a bill to Parliament; the strong case required firmer support. A ministerial committee chaired by the Lord Chancellor was appointed to examine the obstacles to be overcome if legislation were to be introduced. In addition, a new interdepartmental working party was convened to provide the committee with bi-annual reports on the 'social and economic problems arising from the growing influx…of coloured workers'.

Conclusion

The evidence we have drawn on suggests that the common interpretation of the role of the state in the 1940s and 1950s needs to be revised. Specific measures to discourage and restrict black immigration rested firmly on a policy of preserving the homogeneous 'racial character' of British society. The passing of the 1948 Nationality Act intensified the contradiction between a formal definition of 'Britishness' which embraced black British subjects abroad and an increasingly racialized notion of belonging in which 'racial types' were constructed around colour. Even as the Act entered the statute books it was qualified by a series of 'devious little devices' designed to 'hold the tide' of black immigration. When these proved insufficient, legislative control increasingly became a favoured option among ministers and senior civil servants. For public consent to be won for legislation, however, a 'strong case', had to be built. A consequence of this was an extension of the control and surveillance of the black population in the UK.

Black immigration, it was alleged, would create problems which were insoluble precisely because their provenance was 'racial' and not political. Black people were unemployed not because of discrimination, but because of their 'irresponsibility, quarrelsomeness and lack of discipline'. Black people lived in slums not because of discrimination and the unwillingness of government and local authorities to tackle the housing shortage but because they knew no better. Indeed, their very 'nature' was held to predispose them towards criminality. All of these stereotypes were evoked vividly in the concept of 'new Harlem', an alien wedge posing an unprecedented threat to the 'British way of life'. So powerful was this racialized construction that anti-discrimination

legislation was seen as irrelevant to the 'social problems' of housing and employment. This was evident from the consistent opposition to Fenner Brockway's bill seeking to outlaw discrimination and the failure to heed the (Caribbean Migrant Services Division) Welfare Liaison Officer's warning that:

> A freedom of entry to the United Kingdom…is nevertheless an empty and vicious one as long as the right to equal employment, accommodation and social intercourse does not exist in practice.[48]

In building its 'strong case' for immigration control the state undertook nothing less than a populist political project which both reconstructed an image of a national community that was homogeneous in its 'whiteness' and racialized culture and defended it from the allegedly corrosive influence of groups whose skin colour and culture debarred them from belonging. This reconstruction simultaneously involved an attempt to de-racialize the Irish who 'are not—whether they like it or not—a different race from the ordinary inhabitants of Great Britain'.[49] Only by arguing 'boldly along such lines' could Irish exclusion from the 1955 draft bill avoid political censure. This line was not without its inconsistencies. As one CRO official minuted: 'This is poor stuff after Irish behaviour in the war and their departure from the commonwealth.' Moreover it ignored the contribution to the Allied war effort of black service personnel like those who had returned on the *Empire Windmsh*.

The racialized reconstruction of Britishness also posed problems for Britain's image as the 'Mother Country' of a 'multiracial commonwealth':

> it may well be argued that a large coloured community as a noticeable feature of our social life would weaken the sentimental attachment of the older self-governing countries to the UK. Such a community is certainly no part of the concept of England or Britain to which people of British stock throughout the commonwealth are attached.[50]

While wishing to prevent black British subjects from entering the UK, the cabinet was concerned to preserve the right of white 'kith and kin' in the dominions to free entry.

Our argument clearly points to the need to recover the history of the state's central role in the construction of postwar British racism. This racism was not simply the product of an imperial legacy, even less the consequence of a popular concern in the 1960s about numbers. Before black workers had begun to arrive here in significant numbers, black immigration was already being racialized. 'Race' was becoming a lens through which people experienced and made sense of their everyday lives. Black people came to be defined as 'a problem' whose solution lay in further and more restrictive control and surveillance. As the state's role in the racialization of black immigration intensified, so the repeated signification of black people's 'presence' and 'difference' as the 'problem' rendered the hand of the state yet more invisible. Any political strategy to combat racism must make the state a central focus of its analysis and campaigns.

Notes

1 CAB 128/29, CM 39(55), minute 7, Cabinet Meeting, 3 November 1955.
2 In Harris (1988), Carter, Harris and Joshi (1993) we show quite clearly that such a policy had been elaborated during the 1930s and 1940s
3 HO 213/244, J Murray et al. to Prime Minister, 22 June 1948.
4 Keith's concern in raising the subject of the principle of free entry was based on the fear of many CO officials that the Colonial Office would be railroaded into agreeing to controls which singled out—and therefore discriminated against—in an obvious way the [black] colonies. Controls, it was argued, should in principle be general, i.e. they should appear to apply equally to white and black territories.
5 CO 1032/121, minute, Carstairs 21 October 1955. Emphasis added.
6 CO 537/5219, minute, J.G.Thomas, 23 March 1950.
7 Ibid., minute, J.Williams, 27 June 1950.
8 CO 537/5219, minute, J.Williams, 27 June 1950.
9 The working party was also reconvened to examine the feasibility of introducing *(a)* a £25 deposit on migrants, and *(b)* powers to deport 'criminals' as a deterrent to migration.
10 CAB 124/1191, memorandum, Quirk to Marquis of Salisbury (Lord President of the Council), 29 October 1954.
11 CO 1032/119, Lord Glyn to Earl of Munster (Minister of State), 30 April 1954.
12 *The New Statesman,* 17 September 1955.
13 CO 1028/22, STU 91/143/01, minute, B.G.Stone, 9 December 1953.
14 CAB 129/29, CM 31(55), minute 4, meeting 15 September 1955.
15 CO 1028/23, STU 106/03, minute, J.Keith, 5 December 1952.
16 LAB 8/1898, minute, Marjorie Hayward, 24 March 1953.
17 LAB 8/1898, ibid.
18 CO 1031/122, memorandum by Mr Hardman and Miss Hope-Wallace, November 1956.
19 DO 35/5217, Deputation from Birmingham City Council, Report of Meeting, 19 January 1955.
20 *The Times,* 8 November 1954.
21 CAB 124/1191, Conservative Commonwealth Association, Liverpool Group, *The Problem of Colonial Immigrants,* January 1954.
22 CO 1032/119, minute, B.G.Stone, 13 March 1954.
23 HLG 117/10, minute, Ryan, 22 February 1955.
24 Hansard, vol. 532, 3 November 1954.
25 CO 876/231, J.Nunn to E.Cass, 23 January 1950.
26 CO 1028/25, Police Report upon the Coloured Population in Sheffield, 3 October 1952, enclosed in Town Clerk (Sheffield), John Heys to V.Harris, 8 October 1952.
27 CO 1028/22, STU 91/143/01, CWP (53) 10, 11 July 1953.
28 Ibid., Draft Report of Working Party on Coloured People Seeking Employment in

the United Kingdom, 17 December 1953.

29 Sheffield Police Report.

30 CO 1025/25, Town Clerk (Middlesbrough), E.Parr to V.Harris, 14 October 1952.

31 *The Times,* 9 November 1954.

32 CAB 124/1191, minute, Marquis of Salisbury, 8 August 1954.

33 CAB 124/1191, Marquis of Salisbury to Viscount Swinton, 19 November 1954.

34 CAB 124/1191, Philip Swinton (Commonwealth Relations Secretary) to Gwilym LloydGeorge (Home Secretary), 16 November 1954.

35 PREM 11/824, C.(54) 354, Memorandum, Colonial Immigrants, Colonial Secretary, 6 December 1954.

36 PREM 11/824, Norman Brook (Cabinet Secretary) to Prime Minister, 14 June 1955. Emphasis added.

37 CAB 124/1191, Alan Lennox-Boyd to Gwilym Lloyd-George, 26 November 1954. Emphasis added.

38 CAB 128/27, CC 78(54), meeting 6 December 1954.

39 CAB 128/29, CM 14(55), minute 4, meeting 14 June 1955.

40 PREM 11/824, I.W.Hooper to Prime Minister, 14 September 1955.

41 DO 35/5220, minute, Morley, 24 January 1955.

42 CO 1032/83, minute, Carstairs, 12 February 1955.

43 Ibid., Norman Brook to Prime Minister, Colonial Immigrants, 17 February 1955.

44 Ibid., Summary of Commonwealth Affairs Committee meeting by Chief Whip, 27 January 1955, enclosed in Patrick Buchanan-Hepburn to Prime Minister, 27 January 1955.

45 There was a further irony here. Norman Manley, the Jamaican prime minister, had already conveyed to a visiting parliamentary delegation that his government would not object to restrictions on entry which 'were genuinely applied to the whole commonwealth' (Memorandum by Nigel Fisher, West Indian Migration to UK, PREM 11/824). So concerned was the British government to introduce discriminatory controls that this offer was not considered seriously.

46 CAB 128/29, CM 39(55), minute 7, meeting 3 November 1955.

47 If this view seems surprising given the 'labour shortage', it would be important to ask the question about which fraction of the capitalist class did the government represent. The suggestion is that it represented finance capital rather than industrial capital.

48 CO 1028/36, Interim Report of Conditions of Jamaicans in the United Kingdom, 1 January to 31 March 1954, Welfare Liaison Officer, Ivo de Souza.

49 CAB 129/77, CP (55) 102, Report of the Committee on the Social and Economic Problems Arising from the Growing Influx into the United Kingdom of Coloured Workers from Other Commonwealth Countries, 3 August 1955.

50 CO 1028/22, CWP (53), 6 August 1953.

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From Winston James and Clive Harris (eds), *Inside Babylon: The Caribbean Diaspora in Britain* (London: Verso, 1993).

2
THE OCCASION FOR SPEAKING

George Lamming

I want to consider the circumstances as well as the significance of certain writers' migration from the British Caribbean to the London metropolis…

Why have they migrated? And what, if any, are the peculiar pleasures of exile? Is their journey part of a hunger for recognition? Do they see such recognition as a confirmation of the fact that they are writers? What is the source of their insecurity in the world of letters? And what, on the evidence of their work, is the range of their ambition as writers whose nourishment is now elsewhere, whose absence is likely to drag into a state of permanent separation from their roots?…

The exile is a universal figure. The proximity of our lives to the major issues of our time has demanded of us all some kind of involvement… We are made to feel a sense of exile by our inadequacy and our irrelevance of function in a society whose past we can't alter, and whose future is always beyond us. Idleness can easily guide us into accepting this as a condition. Sooner or later, in silence or with rhetoric, we sign a contract whose epitaph reads: To be an exile is to be alive.

When the exile is a man of colonial orientation, and his chosen residence is the country which colonized his own history, then there are certain complications. For each exile has not only got to prove his worth to the other, he has to win the approval of Headquarters, meaning in the case of the West Indian writer, England. If the West Indian writer had taken up residence in America—as Claude McKay did—his development would probably be of a different, indeed, of an opposed order to that of a man who matured in England. One reason is that although the new circumstances are quite different, and even more favourable than those he left in the West Indies, his reservations, his psychology, his whole sense of cultural expectation have not greatly changed. He arrives and travels with the memory, the habitual weight of a colonial relation…

I have lately tried to argue, in another connection, that the West Indian student, for example, should not be sent to study in England. Not because England is a bad place for studying, but because the student's whole development as a person is thwarted by the memory, the accumulated stuff of a childhood and adolescence which has been maintained and fertilized by England's historic ties with the West Indies… In England he does not feel the need to try to understand an Englishman, since all relationships begin with an assumption of previous knowledge, a knowledge acquired in the absence of the people known. This relationship with the English is only another aspect of the West Indian's relation to the *idea* of England…

This *myth* begins in the West Indian from the earliest stages of his education… It

begins with the fact of England's supremacy in taste and judgement: a fact which can only have meaning and weight by a calculated cutting down to size of all non-England. The first to be cut down is the colonial himself…

This is one of the seeds which much later bear such strange fruit as the West Indian writers' departure from the very landscape which is the raw material of all their books. These men had to leave if they were going to function as writers since books, in that particular colonial conception of literature were not—meaning, too, are not supposed to be—written by natives. Those among the natives who read also believed that; for all the books they had read, their whole introduction to something called culture, all of it, in the form of words, came from outside: Dickens, Jane Austen, Kipling and that sacred gang.

The West Indian's education was imported in much the same way that flour and butter are imported from Canada. Since the cultural negotiation was strictly between England and the natives, and England had acquired, somehow, the divine right to organise the native's reading, it is to be expected that England's export of literature would be English. Deliberately and exclusively English. And the further back in time England went for these treasures, the safer was the English commodity. So the examinations, which would determine that Trinidadian's future in the Civil Service, imposed Shakespeare and Wordsworth, and Jane Austen and George Eliot and the whole tabernacle of dead names, now come alive at the world's greatest summit of literary expression.

How in the name of Heavens could a colonial native taught by an English native within a strict curriculum diligently guarded by yet another English native who functioned as a reliable watch-dog, the favourite clerk of a foreign administration: how could he ever get out from under this ancient mausoleum of historic achievement?

Some people keep asking why the West Indian writers should leave the vitality and freshness (frankly I don't believe in the vitality talk, as I shall explain) for the middle age resignation of England. It seems a mystery to them. The greater mystery is that there should be West Indian writers at all. For a writer cannot function; and, indeed, he has no function as writer if those who read and teach reading in his society have started their education by questioning his very right to write…

The historical fact is that the 'emergence' of a dozen or so novelists in the British Caribbean with some fifty books to their credit or disgrace, and all published between 1948 and 1958, is in the nature of a phenomenon…

There are, for me, just three important events in British Caribbean history. I am using the term *history* in an active sense. Not a succession of episodes which can easily be given some casual connection. What I mean by historical event is the creation of a situation which offers antagonistic oppositions and a challenge of survival that had to be met by all involved…

The first event is the discovery. That began, like most other discoveries, with a journey; a journey inside, or a journey out and across. This was the meaning of Columbus. The original purpose of the journey may sometimes have nothing to do with the results that attend upon it. That journey took place nearly five centuries ago; and the result has been one of the world's most fascinating communities. The next event is the abolition of slavery and the arrival of the East—India and China—in the Caribbean Sea. The world met here, and it was at every level, except administration, a peasant world. In

one way or another, through one upheaval after another, these people, forced to use a common language which they did not possess on arrival, have had to make something of their surroundings. What most of the world regard today as the possibility of racial harmony has always been the background of the West Indian prospect… The West Indian, though provincial, is perhaps the most cosmopolitan man in the world…

The third important event in our history is the discovery of the novel by West Indians as a way of investigating and projecting the inner experiences of the West Indian community. The second event is about a hundred and fifty years behind us. The third is hardly two decades ago. What the West Indian writer has done has nothing to do with that English critic's assessments. The West Indian writer is the first to add a new dimension to writing about the West Indian community…

As it should be, the novelist was the first to relate the West Indian experience from the inside. He was the first to chart the West Indian memory as far back as he could go. It is to the West Indian novelist—who had no existence twenty years ago—that the anthropologist and all other treatises about West Indians have to turn.

I do not want to make any chauvinistic claim for the West Indian writer. But it is necessary to draw attention to the novelty—not the exotic novelty which inferior colonials and uninformed critics will suggest—but the historic novelty of our situation. We have seen in our lifetime an activity called writing, in the form of the novel, come to fruition without any previous native tradition to draw upon. Mittelholzer and Reid and Selvon and Roger Mais are to the new colonial reader in the West Indies precisely what Fielding and Smollett and the early English novelists would be to the readers of their own generation. These West Indian writers are the earliest pioneers in this method of investigation. They are the first builders of what will become a tradition in West Indian imaginative writing: a tradition which will be taken for granted or for the purpose of critical analysis by West Indians of a later generation.

The novel, as the English critic applies this term, is about two hundred years old, and even then it had a long example of narrative poetry to draw on. The West Indian novel, by which I mean the novel written by the West Indian about the West Indian reality is hardly twenty years old. And here is the fascination of the situation. The education of all these writers is more or less middle-class Western culture, and particularly English culture. But the substance of their books, the general motives and directions, are peasant. One of the most popular complaints made by West Indians against their novelists is the absence of novels about the West Indian middle class.

Why is it that Reid, Mittelholzer in his early work, Selvon, Neville Dawes, Roger Mais, Andrew Salkey, Jan Carew—why is it that their work is shot through and through with the urgency of peasant life? And how has it come about that their colonial education should not have made them pursue the general ambitions of non-provincial writers. How is it that they have not to play at being the Eliots and Henry Jameses of the West Indies? Instead, they move nearer to Mark Twain…

Unlike the previous governments and departments of educators, unlike the business man importing commodities, the West Indian novelist did not look out across the sea to another source. He looked in and down at what had traditionally been ignored. For the first time the West Indian peasant became other than a cheap source of labour. He

became, through the novelist's eye, a living existence, living in silence and joy and fear, involved in riot and carnival. It is the West Indian novel that has restored the West Indian peasant to his true and original status of personality.

Edgar Mittelholzer was born in British Guiana in 1909. He came to Trinidad in 1941; but he was a name to me before I left Barbados to live in Trinidad…

Mittelholzer is important because he represents a different generation from Selvon and myself. He had suffered the active discouragement of his own community, and he had had their verdict sanctioned by the consistent rejection of his novels by publishers abroad. And in spite of this he made the decision, before anyone else, *to get out*. That is the phrase which we must remember in considering this question of why the writers are living in England. They simply wanted *to get out* of the place where they were born. They couldn't argue: 'you will see'; and point to similar examples of dejection in earlier West Indian writers who were now regarded as great figures. There were no such West Indians to summon to your aid. We had *to get out;* and in the hope that a change of climate might bring a change of luck. One thing alone kept us going; and that was the literary review, *Bim,* which was published in Barbados by Frank Collymore. This was a kind of oasis in that lonely desert of mass indifference, and educated middle-class treachery.

This experience is true of Trinidad. The story is the same in Barbados. British Guiana would be no different. In Jamaica, with a more virile nationalist spirit, the difference is hardly noticeable. They murdered Roger Mais, and they know it. And when I was there in 1956, Vie Reid, their greatest performer in the novel, was talking to me about going to Britain. Whether for a year or for good, Reid needed to get out. And it's an indication of his thinking and feeling when he said to me that evening in the course of talk about the situation of the West Indian writers: 'You know somethin, George? Roger is the first of us…' I knew that Mais was dead, but it had never occurred to me to think of him as the first to die, meaning the first of the lot whose work appeared in England from 1948 to 1958. For that is the period we are talking about. This is the decade that has really witnessed the 'emergence' of the novel as an imaginative interpretation of West Indian society by West Indians. And every one of them: Mittelholzer, Reid, Mais, Selvon, Hearne, Carew, Naipaul, Andrew Salkey, Neville Dawes, everyone has felt the need *to get out.* And with the exception of Reid who is now in Canada, every one of them is now resident in England…

If we accept that the act of writing a book is linked with an expectation, however modest, of having it read; then the situation of a West Indian writer, living and working in his own community, assumes intolerable difficulties. The West Indian of average opportunity and intelligence has not yet been converted to reading as a civilized activity, an activity which justifies itself in the exercise of his mind. Reading seriously, at any age, is still largely associated with reading for examinations. In recent times the political fever has warmed us to the newspapers with their generous and diabolical welcome to join in the correspondence column. But book reading has never been a serious business with us…

The absence of that public, the refusal of a whole class to respond to an activity which is not honoured by money: it is this dense and grinning atmosphere that helped to murder

Roger Mais. Mittelholzer survived it by fleeing the land; and Mr Vie Reid still breathes it, preparing, for all we know, to make a similar flight.

For whom, then, do we write?

The students at University College were always raising that question in their discussion… Many of the West Indian writers would have passed through the same cultural climate. But the West Indian writer does not write for them; nor does he write for himself. He writes always for the foreign reader. That foreign does not mean English or American exclusively. The word *foreign* means other than West Indian whatever that other may be. He believes that a reader is *there,* somewhere. He can't tell where, precisely, that reader is. His only certain knowledge is that this reader is not the West Indian middle class, taken as a whole…

An important question, for the English critic, is not what the West Indian novel has brought to English writing. It would be more correct to ask what the West Indian novelists have contributed to English reading. For the language in which these books are written is English which—I must repeat—is a West Indian language; and in spite of the unfamiliarity of its rhythms, it remains accessible to the readers of English anywhere in the world. The West Indian contribution to English reading has been made possible by their relation to their themes which are peasant. This is the great difference between the West Indian novelist and the contemporary English novelist…

Writers like Selvon and Vie Reid—key novelists for understanding the literacy and social situation in the West Indies—are essentially peasant. I don't care what jobs they did before; what kind or grade of education they got in their different islands; they never really left the land that once claimed their ancestors like trees. That's a great difference between the West Indian novelist and his contemporary in England. For peasants simply don't respond and see like middle class people. The peasant tongue has its own rhythms which are Selvon's and Reid's rhythms; and no artifice of technique, no sophisticated gimmicks leading to the mutilation of form, can achieve the specific taste and sound of Selvon's prose…

The West Indian who comes near to being an exception to the peasant feel is John Hearne. His key obsession is with an agricultural middle class in Jamaica. I don't want to suggest that this group of people are not a proper subject for fiction; but I've often wondered whether Hearne's theme, with the loaded concern he shows for a mythological, colonial squirearchy, is not responsible for the fact that his work is, at present, less energetic than the West Indian novels at their best…

So we come back to the original question of the West Indian novelists living in a state of chosen exile. Their names make temporary noise in the right West Indian circles. Their books have become handy broomsticks which the new nationalist will wave at a foreigner who asks the rude question: 'What can your people do except doze?'

Why don't these writers return? There are more reasons than I can state now; but one is fear. They are afraid of returning, in any permanent sense, because they feel that sooner or later they will be ignored in and by a society about which they have been at once articulate and authentic. You may say that a similar thing happens to the young English writer in England. There is the important difference that you cannot enjoy anonymity in a small island…

In spite of all that has happened in the last ten years, I doubt that any one of the West Indian writers could truly say that he would be happy to go back. Some have tried; some would like to try. But no one would feel secure in his decision to return. It could be worse than arriving in England for the first time…

In the Caribbean we have a glorious opportunity of making some valid and permanent contribution to man's life in this century. But we must stand up; and we must move. The novelists have helped; yet when the new Caribbean emerges it may not be for them. It will be, like the future, an item on the list of possessions which the next generation of writers and builders will claim. I am still young by ordinary standards (thirty-two, to be exact) but already I feel that I have had it (as a writer) where the British Caribbean is concerned. I have lost my place, or my place has deserted me.

This may be the dilemma of the West Indian writer abroad: that he hungers for nourishment from a soil which he (as an ordinary citizen) could not at present endure. The pleasure and paradox of my own exile is that I belong wherever I am. My role, it seems, has rather to do with time and change than with the geography of circumstances; and yet there is always an acre of ground in the New World which keeps growing echoes in my head. I can only hope that these echoes do not die before my work comes to an end.

From George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* (London: Michael Joseph, 1960).

3
TIMEHRI

Kamau Brathwaite

The most significant feature of West Indian life and imagination since Emancipation has been its sense of rootlessness, of not belonging to the landscape; dissociation, in fact, of art from act of living. This, at least, is the view of the West Indies and the Caribbean that has been accepted and articulated by the small but important 'intellectual' elite of the area; a group—call it the educated middle class—ex-planter and ex-slave—that has been involved in the post-plantation creolizing process that made our colonial polity possible…

'Creolization' is a socio-cultural description and explanation of the way the four main culture-carriers of the region: Amerindian, European, African and East Indian: interacted with each other and with their environment to create the new societies of the New World. Two main kinds of creolization may be distinguished: a *mestizo-creolization:* the inter-culture of Amerindian and European (mainly Iberian) and located primarily in Central and South America, and a *mulatto-creolization:* the inter-culture of Negro-African and European (mainly Western European) and located primarily in the West Indies and the slave areas of the North American continent. The crucial difference between the two kinds of creolization is that whereas in mestizo-America only one element of the interaction (the European) was immigrant to the area, in mulattoAmerica both elements in the process were immigrants. In mestizo-America, there was a host environment with an established culture which had to be colonized mainly by force—an attempted eradication of Amerindian spiritual and material structures. In mulatto America, where the indigenous Indians were fewer and more easily destroyed, and blacks were brought from Africa as slaves, colonizing Europe was more easily able to make its imprint both on the environment (the plantation, the North American city), and the cultural orientation of the area… In mulatto America…the process of creolization began to alter itself with the waning of the colonial regime. It simply fragmented itself into four main socio-cultural orientations: European, African, indigeno-nationalist and folk.

The problem of and for West Indian artists and intellectuals is that having been born and educated within this fragmented culture, they start out in the world without a sense of 'wholeness'. Identification with any one of these orientations can only consolidate the concept of a plural society, a plural vision. Disillusion with the fragmentation leads to a sense of rootlessness. The ideal does not and cannot correspond to perceived and inherited reality. The result: dissociation of the sensibility. The main unconscious concern of many of the most articulate West Indian intellectuals and artists in the early post-colonial period was a description and analysis of this dissociation: C.L.R.James's

Minty Alley (London: New Beacon Books, 1971), the work of George Lamming, V.S.Naipaul, Orlando Patterson and M.G.Smith's *The Plural Society in the British West Indies*. The achievement of these writers was to make the society *conscious* of the cultural problem. The second phase of West Indian and Caribbean artistic and intellectual life, on which we are now entering, having become conscious of the problem, is seeking to transcend and heal it.

My own artistic and intellectual concern is, I think, not untypical of this new departure in West Indian and Caribbean cultural life… I was born in Barbados, from an urban village background, of parents with a 'middle class' orientation. I went to a secondary school originally founded for children of the plantocracy and colonial civil servants and white professionals; but by the time I got there, the social revolution of the '30s was in full swing, and I was able to make friends with boys of stubbornly non-middle class origin. I was fortunate, also, with my teachers. These were *(a)* expatriate Englishmen; *(b)* local whites; *(c)* black disillusioned classical scholars. They were (with two or three exceptions) happily inefficient as teachers, and none of them seemed to have a stake or interest in our society. We were literally left alone. We picked up what we could or what we wanted from each other and from the few books prescribed like Holy Scripture. With the help of my parents, I applied to do Modern Studies (History and English) in the Sixth Form…and succeeded, to everyone's surprise, in winning one of the Island Scholarships that traditionally took the ex-planters' sons 'home' to Oxbridge or London.

The point I am making here is that my education and background, though nominally 'middle class', is, on examination, not of this nature at all. I had spent most of my boyhood on the beach and in the sea with 'beach-boys', or in the country, at my grandfather's with country boys and girls. I was therefore not in a position to make any serious intellectual investment in West Indian middle-class values. But since I was not then consciously aware of any other West Indian alternative (though in fact I had been *living* that alternative), I found and felt myself 'rootless' on arrival in England and like so many other West Indians of the time, more than ready to accept and absorb the culture of the Mother Country. I was, in other words, a potential Afro-Saxon.

But this didn't work out. When I saw my first snow-fall, I felt that I had come into my own; I had arrived; I was possessing the landscape. But I turned to find that my 'fellow Englishmen' were not particularly prepossessed with me. It was the experience later to be described by Mervyn Morris, Kenneth Ramchand and Elliot Bastien in *Disappointed Guests* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965). I reassured myself that it didn't matter. It made no difference if I was black or white, German, Japanese or Jew. All that mattered was the ego-trip, the self-involving vision. I read Keats, Conrad, Kafka. I was a man of Kulture. But the Cambridge magazines didn't take my poems. Or rather, they only took those which had a West Indian—to me, 'exotic'—flavour. I felt neglected and misunderstood…

Then in 1953, George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* (London: Michael Joseph, 1953) appeared and everything was transformed. Here breathing to me from every pore of line and page, was the Barbados I have lived. The words, the rhythms, the cadences, the scenes, the people, their predicament. They all came back. They all were possible. And all the more beautiful for having been published and praised by London, mother of

metropolises.

But by now this was the age of the Emigrant. The West Indies could be written about and explored. But only from a point of vantage outside the West Indies. It was no point going back. No writer could live in that stifling atmosphere of middle-class materialism and philistinism. It was Lamming again who gave voice to the ambience in *The Emigrants* (London: Michael Joseph, 1954), and in *The Pleasures of Exile* (London: Michael Joseph, 1960). His friend Sam Selvon made a ballad about it in *The Lonely Londoners* (London: Allan Wingate, 1956), and Vidia Naipaul at the start of his brilliant career could write (in *The Middle Passage,* London: Deutsch, 1962):

> I had never wanted to stay in Trinidad. When I was in the fourth form I wrote a vow on the endpaper of my Kennedy's *Revised Latin Primer* to leave within five years. I left after six; and for many years afterwards in England, falling asleep in bedsitters with the electric fire on, I had been awakened by the nightmare that I was back in tropical Trinidad… I knew [it] to be unimportant, uncreative, cynical.
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> (41)

For me, too, child and scion of this time, there was no going back. Accepting my rootlessness, I applied for work in London, Cambridge, Ceylon, New Delhi, Cairo, Kano, Khartoum, Sierra Leone, Carcassone, a monastery in Jerusalem. I was a West Indian, rootless man of the world. I could go, belong, everywhere on the worldwide globe. I ended up in a village in Ghana. It was my beginning…

Slowly but surely, during the eight years that I lived there, I was coming to an awareness and understanding of community, of cultural wholeness, of the place of the individual within the tribe, in society. Slowly… I came to a sense of identification of myself with these people, my living diviners. I came to connect my history with theirs, the bridge of my mind now linking Atlantic and ancestor, homeland and heartland. When I turned to leave, I was no longer a lonely individual talent; there was something wider, more subtle, more tentative: the self without ego, without I, without arrogance. And I came home to find that I had not really left. That it was still Africa; Africa in the Caribbean. The middle passage had now guessed its end. The connection between my lived, but unheeded non-middle-class boyhood, and its Great Tradition on the eastern mainland had been made.

The problem now was how to relate this new awareness to the existing, inherited non-African consciousness of educated West Indian society. How does the artist work and function within a plurally fragmented world? How can a writer speak about 'the people', when, as George Lamming dramatizes in *The Castle of My Skin,* those to whom he refers have no such concept of themselves?

> 'I like it,' I said. 'That was really very beautiful.'
>   'You know the voice?' Trumper asked. He was very serious now. I tried to recall whether I might have heard it. I couldn't. 'Paul Robeson', he said. 'One of the greatest o' my people.' 'What people?' I asked. I was a bit puzzled. 'My People', said Trumper. His tone was insistent. Then he softened into a smile. I